

Opinion



Letter Drop

- Our Readers Sound Off

Common sense needed

To The Free Press:

Last week we received notice, via the Free Press, that the Colby School District, Colby Community College and the county commissioners (post election), are all wanting to increase their mill levy.

The present Colby School District administration building was reportedly sold for \$1. How does the board justify an expensive new building for a few personnel while making cuts where students are directly involved?

In business, less income means we cut expenses, or someone more efficient takes over. They may also eliminate top paying positions to cut budget.

The Colby School District enrollment has been decreasing. Doesn't that mean less of something?

And Colby Community College, isn't the idea to conserve water? You want to drill a well so you can use more water? Maybe students and parents would be more impressed with some of those 13 acres being used for parking or in buffalo grass!

Our economy is struggling! This may be one of the driest years on record. Yes, Colby has had recent rain but not the surrounding areas. Water levels are declining. Many irrigated crops are a disaster. The dryland farmer has no fall crop, most have sold all their cattle due to no grass. Unless there is adequate moisture, fall wheat planting is questionable. Local businessmen have expressed concern.

At least two people campaigning for no tax increase, won in the primary election. Could this be used as a wake up call?

Let's face reality, and set some examples of common sense!

Sharon Stramel
Colby
(Letter #114)

About those letters . . .

The *Free Press* encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, if at all possible, and should include a telephone number and an address. Most importantly, all letters must include a signature. Unsigned letters cannot be published. We reserve the right to edit for clarity and length, and, likewise, reserve the right to reject letters deemed to be of no public interest or considered offensive or libelous.

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Slips of the tongue



Patty Decker

- Deep Thoughts

The other day a friend sent me a bunch of quotes by famous people on a variety of subjects. What makes it worth repeating is the fact that many of these statements were so ridiculous and should make all of us feel a lot smarter.

In all fairness, though, I can see how silly things are said now and then because the day that I read some of the following, I almost made the same mistake in an article about the new high school principal.

It usually happens to me when I am pushed for deadline to get an article done and with little turnaround time from the initial interview to writing the story.

So my example of almost saying something totally ridiculous was this: *The new high school principal said he was glad to be here, adding that he believed that Colby is a town you won't see in any other place.*

Although I usually don't tattle on myself like this, it just seemed so appropriate to the rest of this column — so please read on.

• This question, "If you could live forever, would you?" was addressed to Miss Alabama during the 1994 Miss USA Contest.

Her answer was: "I would not live forever, because we should not live forever, because if we were supposed to live forever, then we would live forever, but we cannot live forever, which is why I would not live forever."

• Mariah Carey had this to say about starving children: "Whenever I watch television and see those poor starving kids all over the world, I can't help but cry. I mean, I'd love to be skinny like that, but not with all those flies and death and stuff."

• Brook Shields made the following comment on smoking: "Smoking kills. If you're killed, you've lost a very important part of your life."

"Whenever I watch TV and see those poor starv-

ing kids all over the world, I can't help but cry. I mean I'd love to be skinny like that, but not with all those flies and death and stuff."

• One athlete, Winston Bennett, basketball forward for the University of Kentucky, who recently was operated on said this: "I've never had major knee surgery on any other part of my body."

• Washington D.C. Mayor Marion Barry told reporters: "Outside of the killings, Washington has one of the lowest crime rates in the country."

• And Hillary Clinton made the following slip while talking about the release of subpoenaed documents: "I'm not going to have some reporters pawing through our papers. We are the president."

• Also in the political circles, a congressional candidate in Texas was quoted as saying: "That lowdown scoundrel deserves to be kicked to death by a jack-ass, and I'm just the one to do it."

• This one came from Danny Ozark, Philadelphia Phillies: "Half this game is ninety percent mental."

• Al Gore, vice-president had this to say about the environment: "It isn't pollution that's harming the environment. It's the impurities in our air and water that are doing it."

• Dan Quayle said: "I love California. I practically grew up in Phoenix," and President George Bush said, "It's no exaggeration to say that the undecideds could

go one way or another"

Here's a few more:

• "We've got to pause and ask ourselves: How much clean air do we need?," said Lee Lococca.

• "The word "genius" isn't applicable in football. A genius is a guy like Norman Einstein," said Joe Theisman, NFL football quarterback and sports analyst.

• "We don't necessarily discriminate. We simply exclude certain types of people," said Col. Gerald Wellman, ROTC Instructor.

• "If we don't succeed, we run the risk of failure," Bill Clinton, former president.

• "Your food stamps will be stopped effective March 1992 because we received notice that you passed away. May God bless you. You may reaply if there is a change in your circumstances," said an official from the Greenville, S.C. department of social services.

After reading the majority of these statements, we should all feel smarter, but just in case you still question that, read on:

The following warning label was attached to a drum of industrial-strength detergent. It said: *If you cannot read English, do not use this product until label has been explained to you.*

Or this one was a correction printed in an Illinois newspaper. It read: *An item in the March 6 police news incorrectly identified the suspect in a dispute incident as the wife of the 43-year-old victim's ex-husband. The suspect is actually the ex-wife of the victim's husband.*

And one last dumb statement: If you don't get this message, call me back.

Decker is editor of the Free Press. Her column appears on Thursdays.

Let's bring them up to date

Bill Ayres

- Another Viewpoint

Until recently, food stamps were paper coupons that people cashed in at the checkout counter. Now, in most places, people put a plastic card into a machine. Soon, there will be only plastic cards. Why do we continue to call this process "food stamps"? We need to change the name.

We also need to change the program. It was designed to supplement the food budget of poor families, primarily those on welfare, then called AFDC. It was also intended to help a limited number of poor working families and seniors.

Since AFDC was abolished in 1996 and replaced with TANF, the welfare rolls have been cut in half. More than a third of those on food stamps were either eliminated by new restrictions, discouraged by bad treatment and unnecessary paperwork or disqualified by slightly rising salaries during the second half of the '90s.

When President Clinton introduced welfare reform in his 1992 presidential campaign he said that the way to reduce welfare was to make work pay. For tens of millions of Americans, work does not pay. They cannot feed their families.

There are several steps that our government can take to make work pay, such as raising the minimum wage and increasing the Earned Income Tax Credit. Another effective step is to expand food stamps as a wage supplement for poor working families, and to make sure that families that are eligible receive this much needed benefit.

Here are several suggestions for extending the food stamp program to millions of families.

1. Outreach — Many of the families who are eligible do not know it. Last year the U.S. Department

of Agriculture (USDA) formed partnerships with dozens of grassroots programs to develop effective ways of telling people about the program and processing the applications. We need to identify the most effective of those programs and fund them elsewhere. Also, we need to work with media experts to create a national awareness campaign.

2. Simplify the application form — There is no need for ten or twenty pages. Many states and counties have created one to two page forms. The USDA should give awards for the most compact and effective ones and promote them nationally.

3. Make the application process more accessible and user friendly — Open offices on weekends to accommodate working people. Allow more contact by phone, fax and email. Allow people to sign up for food stamps when they obtain other benefits such as Medicaid. Allow unscheduled interviews for the first visit and let clients sign up then. Schedule subsequent interviews at the client's convenience where possible. Be clear about what papers are needed, and accommodate language needs. Have clear wording on food stamp notices. Most important, inspire workers by convincing them that they are the first line of defense against hunger, and that they are promoting self-reli-

ance.

4. Allow semi-annual reporting — instead of quarterly.

5. Allow ownership of a reasonably priced car — Only five percent of workers take public transportation to work. How can the government expect people to get to work and off welfare without a car?

6. Allow an automatic six months of food stamps for any family that has used up its time on TANF.

7. Use state waivers for unemployed single adults — The current law allows only three months of food stamps every three years for single unemployed adults aged 18 to 49. In areas of high unemployment that exceed the national average by at least one fifth over a two year period, states can exempt 15 percent or more of those ineligible. USDA should encourage the use of that waiver. States should not apply the time limit to persons living in a house with a child under 18.

8. Housing allowance — Housing costs vary in different regions of the country. Therefore Congress should develop a more equitable method of determining the allowance that is more realistic for the region.

9. Finger printing — End the costly finger printing of applicants. This discourages families from applying and has not proven effective in reducing fraud.

Bill Ayres is the co-founder and executive director of World Hunger Year (WHY). Visit: www.worldhungeryear.org

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Doonesbury

- Gary Trudeau

