

Other Viewpoints

Food banks' reality against welfare cuts

Charities in Kansas know the escalating woes of the poor in our midst. More sad news came in a report from the Kansas Food Bank...

Another mean-spirited strategy came in cutting taxes for rich Kansans while allowing the tax rate for the poor to rise. The plan to push Kansas toward zero state income tax...

Where to write, call

- U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. roberts.senate.gov/public/
U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran, 354 Russell Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510 (202) 228-6966.
U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp, 126 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515.
State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St., Room 136-E., Topeka, Kan. 66612.
State Rep. Ward Cassidy, (120th District) State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St., Room 151-S, Topeka, Kan., 66612.

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Thanksgiving more than eating, shopping

When you consider the upcoming Thanksgiving holiday, what comes to your mind?

Is it the wonderfully unhealthy thought of a plate loaded with food and covered with gravy? Maybe the day-after shopping frenzy that causes otherwise sane people to descend upon a department store at 3 in the morning...

What I have been reminded about in recent days - especially with many Facebook contacts - is that Thanksgiving should truly be about giving thanks. I guess I have always known that, deep down, even if I did not express it well.

As a kid, I was thankful if I could just get to the last piece of apple pie before my five siblings. And as a teen, if the University of Alabama could beat the University of West Georgia (also known as Auburn) - a game which traditionally takes place on or around the holiday - I was thankful. Or at least, I thought that I was.

As I have gotten older, I have come to realize that real gratitude (thankfulness) is something much more. It is based on an understanding that life can be hard - and unfair - and we do not receive things simply because we deserve them.

Possessions and accolades should not be misunderstood as guarantees or just rewards. There are many people who have worked just as hard as you or I and have done all the right things, and yet they have not received as much wealth, fame or personal satisfaction. Once I understood that clearly, I could begin to approach true thankfulness. And I say all of this to preface the following comments, which are heartfelt.

I am thankful for the Colby Community College faculty and staff. We live in a world today that is transient and people come and go



Steve Vacik

From the president

often, usually looking for the next best thing. At the college, we have a core group of dedicated employees who give of themselves for the benefit of our students. It is a calling - it is certainly not about the monetary rewards, as we will never compensate as well as I would want - and their commitment to seeing the college become different, better and purposeful, inspires me.

I am thankful for our students, both current and alumni. Over the year, we have had some of the real leaders in our community spend time as students at the college - and the students you find today at the college are as capable and motivated as ever. I expect they will have the same impact on the community, state and region as those who have gone before them. And what they all leave behind forms the legacy upon which we build the future - which is most promising.

I am thankful for our community. Colby is a community of hard-working, no-nonsense folks held together by common values of family, friends, faith and freedom. When we work together, our community is hard to beat. This community has also continued to support the college, during the good times and difficult times. Without the support of the people, our college - and it isn't mine, it is ours - could not survive.

I am thankful for our elected officials. I have mentioned it before, but our college Board of Trustees, City Council members, county com-

missioners (and others) have difficult jobs - they have to address issues that affect everyone, knowing they cannot please all of their constituents and as such, they will be open to complaints and ridicule - and most do it for little or no remuneration.

With that group, I would also single out our state representative, Ward Cassidy. Ward has truly been a friend to education, especially this past year. Without his efforts, community and technical colleges would have lost significant money, something none of us can afford. He has looked out for the interests of the people of northwest Kansas, sometimes to the detriment of his own standing within his party. All of these folks are worthy of an occasional thanks.

There are so many more things, but I would remiss if I did not also share thanks for my family. My wife and sons are such great support for me. They rarely complain about all the evenings that I spend away at school and community events, meetings, programs or the trips to the state capital on behalf of the college.

Though I want to do the best job that I can in serving the college and community, my family will always be the ultimate measuring stick by which I will be remembered. My sincerest hope is that I demonstrate through my actions how thankful I am to be able to share my life with them.

At this time of year, do not hesitate to share with others your sense of gratitude. Turkey and dressing are wonderful - time to relax may be even better - but nothing compares to a thankful heart. May yours abound this holiday season as you count your blessings.

Dr. Stephen Vacik is president of Colby Community College. Vacik is a native of Fargo, N.D., and was vice president of instruction at East Mississippi Community College before moving to Colby.

Feel grateful for what you have

It had been a hard year for our family. My father had formed a partnership with a man he had trusted, but the man took advantage of my father's trust as well as his honesty.

The man took all the incoming money, but left my father with the bills. The partnership was broken, leaving my father with no income and hard pressed to pay, but he was determined to do so in order to preserve his good name.

Although there was little money for things like school clothes, we always had enough to eat. We raised a big garden, and it and our farm produced plenty of food. There were times when we children felt the sting of teasing because our clothes were not the newest style. There were times we felt left out when other kids could go to the show and we couldn't. But when a new family, the Tawsons, moved in near us, we soon realized how lucky we were.

We saw them unloading the moving van and went to help. The children's clothes were even more worn than ours, but the main thing we noticed was how thin they were. The mother was thin as well, but the father was dressed nicely and was the opposite of thin. The contrast was so stark it was hard not to notice.

As our family helped them move, we learned little about them. The mother had a job teaching school, while the husband was unemployed. The children said nothing. When my mother brought a house warming dinner to

Other Opinions

Daris Howard Life's Outtakes

finish off our welcome, the children eyed the food hungrily. When it was set on the table, they ate as if they had fasted for days.

When our family returned home, my father spoke what was on everyone's mind. "Something is not right here."

It was only a short time until we learned more. My father had gone to the hardware store to get hinges to fix a broken door on our barn. While passing the local bar, he saw Mr. Tawson inside drinking and gambling. My father didn't think too much of it, but, that same day, my mother caught some of the Tawson children stealing food from our pantry.

"What are you doing?" she demanded.

The children hung their heads, but said nothing. My mother took them home and visited with their mother. She was embarrassed.

"I'm sorry," she said, "but we have nothing in the house to eat."

"Doesn't your job provide enough?" my

mother asked.

Mrs. Tawson could not look my mother in the eye, and seemed reluctant to talk, but the situation had torn the mask from the silence.

"My husband takes my paychecks, and gives me very little back to buy food with," she said. "The children are always hungry."

"What does he do with the money?" my mother asked.

"He said that was none of my business," Mrs. Tawson answered. "Unfortunately, sometimes he uses what food he allows us to have as incentive to make sure we do as he demands. Please don't tell him I said anything."

"You tell your children they don't need to steal," my mother said. "They can have food, though I may expect help weeding the garden or doing other chores in exchange."

That evening, as my mother told my father what had happened, they pieced it all together. From then on, the Tawson children were often helping with chores, and, in return, they would eat with us and take food home.

And as we grew to understand their situation, our desires for what we didn't have changed to gratitude for how good our life really was.

Daris Howard, award-winning, syndicated columnist, playwright, and author, can be contacted at daris@darishoward.com, or go to his website at www.darishoward.com.

Mallard Fillmore

Bruce Tinsley



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