



Free Press Viewpoint

One little snow won't end drought

Anyone who thinks we're out of the woods when it comes to the drought, just because we got some snow, is as optimistic as a New York commodities trader.

Which, come to think of it, might be why those folks sent the price of wheat spiraling down this week. The market knocked 58 cents, nearly 8 percent, off the cash price over the last two weeks.

So, we had a blizzard. Oberlin got maybe 15 inches in two storms, and that amounted to about an inch of moisture. That, according to wire reports, was about what most of the drought belt was reporting, though the farther east you go, the more water they got.

It brought our moisture for the year to 1.41 inches, which was .4 of an inch more than we had at this time last year. And that sounds pretty good – until you realize that last year we got only 11.35 inches all year. That is less than half our normal precipitation – and dangerously close to the 8 inches that defines a desert.

The wheat crop? Kansas Agricultural Statistics says it's a little better now, but 41 percent remained in fair condition and 36 percent is poor to very poor. Statewide, 61 percent of the fields were short to very short of topsoil moisture. Here in the northwest, however, fully three-fourths of the fields were dry.

What would it take to end the drought?

Not an inch of rain, not a foot of snow. Climatologist Mark Svoboda of the National Drought Mitigation Center in Nebraska told the Associated Press a foot of snow usually equals an inch of rain. That means, he said, it'd take two to four feet just to make up the deficit since fall, he said, and no one was asking for that – not all at once, anyway.

He estimated that we need 12 to 16 inches of moisture for fields and pastures to fully recover. So, the drought won't end anytime soon.

Still, an inch of water is an inch of water. Wheat plants that were beginning to parch in the sun now lie under the snow, protected from the dry winds of spring. When it melts, the moisture will keep them going for a while.

For a while. They'll need more in a couple of weeks, more after that. It's likely we'll get enough over the next three months to keep what's left of the crop going. We usually do.

With a dry fall, though, many fields were damaged. Some didn't come up at all. Farmers will be looking to plant milo or another crop in the spring – if there's enough moisture.

The price, down right now, will bounce around, jumping this way and that with news reports. There'll be a wheat crop, but nobody expects a good one.

One blizzard does not a drought break.

A couple dozen more might, but only a New York commodities trader would bet on that. – *Steve Haynes*

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155 W. Fifth St. (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963
Colby, Kan. 67701 fax (785) 462-7749

Send news to: colby.editor@nwkansas.com

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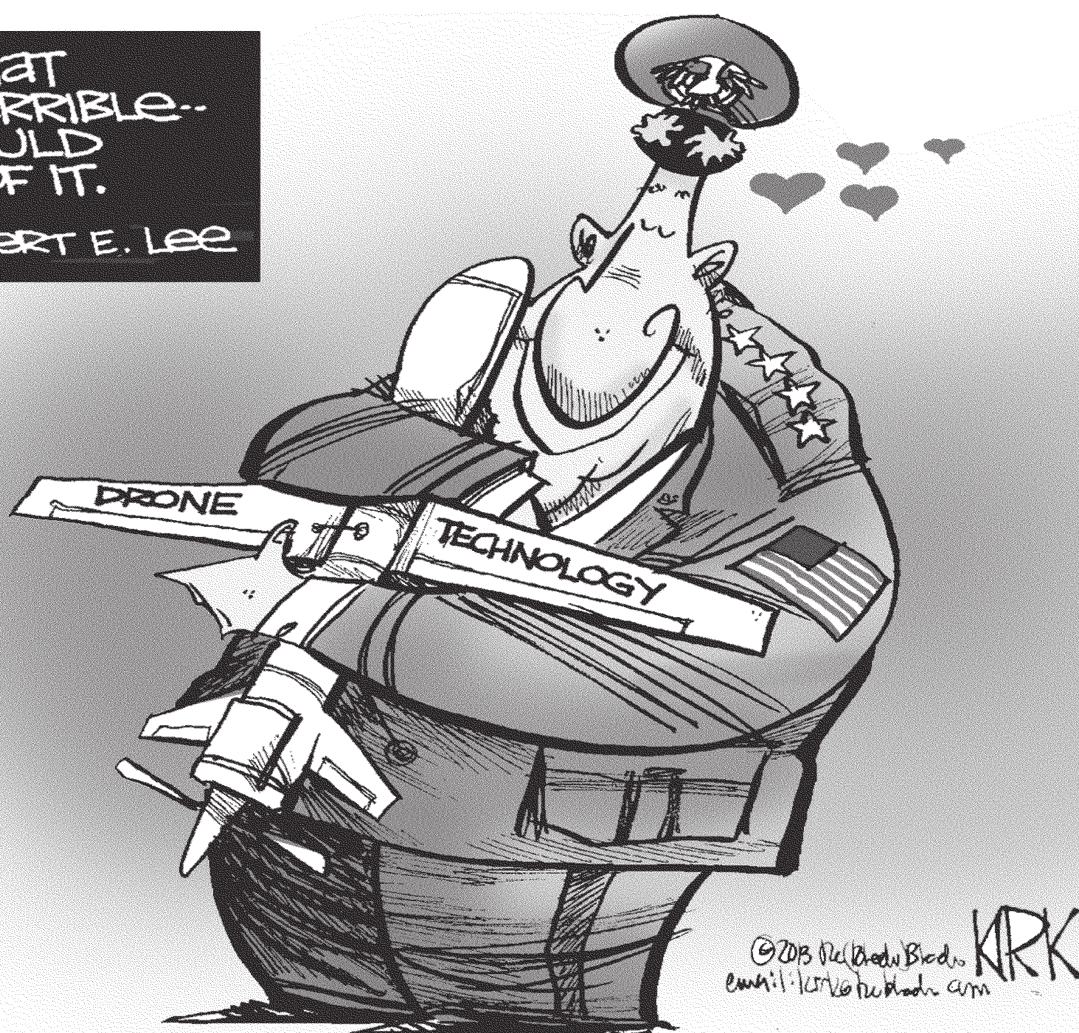
THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the days observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Nor'West Newspaper, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

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.

IT IS WELL THAT
WAR IS SO TERRIBLE--
LEST WE SHOULD
GROW FOND OF IT.
-- GEN. ROBERT E. LEE



Cat's like a cold drink of water – sort of

I didn't really hear the crash, but the scream woke me from a sound sleep.

"Get out! Get out of here, you miserable cat!" my husband was yelling.

He was really, really mad.

The yelling was uncharacteristic. At 1 a.m., he usually tries to be quiet.

He's the night person and I'm the day gal. He gets up at 8:30 a.m. And goes to bed at 1 to 1:30 a.m. While I get up at 6 to 7:30 a.m. and like to go to bed at 11 p.m. So we try to have quiet time while the other one sleeps.

Something really bad must have happened, I thought as I woke with a start.

As I listened to Steve stamping around into the bathroom, opening drawers and venting his frustration on the floors, I wondered if I should get up and find out what was happening.

I didn't need to. He came into the bedroom and was still stamping and muttering about strangling the cat, just as soon as he found her. I haven't heard him that angry in years.

He had a bad temper, he says, when he was young. However, he has tried hard over the years to teach himself to control it and today



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

he hardly ever has steam coming out of his ears.

Whatever that cat did, I thought, had him going.

He finally calmed down enough to tell me that Jezebel had knocked a full glass of ice water over on him, his chair and all the books and papers we had been reading that night.

It seems the cat, which was sitting in my chair, suddenly decided to move over into his lap. This move was made across a small table between the two chairs. A table containing a large glass of ice water.

Luckily for Jez, she's quick to disappear, and Steve's quick to cool down.

It turns out that neither of them learns from

one experience, however.

The very next night, I heard a moan from the sitting room and a shout.

"She did it again!"

This time there was no explosion. The cry was more of desperation and frustration.

He knows that Jez loves him as much as a cat can love anyone and wants to be with him. He would just prefer that she sit quietly and not spill ice water in his lap at 1 a.m.

I'm assuming they've come to a truce or that he's figured out somewhere else to put his evening glass of water, because this happened a week ago and I haven't been awakened by agonizing screams and the sounds of a cat rushing for cover since.

Of course, we've been gone for three or four days.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor'West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes@nwkansas.com

School funding needs look at history

On Thursday, the Kansas Senate passed out a resolution that attempts to clarify that setting the budget for public education should be solely the responsibility of the Legislature.

The resolution would insert the following into the Kansas Constitution: "The financing of the educational interests of the state is exclusively a legislative power under article 2 of the constitution of the state of Kansas and as such shall be established solely by the Legislature."

The resolution will go to the House of Representatives for consideration, but I have concerns that inserting that sentence into the Constitution would have far-reaching consequences. A few days ago I came across some very interesting background on this issue.

Article 6b of the Constitution currently says "The legislature shall make suitable provision for finance of the educational interests of the state." This language was amended into the Constitution in 1966. The really interesting thing is what else was going on at that time.

In 1964, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a ruling that all state legislative bodies must be apportioned based upon population rather than geography or any other means. This doctrine of equal representation, or "one man, one vote," meant that the Kansas House of Representatives could no longer be apportioned one representative per county with a few extra seats allocated to the larger cities in the state.

1966 was the last year that the Kansas House was apportioned under the old system, and it



Don Hineman

• Topeka Update

seems very likely that the members of that predominantly rural Legislature understood that "one man, one vote" would forever change the character of the Kansas House. They no doubt understood that future Legislatures would become increasingly urban. And that raised the prospect that at some point, an urban-oriented legislature might adopt a school funding formula that would disadvantage rural school children relative to their counterparts in the cities of Kansas.

The solution those rural legislators apparently devised was to lock language into the Constitution that would insure suitable funding for the education of all Kansas school children. In my opinion, they met their objective well. Though the present school finance formula is not perfect, it has been crafted and refined over a period of decades to balance the needs of diverse student populations throughout the state.

But now, thanks to a series of contentious court rulings, some folks want to change the constitutional language and remove the possibility of future court challenges regarding

school finance.

The rural legislators of the 1960s recognized that putting that power strictly in the hands of the Legislature would be a bad thing for rural Kansas. I am thankful for their wisdom and leadership of nearly 50 years ago, and I am committed to their objective – equal educational opportunity for all Kansas children.

This little peek into the past is verification of the old saying "those who cannot learn from the past are doomed to repeat it." Problem is, if rural Kansans cannot value the foresight of those who went before, it is quite possible that we will never again be able to restore the constitutional protection of equal educational opportunity.

It is an honor and privilege to represent the people of the 118th District in Topeka, and I welcome your advice, questions and concerns.

Rep. Don Hineman, a Dighton Republican, is the House member for the 118th District. Reach him at dhineman@st-tel.net or 620-397-3242 (mobile).

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Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

