

# Opinion



## Guest Viewpoint

## Treasury secretary is a bad role model

Time for another Gooberhead Award, presented periodically to those in the news who've got their tongues running 100 miles per hour...but forgot to put their brains in gear. Today's Goober is a high-ranker: Paul O'Neill, George W's secretary of the Treasury, who previously was making millions as CEO of Alcoa Inc., the world's largest maker of aluminum. Paul was one of the corporate CEOs that Bush so proudly hailed when filling his cabinet with them only 18 months ago. George bragged then that executives like O'Neill would bring the discipline and efficiency of corporate governance to Washington.

But that was B.E — Before Enron. And before WorldCom, Tyco, Arthur Anderson, Global Crossing, etc. Now, the corporate connections of O'Neill, Dick Cheney, Bush himself, and all the rest of the cabinet are downplayed — and, instead, these corporatists are loudly posing as populist reformers.

O'Neill has been especially noisy, even getting up on his high horse recently to bellow that villainous corporations should get the death penalty and that executives who profit from abuse of their public trust should be "strung up from the highest tree!"

Police detectives have a rule of thumb: At a crime scene, pay particular attention to anyone who's talking a lot and pointing fingers at others. So let's check out O'Neill.

As CEO, he made millions on stock payments that were based in part on extra profits the company banked by illegally avoiding the installation of pollution-control equipment. Instead of buying the equipment, Alcoa's smelters simply kept pumping massive amounts of health-damaging pollutants into the air. In Texas alone, Alcoa has just been fined \$4 million for this gross violation of the Clean Air Act.

By abusing his public trust, O'Neill and Alcoa reaped millions in ill-gotten profits at the expense of neighbors whose air they carelessly contaminated.

Shall we string him up from the highest tree? — *by radio talk-show host and author Jim Hightower, former agricultural commissioner of Texas.*

Comments to any opinions expressed on this page are encouraged. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. 5th St., Colby, Kan., 67701. Or e-mail [td@nwkansas.com](mailto:td@nwkansas.com).

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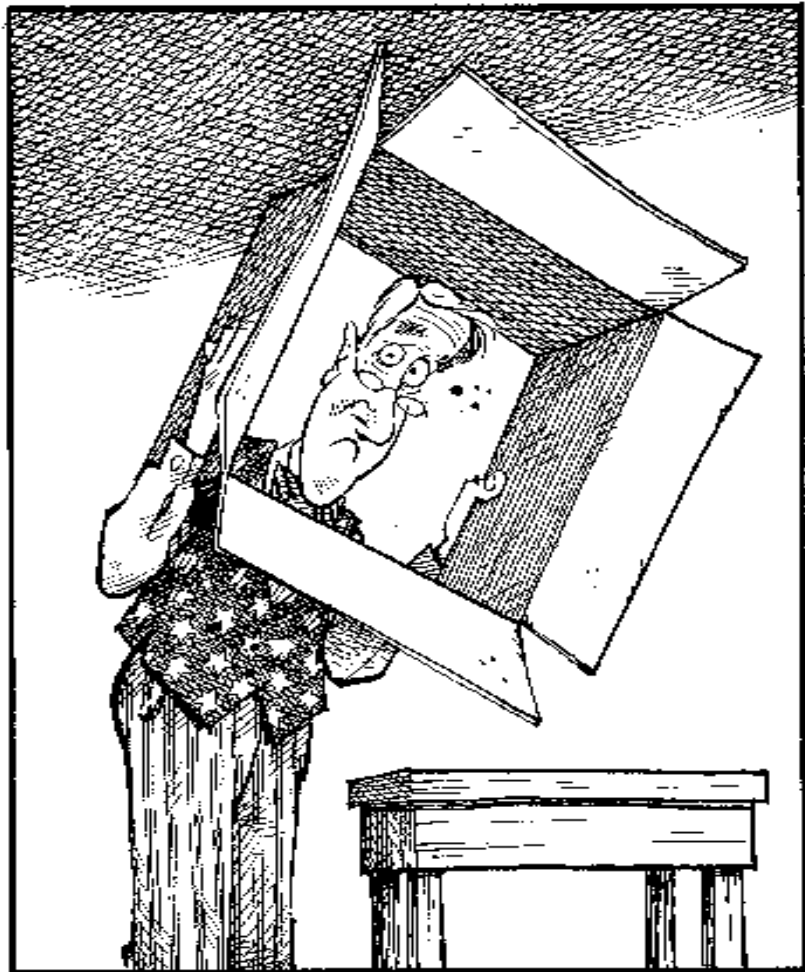
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## Survey gap narrows

Tom Dreiling

### • My Turn



I just couldn't understand why they were killing each other for 25 cents."

"What on earth do you mean?" he asked with a puzzled look on his face.

"Well," she said, "I saw them flip a coin and one team got it and then for the rest of the game all they kept screaming was: 'Get the quarter back! Get the quarter back!'"

**IDON'T** think they will ever learn how to vote in Florida. Their primary was held on Tuesday of this week and now Janet Reno's forces are yelling for a recount.

Reno was apparently upset by a politically unknown in her quest to win the Democratic primary and go up against Gov. Jeb Bush in November. Remember Florida in the presidential voting two years ago? Seems that nothing has changed.

### HAPPY Birthday to...

**Sept. 13** — Adam Lovelady (1-year-old), Frances Jones, Brewster (80), Merabeth Corbett

**Sept. 14** — Dan Kuenzi, Dodie Miller, Leah Sewell, Jordan Erickson, Brian Eicher, Jim Griffin, Niki Burmester, Pattie Stevens

**Sept. 15** — Roger Voss, Travis Parker, Linda Nelson, Melissa Murray, Debbie Luckert, Chris Hubert, Leisha Carpenter, Greg Mentlick, Kylie Ritter, Larry Miller, Kristina Morton, Dana Barnhart, Brianna Moses

**Sept. 16** — Connie Renner, Eric Ohlrogge, Dianne Merrell, Ralph Fischer, Nadine Shull

**Sept. 17** — Austin Herbel, W.O. Miller, Gwen Sloan

Congratulations!

Call 462-3963 or email [td@nwkansas.com](mailto:td@nwkansas.com) to have your special day mentioned. And please keep us advised of any changes in any listing. Thanks!

**GRACE JONES**, a frequent contributor to this

column passed the following along via email this week. I don't know where she got it, but I certainly enjoyed it. It's called...

### A Matter of Perception

1. All teenagers should get a high school education even if they already know everything.

2. I read recipes the same way I read science fiction. I get to the end and think, "Well, that's not going to happen."

3. Health nuts are going to feel stupid someday, lying in hospitals dying of nothing.

4. The other night I ate at a real nice family restaurant. Every table had an argument going.

5. Have you noticed since everyone has a camcorder these days no one talks about seeing UFOs like they used to.

6. You know when you're sitting on a chair and you lean back so you're just on two legs, then you lean too far and you almost fall over but at the last second you catch yourself? I feel like that ... all the time.

7. Whenever I feel blue, I start breathing again.

8. All of us could take a lesson from the weather. It pays no attention to criticism.

9. Why does a slight tax increase cost you two hundred dollars and a substantial tax cut save you thirty cents?

10. I hate to advocate drugs, alcohol, violence, or insanity to anyone, but they've always worked for me.

11. In the 60's people took acid to make the world weird. Now the world is weird and people take Prozac to make it normal.

12. How is it one careless match can start a forest fire, but it takes a whole box to start a campfire?

13. Doctors can be frustrating. You wait a month-and-a-half for an appointment, and he says, "I wish you'd come to me sooner."

14. You read about all these terrorists—most of them came here legally, but they hung around on expired visas, some for as long as 15 years. Now, compare that to Blockbuster; you are two days late with a video and those people are all over you.—Let's put Blockbuster in charge of immigration.

**HAVE** a good evening...and a good weekend!

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## Can Donahue survive?

Jason Salzman

### • Another Viewpoint

In polls, citizens claim they want more thoughtful programming on television news shows.

In reality, when it comes time to choose between celebrity titillation and substance, we go for the fluff — at least when it comes to the cable news chat shows.

For the latest proof of this, look at the battle on prime-time cable among CNN's insipid Connie Chung, mouthy hosts like Chris Matthews, condescending Bill O'Reilly, and Phil Donahue.

You'd think Donahue would win with no problem. The show's promotions urged viewers to watch the show and "Be Thinkful." We should.

Lots of shows have Ann Coulter and Patrick Buchanan, who were both on Donahue. But what about Ralph Nader and Ben Cohen of Ben and Jerry's fame?

Donahue isn't about a debate among centrists. He's offering a political spectrum that you'd see if you lived in France.

Yet, Donahue is third behind Connie Chung in his time slot. With about 350,000 viewers, Donahue's audience is half the size of Chung's, while O'Reilly is trumping both shows with an audience of 2 million — giant for cable.

Why do Americans go for O'Reilly anyway? With a smirk on his face, O'Reilly repeats his line daily that the show is a "no spin zone." This is hard to listen to. Only a pinhead would miss the fact that O'Reilly is himself a spin-head of major proportions.

You have to give O'Reilly credit for not being as ideological and unabashedly self-absorbed as Rush Limbaugh, but don't give him much credit. He's about as paternalistic as you could imagine, if you

hadn't already been exposed to Rush.

O'Reilly's nightly commentaries and letters from viewers are reminiscent of lectures by my little league football coach.

MSNBC executives believe Donahue will shine during the election season. They hope he will be able to handle issues that put that unfortunate "ahaa" expression on the face of Connie Chung.

And there is no doubt that Donahue can handle an array of controversial issues, and he is not afraid to tackle any of them.

For example, Donahue was one of the few voices opposing the war in Afghanistan on television after the war broke out — even though a high percentage of Americans had significant doubts about the war.

The question is, will top management at NBC and its giant parent corporation, General Electric, give Donahue time to prove himself again?

Apparently, the corporate honchos at NBC and GE are already unhappy with Donahue, and they expect ratings to rise or else. Yuck. What happened to the notion that news programming had public interest as well as monetary value?

Today, our nation's giant media conglomerates treat

news programming just like any other form of entertainment broadcasting. News is expected to generate as much money as a sit-com.

So it's no surprise that "news" looks less and less like actual news — and more and more like any entertainment show. Media companies expect the same profit from their news divisions as from their video game divisions.

Yes, you can and should watch Donahue, and tell your friends about it. The more people who watch it the better — for Phil and for our democracy.

But this probably won't work. The troubles at Donahue symbolize the degeneration of journalism in America, and the only real solution will come via government regulation — not censorship, but careful regulation that honors this principle:

In a democracy, news should not be just another product, like a hamburger, subject to the whims of the free market. Instead, it should receive special Federal Communications Commission (FCC) protections, including restrictions on the size of companies that control media outlets and on the number of media outlets a large company is permitted to own.

Currently, the FCC is moving in the opposite direction. Let's hope Donahue sends a message to the FCC.

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*Jason Salzman, author of "Making the News: A Guide for Nonprofits and Activists," is board chair of Rocky Mountain Media Watch (www.bigmedia.org), a media watchdog organization based in Denver. The comments of Mr. Salzman do not reflect the feelings of the Colby Free Press on this issue. Feedback to [td@nwkansas.com](mailto:td@nwkansas.com).*