Opinion



Storms help area desperate for rain

In a region desperate for rain, the recent deluge helped quench some of the thirst.

A storm July 31 delivered rainfall in astounding amounts, with heavy rain to include more than four inches in some parts.

The downpour that came in a short time swamped lawns and flooded streets and basements. Traffic was halted in some places, and local crews were left to help residents clean up the mess from rain and 60-mph winds that damaged and uprooted trees.

As inconvenient as it may have been for some, the rain was cause for celebration. With this part of Kansas battling extreme drought – and crops dying in the fields – every drop of precipitation is needed.

Of course, the recent rain wasn't a drought-buster.

Southwest Kansas needs a lot more moisture. Even last week's gully-washer of a rain wasn't enough to turn the tide on drought unwilling to loosen its grip.

That rainfall did push the year-to-date precipitation in Garden City to more than five inches for the year, but the annual total remains well short of the normal precipitation for this point in the year.

Still, it's easy to see how such a rain could at least lift the spirits of folks from the farm to the city, where retailers know any good news for farmers helps make cash registers sing.

When it comes to economic prosperity, local officials spend significant time on ways to encourage success stories. They have some control of the outcome thanks to incentives and other strategies used to create jobs and energize the economy.

Farmers, however, remain more at the mercy of uncontrollable circumstances.

While farmers' expertise helps lead to harvests needed to feed the world, their operations too often fall prey to unpredictable and volatile weather. Drought, extreme heat and hail usually are the culprits.

Unfortunately, the recent heavy rain missed some nearby communities and farms. At least the region has more chances with rain in the forecast.

Every bit of moisture, after all, can make a difference in an area that will take it in any way, shape or form.

- The Garden City Telegram, via the Associated Press

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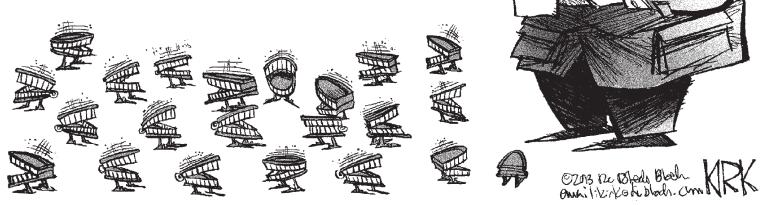
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Propaganda blocks liberal agenda

COLLECTING INTELLIGENCE

For the longest time I've lived with the belief that the United States is a center-right country.

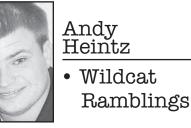
I assumed that my country was too enthralled with rugged individualism to ever fully embrace a progressive agenda. Lately, however, I've started to question those assumptions.

While Americans certainly have an affinity for conservative rhetoric about limited government and low taxes - as opposed to the progressive taxation and increased economic equality championed by liberals - this alone doesn't prove that most Americans are naturally inclined to support conservative policies. One of the great paradoxes in U.S. politics lies in how citizens embrace conservative beliefs in theory but not in practice.

For example, American's generally like the idea of low taxes, but poll after poll reveals that citizens favor raising taxes on the wealthy and cutting military spending as the best ways to balance the budget. And, in sharp contrast to the right wing media – and many self-styled centrists in the mainstream media - there is bipartisan opposition to cuts in Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security.

Given these surprising revelations, one would think liberals could marshal support from diverse groups for implementing a progressive economic agenda that strengths the safety net, provides all citizens with health care and creates jobs by putting people to work fixing our country's broken infrastructure.

But, alas, liberals have failed to capitalize on American's appetite for more economic are troubled by rising inequality, they are com/heintz23. equality. The fact that balancing the budget cynical about the government's ability to help



has taken precedence over creating jobs is proof that conservatives still control political discourse when it comes to economic issues. The key question here is why haven't progressives been able to win over the hearts and minds of more Americans?

This question can't be reduced to a simple answer and no deus ex machina exists to solve this thorny riddle. Much of progressive's failure to win broad support from the American people can be chalked up to the success of conservative propaganda. Thanks to a sophisticated campaign to demonize the left in general, many Americans now think the terms liberal and progressives are code words for socialist and anti-American. Conservatives have successfully used words like "dependency," "big government," "welfare," "bureaucrats" and "nanny state" to portray progressives and liberals in an unflattering light. Progressives are still trying to escape from the dark shadow cast by these politically disastrous stereotypes.

Liberals and progressives, however, have another problem that exceeds conservative ing. You can find his blog at www.orble.com/ propaganda in importance. While Americans just-one-mans-vision, or find him at twitter.

solve this problem. If they allowed inequality to get this bad in the first place, why should they be trusted to fix the problem?

This is a legitimate question. While at first glance, voting for someone who supports an austere agenda that is certain to further enrich the top one percent while weakening the middle class seems irrational - especially if that person is a member of the middle or working class - it appears less so when the government's role in redistributing wealth upward over the past couple of decades is taken into account.

While liberals have been effective at highlighting the corruption and lack of accountability in our elite institutions - whether they be run by the government or special interests they haven't been able to reconstitute them. Nevertheless, reforming our countries broken and/or discredited institutions - especially the financial sector and our ubiquitous mass surveillance system - should remain a top priority for progressives. Once our institutions are adequately reformed, it will be easier to convince Americans that government can play a constructive role in creating jobs and strengthening our struggling middle class.

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Food safety linked to emotional values

The issue of safe, healthy food is in the news once again. While the majority of this nation's food is healthy and safe to eat, food remains deeply entrenched in family values.

Without question, emotions are also tied with what we're eating for lunch or dinner. Emotional connections to our food sometimes make potential risks within our food supply appear frightening.

Consumers react strongly to food safety issues. Because they can't control the outcomes, their exposure is involuntary, the effects are irreversible and they're caused by human actions or failures.

Approximately 5 million illnesses and 4,000 deaths can be attributed each year to meat and poultry products, according to the Centers for Disease Control. About 9,000 people die and at least 6 million become sick each year from food-borne infections.

Like the food industry and our government, consumers have an obligation to keep food safe. The way we handle, store and cook food can mean the difference between a satisfying meal or a bout with E. coli or salmonella.

Purchasing, storing and preparing food, presents many challenges to consumers. As wise and safety-conscious shoppers, it is our responsibility to keep food safe once it leaves our local grocery store or meat market.

Always buy food from a reputable dealer, with a known record for safe handling. If you don't know if the meat is fresh ask a neighbor or friend who's shopped there before.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) advises consumers to buy dated prod-



they are reliable only if the food has been kept at the proper temperature during storage and handling. Although many products bear "sell by" and "use by" dates, product dating is not a federal requirement.

When we purchase products labeled "keep refrigerated," we should do so only if they are stored in a refrigerated case and cold to the touch. Buy frozen products only if they are frozen solid. Never buy something that feels mushy.

Buy packaged precooked foods only if the package is sound - not damaged or torn.

Avoid cross contamination. To prevent raw meat and poultry from contaminating foods that will be eaten without further cooking, enclose individual packages of raw meat or poultry in plastic bags. Position packages of raw meat or poultry in your shopping cart so their juices cannot drip on other food.

Always shop for perishables last. Keep refrigerated and frozen items together so they will remain cold. Place perishables in the coolest part of your car during the trip home. Pack them in an ice chest if the time from store to home refrigerator will be more than one hour.

Restaurant salad bars are one of the most ucts only if the "sell by" or "use by" date has common causes of bad stomachs. Improperly not expired. While these dates are helpful, washed raw vegetables are another classic

source of food poisoning.

Unless they've been washed scrupulously and handled expertly, vegetables are every bit as likely as meats to have come into contact with pathogens or toxins. If you fail to be as careful with your veggies as you should be with meat, it can be unpleasant.

Whatever you do, wash your own hands before handling food and before switching to another food group. And don't forget to wash your hands each and every time you handle and eat food.

While most of these tips sound simple, a common-sense approach the next time you shop, snack or prepare a meal for your family will ensure mealtimes are healthy and nourishing

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.

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We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise. Nor do we run form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area.

