

Giving money away won't help the country

Pure politics. That's the administration's move to ask for a \$250-per-person payment to everyone on Social Security, Railroad Retirement, veterans benefits and retired public employees. The rationale is that Social Security clients won't get a cost-of-living increase this year because — gasp — there was no increase in the cost of living. Instead of celebrating this budget-saving event, though, the powers that be stepped quickly into the breach. Never mind that Social Security recipients already got a \$250 payment this year as part of the stimulus bill. The cost of this generosity with your money: \$13 billion, which can't come from the Social Security trust fund, since it's going broke. Of course, the government doesn't have the money and will have to borrow it, but as a deficit buster, it pales by comparison to the trillions spent on bailouts, corporate welfare and stimulus fraud. Why pay everyone a cost-of-living increase when the cost of living didn't increase? Well, it seems like an annual increase is now an "entitlement" for Social Security recipi-

ents, even when it's not needed. Sure, people could use some more money. Who couldn't? But there will be no increases, cost of living or otherwise, for most of the wage earners who support people on Social Security. They're out there trying to hang onto their jobs in the worst economy in a quarter century, but apparently they can afford to pay this little bill for the retired. It's client-driven politics, where the government caters to voters who get a government check. Not the taxpaying workers. And it sets a bad precedent, where government clients get raises no matter what. Just because. This may be the future of the country, however, as more and more people, from corporate executives to the retired to welfare clients, ease up to the federal trough. The more voters benefit from government spending, the more the government spends. Someday, there will be only a few workers left to support this system, and it'll collapse. Until then, be ready to pay. — *Steve Haynes*

Foundation attacks papers

Newspaper people ought to be incensed with the Knight Foundation, an organization formed from one of the nation's great newspaper fortunes which seeks pretty much to eliminate the newspaper from tomorrow's world. The James S. and John L. Knight foundation is named for the brothers who made millions as owners of the Akron Beacon Journal, Miami Herald and other great American newspapers. In the beginning, it paid for good works in Knight towns. Later, it focused on promoting quality journalism. But somewhere along the line, the foundation decided that the newspaper as we know it is a dodo. The eggheads running the show decided they should be spending money not to improve newspapers, but to replace them, or as one statement puts it, not to save journalistic institutions, but to invent them. In other words, the foundation would use the Knight brothers' money to buy the shovels with which to bury the newspaper industry. For several years now, the foundation has poured money into projects such as "hyperlocal" websites designed to serve a community as newspapers serve a community, but without all that messy ink and dead trees.

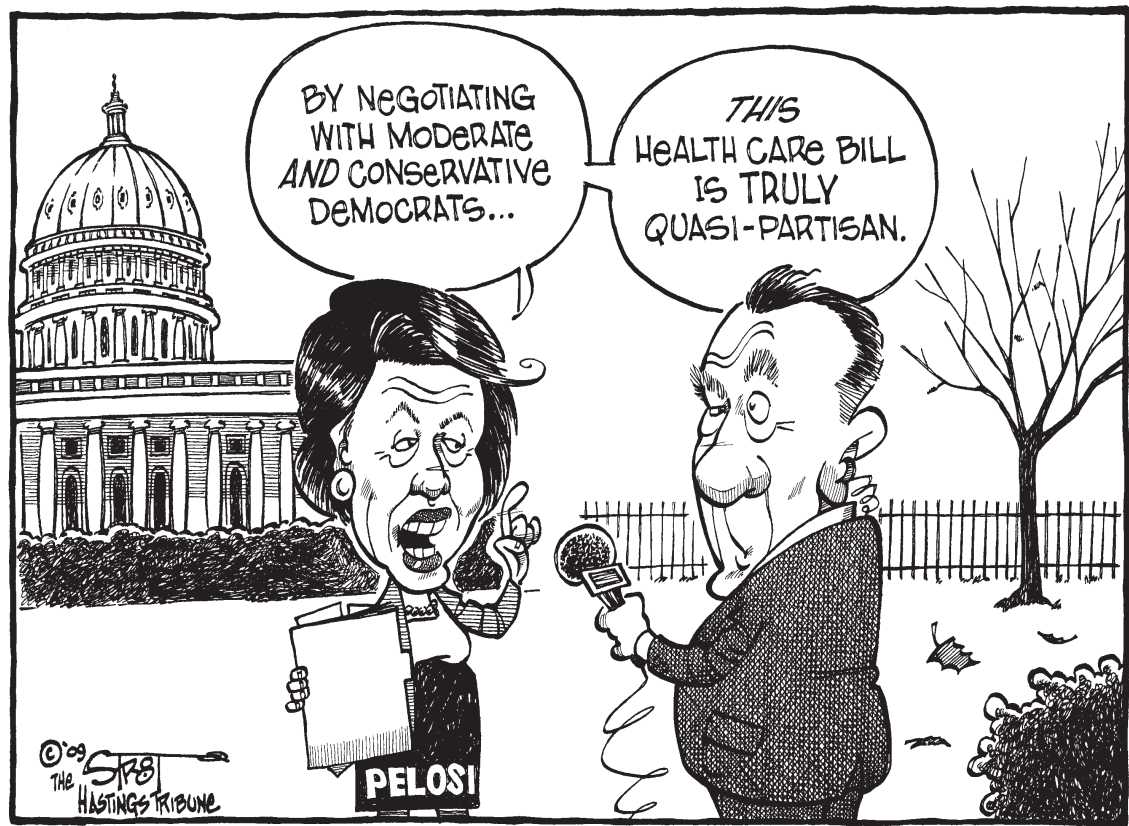


Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
s.haynes@nwkansas.com

though few of them make money. Print newspapers, however, make money. And of the daily newspapers, maybe only 150 to 200 are metro dailies, the kind the Knights owned and the kind that really are in trouble today. It's not that many won't survive, but they face a need to change and reconnect to a single definable community that is difficult at best. Most, like *The Kansas City Star* or *The Denver Post*, started out serving a single town and grew to dominate a region. After World War II, though, American cities changed. So did America's sense of community. Metro newspapers have been trying to figure all this out for 60 years, but now, faced with a poor economy, many must change in ways they never dreamed of. Does the same fate await the rest of the industry, the 7,000 to 8,000 newspapers that make money and still connect to a community? Probably not. You never hear much about these smaller papers. The big ones get all the ink, mostly because they are public companies. The Knight Foundation has little if any appreciation for this aspect of the business, however. It's too busy buying shovels. The latest outrage is something called The Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy, founded in conjunction with the Aspen Institute. This commission worries greatly about reinventing journalism and ignores the fact that, in most places, and especially in rural America, it thrives. That does not fit its grand

scheme of new, shiny electronic journalism. The commission, in its report, talks a lot about the need to reconnect America the way Lincoln connected us with rails (by subsidizing the robber barons) and Eisenhower connected us with freeways (killing and maiming thousands of small rural communities in the process.) It repeats the false assumptions that rural areas are not well served by the Internet (in fact, unserved areas are shrinking) and that many in urban America lack broadband because they cannot pay for it. (In fact, many simply choose not to connect because they don't need it.) By this time, you'd think the Knight brothers would be twirling in the grave, but their latter-day minions stand ready to heap even more earth on the newspaper's grave. But to paraphrase Mark Twain, the rumors of our demise are greatly exaggerated. We need to grow and change with the new world, but the evidence is no electronic means exists to replace us. (And that is a fact confirmed by years and years of Knight company research.) Our advice to the Knight Foundation and its commission: Belay the shovels. Instead of throwing money at ways to reinvent journalism, help the industry meet its challenges. For since there is nothing out there to replace newspaper journalism, it stands to reason that democracy will depend on us — and our heirs — for a long time to come. On the web: report.knightcomm.org



It's tough living 'off the grid'

I have some friends who are thinking of moving "off the grid." That is, they are looking for a place to live that isn't on the national system of electrical lines. This doesn't mean their home wouldn't have electricity. It just means that they would have to provide their own using a generator, windmill, solar panels or water power. It's not really a cheaper way to live, but it is a more self-sufficient lifestyle. When we were traveling a lot a couple of years ago, we saw quite a few ranches and farms in the Dakotas and Wyoming with no electric lines coming over the hills. These were single farmsteads miles and miles from any neighbor, and the cost of bringing in electric lines would have been astronomical. Back in the early 90s, we had some friends who were the managers of a guest ranch high in the mountains. They lived off the grid. The source of power was a water wheel. When everyone went to bed, the ranch manager would go out and turn off the wheel, shutting off all



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
c.haynes@nwkansas.com

electricity to the place. When television dishes became popular, the couple got one so they could watch television, something that hadn't been available in their remote location. It worked really well, the wife said, except when a fish went over the wheel. That made a power bump, which caused the television dish to not only lose power but also its programming. Eventually, the very wealthy owners decided to pay to have the place connected to the lines, which were about 17 miles down the winding dirt road. After underground lines were put in so as not to disturb the scenery, it was discovered that most of the

buildings had no light switches. They had never needed them, since the electricity was all turned off at the same time every night. I'm sure my friends won't have that problem, but they might find that heating with propane or wood to be a lot of work. I never had to live off the grid, but, I did live in a home heated by wood. Getting up at 2 a.m. to refill the stove was a winter ritual when the temperatures fell to between -20 and -40. And my friends in Colorado wonder why I moved to Kansas! We have natural gas. "Hey Steve, turn that thermostat up, will you?"

Family helps build a home

I don't care how many Mexico mission trips I take part in, there is always something new and exciting. We returned late Friday night road weary and tired, but I think I speak for the entire team when I say we were extremely pleased with ourselves. We built the house in the allotted amount of time and it was beautiful. Who knew five women and two men could build a house in 3 1/2 days? Normal construction time is 2 1/2 days but, we had freezing rain and high winds on the third day and had to shut down. We were miserably cold and stucco does not "stick" in the rain. The final touches were added that fourth day. The family we built for was unique in that they spoke quite a bit of English. The father, Juan Carlos, and his son-in-law Jesus (pronounced Hay-sous) pitched right in and helped. Jesus is married to Juan Carlos' daughter, Brenda, who is stunningly beautiful. If she were in the states, she would be a movie star or a model. She and Jesus are the parents of 6-month old Andres, who was adorable. By the way they looked at Andres, you know they thought they had invented babies. Everyone on our team, including the men, took their turns holding Andres. He was a happy baby and hardly ever cried. Juan Carlos had two other sons, Diego, 18, and Irvin, 9. They were both in school so could not help all the time. The house where the family lived, about 10 feet by 20 feet, was made of cinder block. It was cold, drafty



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
quality-pro@webtv.net

and had a roof that leaked in many places. We understand Juan Carlos and the two boys plan to live in the new house while Brenda, Jesus and Andres will occupy the old one. I sure hope they can repair the roof and make it more livable. I hate to think of little Andres in that cold, wet house. I'm sure they will because Juan Carlos and Jesus both wanted to learn all they could about our building techniques. "You teach me," Juan Carlos said, "so I can learn how to do this, OK?" There was enough extra tar paper and rolled roofing left over, and I hope they can fix the roof of the old house. What is humbling to me is that even with their dire living conditions, the entire family was upbeat, positive and had a great sense of humor. One day Juan Carlos came out of his house holding a small mirror. "This is my I.D.," he said. I thought that was so funny. He also knew the words, in English, to every Golden Oldie song from the '50s and '60s. He and I would sing, "Help me Rhonda, help, help me Rhonda," and "My little run-around, my run, run, run, run-around." It was hard to leave this little

family, and they have been in my thoughts every day: wondering if they are settled into the new house, wondering if the baby is sick, wondering if Irvin still has that cough we were all concerned about and wondering if Juan Carlos will have enough work to provide for his family. We will definitely check on them during our next trip. Yes, there will be another trip. Many more, I hope. Perhaps the day will come when we cannot physically make the trip, but that is a long way in the future. Until then, it's have hammer, will travel.

From the Bible

For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. *Thessalonians 2:10-12*

Writer angry grass was torn up

To the Editor: This is an open letter to someone(s), who know who they are. Thank you for doing such an excellent job of tearing up the grass at Sappa Park. It's so nice to see the muddy, torn-up mess. It must be such a disappointment, though, to know your vehicle is so under-

powered it can only do that in soft, wet grass. It's sad your buddies are such pinheads they think that is fun. A lot of people have put in a lot of hard work to make the area useable. Too

bad you all think it is such fun to tear it up. It's a wonder people still even try to improve anything. Mike Dempewolf Oberlin

Letter to the Editor

Groups buy television for center

To the Editor: It is a pleasure to inform you that the money saved over the years by the Class of 1960 has been matched by the Norcatur Royal Neighbors of America. The Oberlin Lions Club added a donation. This money was used to buy a

50-inch flat-screen, wall-mounted television for the new Golden Age Center. I am sure members of the community will enjoy visiting the center to watch a little television. Audrey Pavlicek Class of 1960 Oberlin



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