

Free Press Viewpoint

News media must critique own work

It may seem strange to see "the media" criticizing itself, but just about everyone should recognize how poorly handled the coverage of the Boston Marathon bombing was.

Covering breaking news is never easy. You are dealing with inaccurate information, because nobody ever knows all the facts right away. You are also dealing with officials in government and law enforcement whose first instinct usually is to withhold information.

This leads news organizations to go elsewhere looking for as much information as they can, usually in the name of getting the story out there first. There has been a disturbing trend of using social media - websites such as Facebook and Twitter - as a substitute for real news gathering. The problem is, these sites are a poorly regulated free-for-all where anyone can say anything.

Hoaxes perpetrated each day by social media users should be reason enough not to trust any reports posted there. A few hours after the bombing, photos circulating on the social site Reddit caused people to pin the attack on an innocent person. A few days after the bombings, the Associated Press' Twitter account was hacked and posts were made saying the White House had also been bombed. It hadn't. You could fill the Grand Canyon with the number of celebrity death hoaxes put on Twitter each year.

But the national news organizations and most especially the partisan talk shows will insist on using these as sources. This leads to mistakes and inaccurate reports that can cause real harm.

As a result of this, the only news reports you can trust are those from about two weeks after a major incident.

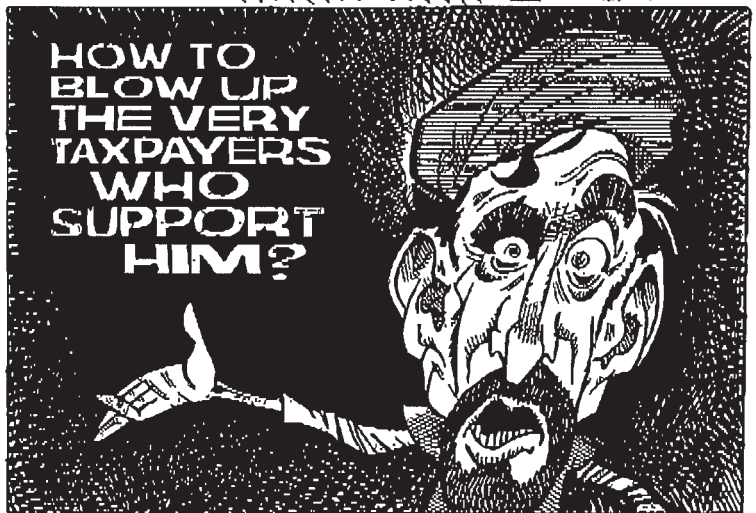
Relying on unreliable sources is probably the cardinal sin of journalism. You need to have real reporters doing real reporting: observing events, talking to people at the scene, verifying information with officials. We understand this is difficult. Most big-city newspapers have felt the economic squeeze over the past few years and have reduced their staffs. But for big, developing stories, it is essential to get someone there to verify everything. Do not take social media at face value. Do not repeat anything until you know its a fact.

When the Northwest Kansas Technical College had its minor scabies outbreak a few weeks ago, a Wichita television news station sent a reporter to Goodland. Whether or not you think this story should have been important enough for that, it shows a willingness on their part to send a real person to the scene to get the truth.

That's what should happen. If something is happening, send a reporter. You need trained journalists on the ground to talk to people and observe for themselves what is happening. Do not rely on "crowdsourcing."

As they say in the military, "There's no substitute for boots on the ground."

- Kevin Bottrell



HITCH SUNDAY TELEGRAM

Remember last year's weird weather?

They say it might snow tonight. I know it's May; so do "they." But hey, it's northwest Kansas, and there's no such thing as normal weather here.

We have weather, and it's all weird.

Last year, it was all hot, at least until it turned off cool in August. Warm spring. More 100-plus-degree days than anyone could remember. Most summers, we only get a couple. Last year, we got 'em by the dozen.

Remember? This spring, at least, it's all snow. We've hardly had a thunderstorm, and tornado "season" is nearly past. And they say it might snow tonight, May 1!

OK, it's only a 20 percent chance as this is written. By today, the whole forecast might change. Weather forecasting is partly the art of honing your predictions as more data comes in.

And then comes the weather, and the forecaster hopes it makes us forget what he or she called for. It's an interesting game.

Weather itself is not a game, however. Weather makes us hot or cold. Either one costs money. Weather makes crops grow, or not. That can cost farmers big money. Weather can tear up the town and leave us in tears. It can freeze us or bake us, blow us away or ice us over.

They say it might snow tonight. I know it's May; so do "they." But hey, it's northwest Kansas, and there's no such thing as normal weather here.



Steve Haynes

• Along the Sappa

We get all that here on the High Plains, and often in the same month. Sometimes in the same week. It was just a little more than a week ago the last time it snowed, right? And this weekend, the temperature soared into the 80s.

I don't know about you, but I got my shorts out to mow the lawn. (The lawn mower shot craps, but that's another story. I had plenty of other chores waiting.)

Weather fascinates us, probably because we usually have absolutely no idea what it will do. Oh, the forecasters take a stab at it, but really, it's just an educated guess. Weather doesn't often do what you think it will.

I know modern forecasting is a science. I have friends who are weathermen. But it's an inexact science, even with computer programs that help make the predictions. (One problem

with those is there are dozens of them, and no two agree on the average day's forecast. The forecaster is left to make his educated guess among them.)

Me, I've given up trying to figure the weather out. I know it'll be crazy, and that's enough.

Oh, I still read the forecasts. Otherwise, how would I know it's supposed to snow tonight? But you can't focus your life on the weather doing what it's supposed to do. Make plans that way, and you can waste a lot of time.

Will it snow? It probably has snowed here in May before, but I'm not qualified to make a prediction. The one thing I do know is that Cynthia put the snow shovels away Sunday. In my book, that all but guarantees snow tonight.

(She's put them away twice before this spring, by the way. An eternal optimist, that woman.)

So if I was going to bet, I'd bet on snow. And hope I can find a shovel in the morning. It'll be time for hot days and thunderstorms soon enough.

Steve Haynes is president of Nor'West Newspapers. When he has the time, he'd rather be reading a good book or casting a fly.

Bill sent to governor covers gun regs

An update on the bills sent to the governor for signature at "turnaround":

The House and Senate passed a measure addressing sovereignty concerns if federal agents attempt to confiscate firearms, accessories or ammunition manufactured and possessed in Kansas.

Originally, the bill required state and local law enforcement officers to arrest federal agents acting on orders of superiors. It was altered to block arrests and gave local and state prosecutors authority to seek court orders prohibiting out-of-state agents from taking Kansas-made weapons.

Both houses also agreed to a bill creating a four-year glide path to imposition of a law requiring state and municipal buildings to have metal detection or trained guards at entries or lift any ban on people with concealed-carry permits from entering with a weapon.

Public schools, correctional facilities and jails would be allowed to retain policies prohibiting concealed handguns on the premises. A school board, university chief executive or community college president could authorize licensed employees to carry concealed handguns at work.

There were so many bills introduced pertaining to public schools this year it will take several articles to highlight them. Today, I'll



Ward Cassidy

• This week in Topeka

cover the governor's "Read to Succeed" proposal.

The House and Senate passed HB 2140, a substantially amended version of the original bill. The measure provides that beginning in the 2016-2017 school year, districts that have a higher percentage of students scoring in the lowest achievement level on state reading assessments will have to adopt a policy for possible retention of certain students in first grade, rather than third grade as proposed by the governor and adopted in some other states.

The bill also creates a grant program to assist struggling readers in the early grades, a task force to study reading interventions and a recognition program for schools demonstrating the most improvement in fourth grade reading results.

Whether the bill is signed and then funded remains to be seen. It certainly has drawn attention to how important it is for students to

learn to read, and I would hope parents and schools continue to focus on reading and its importance.

As of April 22, the governor had signed 120 bills into law.

Rep. Ward Cassidy of St. Francis represents the 120th District in the Kansas House of Representatives, covering the northwest part of Thomas County (including Colby), plus Decatur, Rawlins, Cheyenne, Sherman and Wallace counties. This is his second term in the Legislature, and he is chair of the Education Budget Committee and vice chair of the Education Committee. Send e-mails to ward.cassidy@house.ks.gov.

Where to write, call

State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St., Room 136-E., Topeka, Kan. 66612, (785) 296-7399 Ralph.Ostmeyer@senate.ks.gov

State Rep. Ward Cassidy, (120th District) State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St., Room 151-S, Topeka, Kan., 66612, (785) 296-7616

COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963 Colby, Kan. 67701 fax (785) 462-7749

Send news to: colby.editor@nwkansas.com

State award-winning newspaper, General Excellence, Design & Layout, Columns, Editorial Writing, Sports Columns, News, Photography. Official newspaper of Thomas County, Colby, Brewster and Rexford.

Sharon Friedlander - Publisher sfriedlander@nwkansas.com

NEWS

- Sports Reporter

colby.sports@nwkansas.com

Marian Ballard - Copy Editor

mballard@nwkansas.com

Sam Dieter - News Reporter

colby.editor@nwkansas.com

Heather Alwin - Society Editor

colby.society@nwkansas.com

ADVERTISING

colby.ads@nwkansas.com

Kathryn Ballard - Advertising Representative kb Ballard@nwkansas.com

Kylee Hunter - Graphic Design khunter@nwkansas.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Office Manager

Melissa Edmondson - Office Manager medmondson@nwkansas.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator support@nwkansas.com

NOR'WEST PRESS

Richard Westfahl - General Manager Gary Stewart, Foreman

Jim Jackson, Jim Bowker, Pressmen

Kris McCool, Judy McKnight, Tracy Traxel, Sheri Arroyo, Mailing

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.

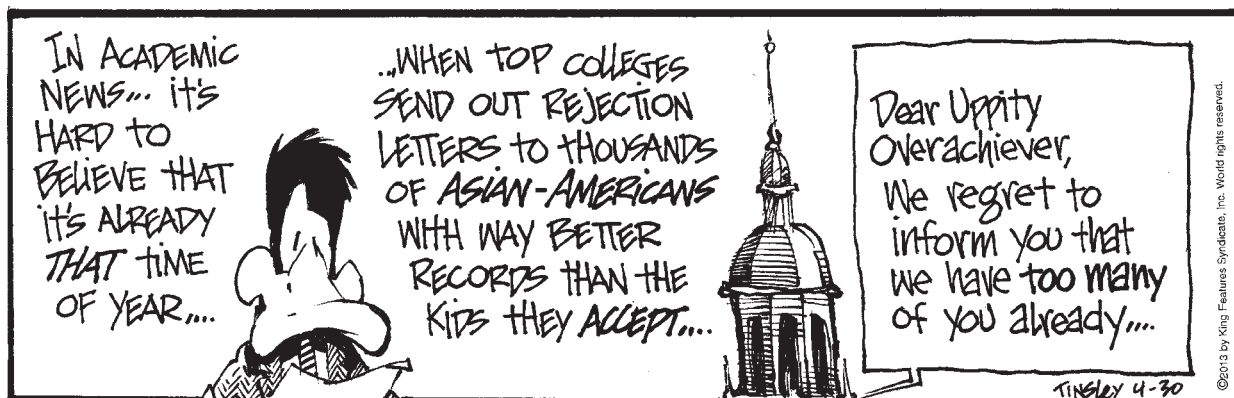
PERIODICALS POSTAGE paid at Colby, Kan. 67701, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

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

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



©2013 by King Features Syndicate, Inc. World rights reserved.

TINSLEY 4-30

Tinsley's-1