

Opinion



Letter Drop

- Our Readers Sound Off

Shallenburger is the best bet

To The Free Press:

Tim Shallenburger still is the only governor candidate with a definite ag policy and I would like to encourage your support for him. He is on track with our views, ideas and opinions in agriculture in that we do have to enforce the laws and take action to restore competition and do it aggressively to rebound our economy and put money back into the hands of the wealth creators.

I am still waiting for a definite ag policy statement from the Democratic candidate. I personally don't think Gov. Graves endorsing Tim is anything too special, he (the governor) has never helped with the ag economy yet and it may be better to not have his endorsement!

Remember to let your friends and families know that the flag wasn't earned to be burned. Candidate Kathleen Sebelius, as a member of the Kansas House of Representatives in 1993, was the lead advocate of the right to burn the United States flag as a protest against the government. During the 1993 legislative session, House Concurrent Resolution 5006 provided that desecration of the flag by burning was wrong. Kathleen Sebelius was the lead opponent in the debate before the Kansas House of Representatives on Feb. 10, 1993.

I personally question Kathleen's "insurance" policies, and what has she done to help? My health insurance has continued to go up again, this last month 23 percent or about \$127.00 more per month and this is not the only rate increase I have felt.

Capping unreasonable costs paid to hospitals and doctors is a must to curtail the abuse from both patients and the medical field. As people stop paying health insurance because it is to the point that it may have to go, think about this: what if people only went to the emergency room for treatment and then without insurance paid only \$15.00 per month — who then will carry the load? (Hospitals and insurance carriers). It may happen!

I am personally voting for Shallenburger! Not big business,
**Mike Schultz
Brewster
(Letter #140)**

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@nwkansans.com.

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COLBY FREE PRESS

155 W. Fifth (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963
Colby, Kan. 67701

freepress@nwkansans.com
State award-winning newspaper, General Excellence, Design & Layout Excellence, Column Writing, Editorial Writing, Sports Columns, News, Photography.
Official newspaper of Thomas County, Colby, Brewster and Rexford.

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THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published daily, every Monday through Friday, except the day observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Haynes Publishing Co., 155 W. Fifth, Colby, Kan., 67701.

PERIODICALS POSTAGE is paid at Colby, Kan. 67701, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth, Colby, Kan., 67701.

THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday to Friday, closed Saturday and Sunday.

MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, which is exclusively entitled to the use for publication of all news credited to it or not otherwise herein. Member Kansas Press Association, Inland Press Association and National Newspaper Association.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: In Colby by carrier: 4 months \$32, 8 months \$47, 12 months \$64. By mail with in Colby and the nine-county region of Thomas, Sheridan, Decatur, Rawlins, Cheyenne, Sherman, Wallace, Logan and Gove counties: 4 months \$44, 8 months \$56, 12 months \$72. Other Kansas counties and surrounding states: 4 months \$51, 8 months \$61, 12 months \$75. All other states, \$75, 12 months.

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Our lives are like a puzzle

About a year ago a good friend of mine went into treatment for alcohol. I absolutely admire anyone who can admit they have a problem and seek help, be it for alcohol, drugs, or any other addiction. It is very difficult to admit that you have a weakness and expose that weakness to others.

I have never had close exposure to an alcoholic before helping this friend work through his problems, and I gained so much perspective about life, myself, and the plan we all have laid out before us.

Many hours were spent talking, crying, and praying together. There is nothing like a trial to strengthen the bonds of friendship. Really the only thing I could offer was a listening ear and prayer. Other than those two things, we really are powerless when helping others through situations such as alcohol addiction. The responsibility is ultimately upon them to "work their program."

I don't know whether the biggest hurdle you have to overcome is other people or yourself. I am very aware of what others are saying or how they feel. Sometimes it becomes a struggle when you see people who really don't think you will make it. It is almost as if there is satisfaction for people to say, "I told you so." It almost makes it easier to take another drink (or whatever other vice) because people will say, "I didn't expect you to last long" or "well I figured it was coming." On the other hand, the battle of self vs. self is never-ending. Many times I find myself so beat-up and the only one to blame is myself.

On tid-bit of treasure that came out of this friendship was during a conversation one afternoon. My friend asked me about God's will for their life, and if I thought the situation they were in was God's will.

We started talking about it, and I told him I felt that we all make choices in our lives that result in consequences — some good, some bad. Some of the consequences we pay are definitely more obvious than others. For instance, according to the Bible, stealing



Michelle L. Hawkins

• Pursuit of a Richer Life

is as much of a sin as fornication. There is no black or white sin, sin is sin. But the apparent consequences for someone who steals a CD from a store is much different from the apparent consequences for an unwed mother. I came to the realization, who am I to judge anyone or the repercussions of their actions. The only person I am responsible for is myself.

As we discussed God's will, I shared a little object lesson about how our lives are like a huge puzzle. The end result is beautiful. Everything works in harmony and fits together perfectly. This is similar to our life plan — the end picture. Each day is like one piece. Unless you are superhuman, you cannot tell what the entire puzzle looks like from just examining one piece. One piece fits into the next, leading you through life, to the ultimate plan.

As I started sharing this object lesson with him, I suddenly found it kicking me from behind. I am sure I am not the only one, that as I am talking I find myself saying, "are you listening to yourself?" God has a plan for all of us, and we don't have to see the end picture to get there. Accept your piece for the day and realize if you don't fight it, the pieces will all fit together in the end to form a masterpiece.

This lesson became so powerful to me in my own life that in my house, you will find puzzle pieces and puzzle decorations everywhere — as a reminder. I even carry a small puzzle piece in my purse and have had a small one tattooed onto my ankle as a perma-

nent reminder of the fact I no longer have to worry about the future, the plan has already been set.

I had found a poem in a book, whose author is unknown. It is called *God is in every tomorrow* and beautifully fits with what we had been sharing.

God is in every tomorrow, therefore I live for today;

Certain of finding at sunrise, Guidance and strength for the day,

Power for each moment of weakness, hope for each moment of pain,

Comfort for every sorrow, sunshine and joy after rain.

God is in every tomorrow, planning for you and for me,

Even in the dark I will follow, Trust where my eyes cannot see.

Stilled by His promise of blessing, soothed by the touch of His hand,

Confident in His protection, knowing my life-path is planned.

God is in every tomorrow, life with its changes may come,

He is behind and before me, while in the distance shines Home.

Home—where no thoughts of tomorrow even cast a shadow my brow,

Home in the presence of Jesus, through all Eternity now.

Hawkins is Family Page and Religion Page editor, and also a general assignment reporter/photographer for the Colby Free Press.

In Addition: I am working on a special column about "Famous people we are related to." I would love to know what historical figure, singer, artist, actor, etc. that you are related to, for my special column. Please call, write, or e-mail me with your response.

Next generation of farmers focused on future

Begin with four young farmers. Send them away from home and make them part of the business world for two to four years. Bring them back to their rural community and provide them with nurturing. Add the wisdom and guidance of established family members. What do you have?

In the case of Stafford County Farm Bureau board members Brian Dunn, Keith McNickle, Chad Fisher and Jason Hildebrand this is a sure-fire recipe producing success for the next generation of farmers and ranchers.

That said, these young leaders understand they will face daunting challenges during the next one, two or 10 years, should they all be farming that far down the road. Lurking on the farming horizon are major obstacles including finding enough land, securing the necessary credit, escalating taxes and production costs, devising a sound marketing plan, ensuring profitability and family dynamics.

The four Stafford County board members shared their insight into their past, present and future farming prospects during the 27th Kansas Farm Bureau Governor's Farm and Ranch Field Day held on Sept. 17. Fittingly the site of the discussion was a machine shed on the Randy and Debbie Suiter farm.

For these beginning ag producers one of the first big hurdles to cross was finding enough ground to farm. These young farmers all began by farming with their families.

Nobody has a track record, Dunn says. Landlords all want good farmers farming their ground.

"It's hard to convince them that you can do the job," he says. "They (land owners) are glad to welcome new blood into the community, but when they have land for rent, they take it somewhere else."

The foursome said beginning farmer loans afford little more than a "Catch 22" scenario. They all agree the rules and regulations are cumbersome and too often a farmer has to farm for three years to qualify,

John Schlageck

• Insight

which makes it nearly impossible for them to qualify. Dunn is lucky enough to farm with his father, Leon. Like the others, this allows him to use a family member's machinery inventory. Some have worked out partnerships with other young farmers to share equipment.

"For me to go out and purchase my own is difficult," he says. "You can't go into the banker and say, 'I got my college degree, my loans are paid off, here's my checking account, and will you loan me \$100,000 to buy a load of cattle or machinery?' It takes someone to sign with you on the loan or it may not happen."

Family dynamics sometimes serve up additional challenges for young farmers. None of them were able to take college courses that helped them work with older family members who are already established in the farming profession. Family members often have differing opinions on nearly every aspect of agriculture.

Increasing taxation of farmland is another concern for the next-generation producers. They would like to see Kansas lawmakers come up with other forms of taxation where all of the citizenry chip in.

While McNickle agrees property taxes are often singled out for increases, when it comes to education and hospitals, he's for their support.

"Those taxes go for my kids," the Stafford County producer says. "Somebody was generous enough to pay for my education. I need to pass it on."

McNickle says he can drive down "relatively poor roads" as long as there is health care and education in rural Kansas. He would like to see cuts in other areas.

Looking at their future in agriculture, all worry about their communities and who will be left to farm in 20 years. They know that competition is fierce and fear that it could come down to a few farming the entire county. That's something none of them want.

It will be a "very" different picture of this rural landscape, Hildebrand says. It's hard to say for certain, but the next two or three years will be very telling of who will be here and who won't. A continuing drought will cause even more producers to leave the farm.

"There are some days I'm ready to go work in the pizza place and I'm sure that's true for everybody," he says. "I'd like to think I'll be here in 20 years and my life is here with me."

Like Hildebrand, McNickle says it will be hard to recognize farming in Stafford County. If producers do not change and continue with business as usual they won't be in the business of agriculture.

Fisher yearns for a time when he can crawl behind the wheel of his tractor and experience more time in the field. Today, most of his time is spent at a desk, planning, marketing, scheduling and working to ensure his operation remains viable. His fellow Stafford County farmers feel the same way.

These four next-generation producers in Stafford County made the conscious decision to return home and farm. They are all business people. They take their profession seriously. They plan to continue farming in the future.

John Schlageck has been writing about farming and ranching in Kansas for 25 years. He is the managing editor of "Kansas Living," a quarterly magazine dedicated to agriculture/rural life in Kansas.