



Other Viewpoints

Speaker's new job still about politics

The Kansas Chamber of Commerce seems like a good fit for House Speaker Mike O'Neal's post-Legislature life. His first order of business as president and chief executive should be to change the name of the organization.

O'Neal, you see, won't be running a state version of your local chamber of commerce. That's not what the Kansas "chamber" is at all anymore. It is a political activist group, and it isn't one that speaks for all of business.

O'Neal is retiring from 28 years in the Kansas House, the last four as Speaker. That is an outstanding span of service, one that could only be amassed by someone who loves state government. And O'Neal is an admitted policy wonk, so he will be well-suited for a move from Hutchinson to Topeka year-round, where he will be able to stay involved in legislative work.

Based on the state chamber's agenda in recent years, O'Neal will have a visible presence at the Statehouse. The organization has emerged as something much different than an umbrella group or state association for local chambers of commerce.

In fact, the state chamber has lost much support from local chambers of commerce in the past two years because of its narrow policy positions. And the state chamber does not enjoy broad membership of the business community like local chambers do.

Tax reduction has been the obsession of the state chamber, which has been a strong ally for Gov. Sam Brownback in this crusade. While lower taxes are good for business, so is state investment in education and transportation. The chamber's abandonment of those priorities is what got it crosswise with local chambers.

And with the help of six-figure financial support from Koch Industries of Wichita, for one, the state chamber's political action committee has become a high-profile player in state elections – not just to elect Republicans to the Legislature but in this past primary election cycle to promote conservative Republicans over moderates.

Calling itself the Kansas "chamber of commerce" is highly misleading. The organization should change its name to reflect its real mission and activities.

– The Hutchinson News, via the Associated Press

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- U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp**, 126 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715 or Fax (202) 225-5124. Web site: huelskamp.house.gov
- State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer**, State Capitol Building, 300 SW10th St., Room 225-E., Topeka, Kan. 66612, (785) 296-7399 ralph.ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us
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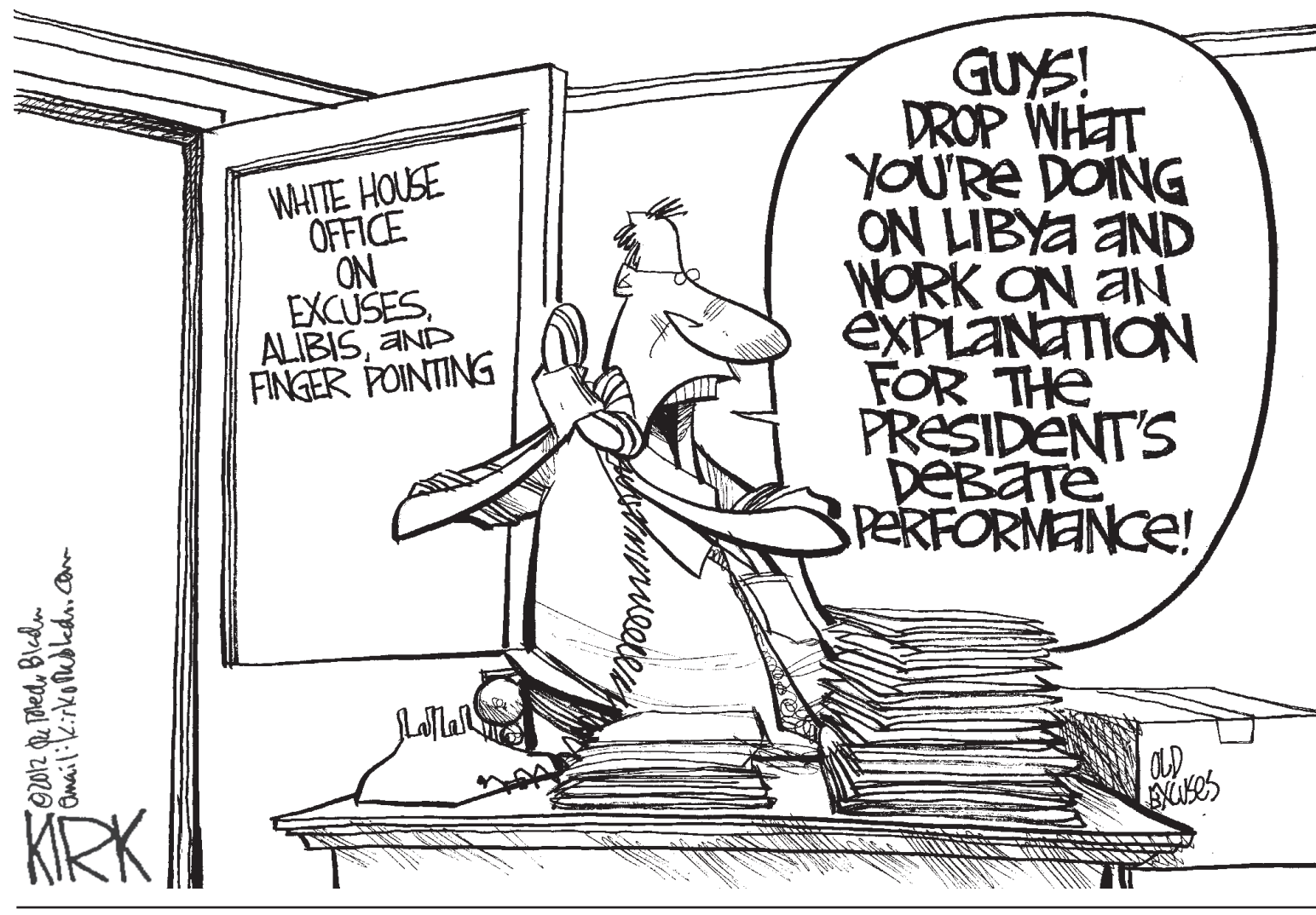
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THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the days observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Nor'West Newspaper, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

PERIODICALS POSTAGE paid at Colby, Kan. 67701, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday to Friday, closed Saturday and Sunday. MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, which is exclusively entitled to the use for publication of all news herein. Member Kansas Press Association and National Newspaper Association.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: In Colby, Thomas County and Oakley: three months \$35, one year \$85. By mail to ZIP Codes beginning with 676 and 677: three months \$39, one year \$95. Elsewhere in the U.S., mailed once per week: three months \$39, one year \$95. Student rate, nine months, in Colby, Thomas County and Oakley, \$64; mailed once per week elsewhere in the U.S. \$72



Camera angles: all in the eye of beholder

In case you've been napping under a rock recently, there's a project afoot to photograph businesses, and the people in them, in Colby – in counterpoint to a similar project unearthed from an earlier era.

Everyone here at the paper had to show up on the same day at the same time and smile for the photographer. We posed.

Now, you have to understand a little about working here to realize what a trauma that really is.

We take pictures. From the first day of work, we start learning how to take pictures, or how to take them better. We actually spend time learning about lighting, flashes, framing, what makes a good picture and what will never find its way into print.

Big newspapers have photographers; we have warm bodies. If you can move, see and wiggle a finger, you will at some point find yourself behind a camera if you work for the Colby Free Press. Guaranteed.

Note the key word there. Behind. Pointing, shooting, flashing behind the camera.

Not in front of the camera. Behind.

We're great at telling people it's wonderful to have their picture taken, that they should relax and act natural and enjoy having a flash going off in their faces. Some actually believe us.

We're not so great at being the ones in front of the camera. We get awkward and worry



Marian Ballard

• Collection Connections

about our hair/teeth/makeup/clothes/witness protection status. Just like everyone else.

Then there's the whole bit about posing.

The project involves posing, because it's a then-and-now retrospective and that's what they did then, so that's what they are doing now. Everybody wearing the usual work clothes in front of the shop or whatever. We posed inside because there are trees blocking the sign in front of our shop – plus the photographer would have gotten run over. Since I usually come and go from the back door, I wouldn't recognize the front of the shop anyway.

A few of you – whose phone numbers have been memorized in the newsroom – realize what a loaded word "posed" is to those of us at 155 W. Fifth.

If you line up everybody in your class or your club for a picture, don't send it to us – we won't print it. If you take a picture of someone being handed a trophy, a certificate of appreciation or a million-dollar check, we'll say thank

you and make a mug shot out of it. We don't use posed photos. I take that back: we print special sections with posed photos of football teams, basketball teams, cheerleaders, golf teams – you get the idea.

So having an outside photographer come in, put us in front of a camera, and get us all lined up in a pose was, well, traumatic. It reminded me in an odd way, of the belief Native American peoples had, and some still hold, that a photograph would steal your soul.

Maybe there might be a little bit of truth to that.

Not that I think, having our picture taken turned us all into zombies (though I did notice a few glazed expressions afterwards). But we look at pictures of our ancestors, hoping some of themselves was captured on film. We seek to know their joys and sorrows, the triumphs and the headaches of their days, by studying a two-dimensional image recording a moment out of time.

For that moment, a soul becomes a little more visible to the future.

So, posed or action, behind or in front of the camera, we have become a piece of history ourselves.

Marian Ballard has collected careers as counselor, librarian, pastor, and now copy editor for the Colby Free Press. She collects ideas, which are more portable than other stuff.

Farmers' planning skills go unrecognized

With each new generation, more of this country's population becomes further and further removed from the farm.

It's easy to understand why many people in this country have no concept where their food comes from. Many have forgotten, or may have never known, that individual producers supply staples for the U.S. diet. Some people believe there will never be a food shortage in our country – as long as the doors remain open on their neighborhood supermarket.

Today's farmer is a planning specialist. Producers understand marketing and using the incentives of free enterprise. This group of food-producing folks also know the importance of incorporating government-sponsored programs in their individual operations.

Every year, this production machine made up of family operations comes under closer scrutiny and sometimes unfounded attacks. We've all read such articles in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and CNN. Social media is also rampant with such stories.

These exposés include the usual suspects and contain a story line that goes something like this: Federal money is going to supplement wealthy farmers who don't need it and who are ripping off the taxpayers. These payments should go instead to small and medium-sized farmers.

This just isn't so. During the last few decades, farmers have relied on and supported direct payments. These subsidies are based on the historic acreage and yield referred to as a farmer's "base." This base is tied to a piece of land, not a farmer.

Direct payments are issued by U.S. Department of Agriculture every year to producers with qualified base acres, regardless of what they planted or if they planted. Given the uncertainty of prices and production, it was one part of the federal farm program "safety net"



John Schlageck

• Insights Kansas Farm Bureau

that producers, and perhaps more importantly, their lenders, could count on year in and year out.

During the last two to three years, and in no small measure driven by drought and ever-increasing production and land costs, crop insurance is becoming more important to farmers than direct payments. This is happening because more growers have also benefited from the predictability of crop insurance, especially revenue-based products.

For instance, wheat growers purchased more than 136,000 policies for crop revenue coverage insurance, paying more than \$1 billion in premiums last year. That's up from 117,708 policies the previous year, with premiums of more than \$570 million.

Even though crop insurance is subsidized by the federal government, producers pay a significant portion of the cost. American taxpayers view crop insurance as a better alternative than a direct payment program. Consequently, many crop growers are asking whether or not the funds currently invested in direct payments could be used to make the federal crop insurance program even better.

Today's farmer is using crop insurance as a risk management tool to deal with wide swings in the marketplace and a drought that has devastated many family farming operations. This valuable tool has helped provide some stability and allowed crop growers to project their revenue (or lack of) when they approach their

lenders.

Crop insurance allows farmers to tailor their risk management to their individual situation and immediate needs. This tool returns an important part of the management decision back to farmers by providing a wide range of products, coverage and options.

This country needs stability in agriculture, especially during these troubled economic times. Few citizens of the United States have ever lived during a period of food insecurity. We've been blessed with an abundance of food at an affordable price.

Continuing to safeguard the interest of agriculture is in the best interest of all of us – farmers, stockmen, agribusiness and our customers. Safeguarding agriculture is critical because the contribution it makes to the health and prosperity of this country is beyond measure. Without agriculture, there is no way to ensure prosperity in our economy. Farmers will not be able to produce the food we take so much for granted.

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm near Seguin, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

Write us

The Colby Free Press encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of general interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise. Nor do we run form letters.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

