

# Opinion



Free Press  
Viewpoint

## Negative political ads play role in campaigns

We have been watching our share of the televised debates featuring candidates for state and national offices on C-Span for several weeks now. And one comment that is used time and again is this: "You started the negative advertising."

Negative advertising.  
What would a campaign be without it?  
Boring!  
Absolutely so.

Only through so-called negative advertising do we get a rounded picture of each candidate. We know they will put their best foot forward in the run-of-the-mill soft background music approach with the flag of this great land in the background. They smile. They plead, much like a child wanting a second cookie from the jar.

But when the negative advertising replaces the soft, honest approach, then the squirming begins as the attacks fly. And in the midst of the uproar, the allegations and the countercharges, some truth begins to emerge. A picture once focused and draped in red, white and blue, suddenly turns fuzzy and the colors begin to run.

Is this really my candidate?

Yep, except for one thing: you are seeing him/her like he/she is. The portrayal might be stretched a little, but what you see it what you get.

The reason many candidates try to get the other side to agree to the positive approach in advertising is simple to explain. They don't want what the other candidate knows for fact to become part of the campaign.

And, additionally, negative political advertising attracts a much greater audience. You watch it, right?

You will hear candidates say, "The people are sick and tired of the mud slinging," as they go about slinging more mud. And what people are they talking about? Studies and surveys clearly show that negative advertising is the power tool that drives campaigns. The more mud you can smear on your opponent — before he can wash it off — all the better for you. And some of that mud sticks through election day.

So, here we are getting ready to make decisions in election 2002. Is negative advertising going to figure in how you vote? — *Tom (TD) Dreiling, Publisher*

### 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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**U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback**, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202/224-6521

**U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran**, 1519 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. 202/225-2715

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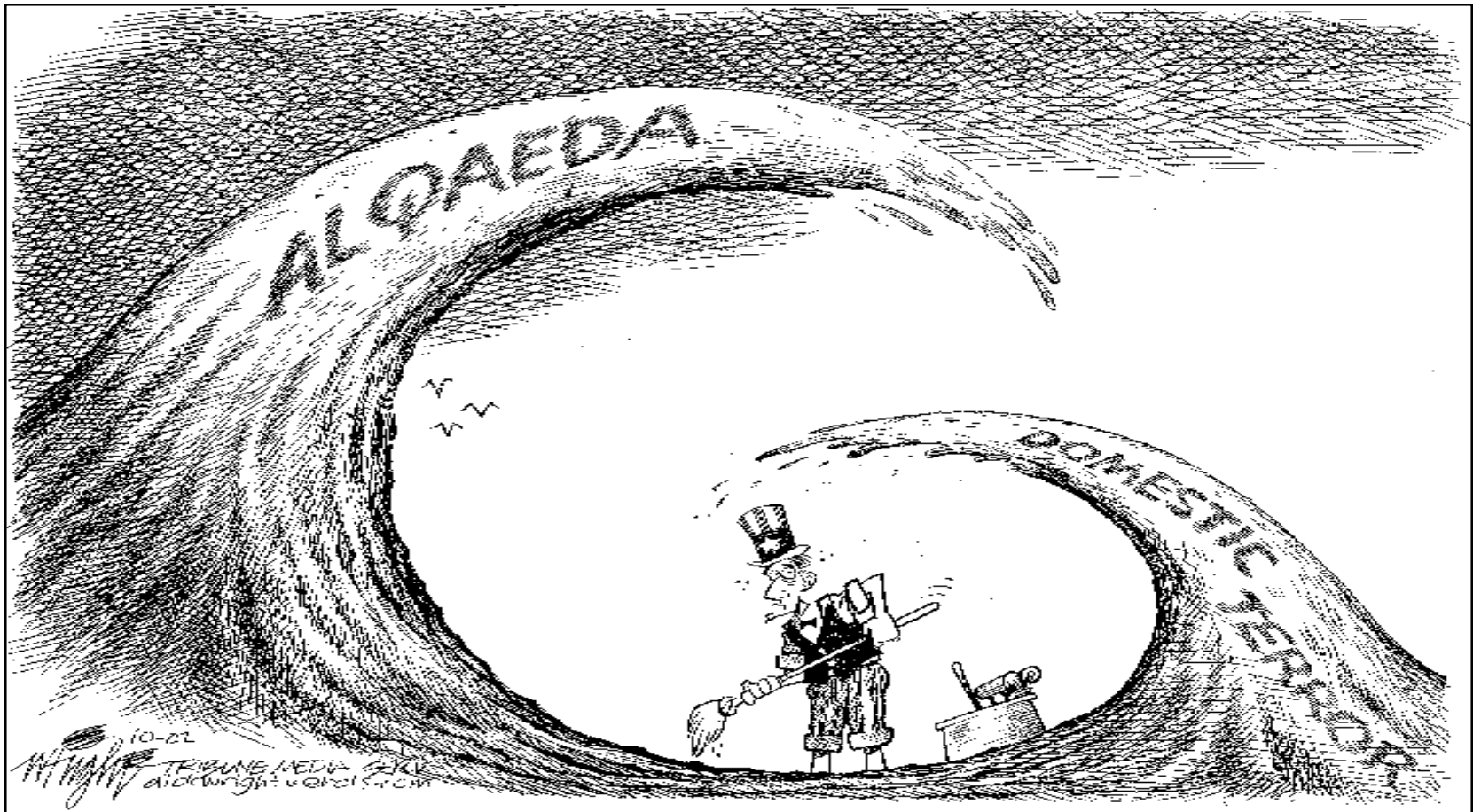
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## Life revolves around choices

Choices.

Good or bad, we all make them and often times the wrong ones.

There isn't a day that goes by without a choice. We all make the same one first thing in the morning — whether or not to get out of bed. I did overcome the urge to stay there today and decided to be a productive member of society and get up, but it wasn't an easy choice by any means.

The problem with choice comes when we question if it really exists. Those who believe in fate or destiny would sometimes argue that things will happen regardless of what we do. If you believe that idea, do we really have a choice? I believe that we do. I believe that we *do* affect the world around us and have power through decision.

Day to day there are the mindless choices: coffee or tea; soup or salad; white shirt or blue; shower or bath; drive or walk; or even Letterman or Leno. Most of the choices we make are not life altering — or are they?

How many times have the simple choices we have made affected a huge outcome. Not going somewhere and something bad happens. Hitting the snooze button one more time and miss being in a bad car accident. Visiting a friend or family member, just because you feel like you need to, not knowing it would be the last time you would see them.

Even better yet, how many choices do we make that affect someone else and we do not even realize it. I can't tell you how many stories I have heard about a friend calling someone not knowing that person would have committed suicide thinking no one



Michelle L.  
Hawkins

### • Pursuit of a Richer Life

cared, until the phone rang, or something similar along those lines.

Choices are part of what make life special and unique, even when we look back and realize we have made bad choices. I personally feel the bad choices I make give me insight and depth as a person. There are lessons I have learned that will keep me from traveling down certain roads for a second time.

In a perfect world, we would be able to know the outcome of our choices before we make them. Many would jump on that train and say they would love to know how things will end up before they make a choice. I would say that sometimes I say that I would like to know, but in reality — I really wouldn't. Garth Brooks sings a song called *The Dance*, and it so beautifully summarizes that very thought. For those of you who have never heard the song, the following is a portion of the lyrics:

*Verse One: Lookin' back on the memories of the dance we shared beneath the stars above.*

*Chorus: For a moment, all the world was right. How could I've known that you'd ever say 'goodbye?' And now, I'm glad I didn't know the way it all would*

*end the way it all would go. And our lives are better left to chance. I could have missed the pain, but I'd've had to miss the dance.*

*Verse Two: Holdin' you, I've held everything. For a moment, wasn't I the king? But if I'd only known how the king would fall, Hey, who's to say, you know, I might have changed it all.*

Okay, so it might be a typical sad country song, but the bottom line is the message is clear — we don't always know how things will turn out, but even if outcome is bad, the road to getting there is worth the heartache.

Even through all the trials in my life, the hurts, the pains, and yes — even the heartache, I would not have changed the choices I have made that have gotten me to the point of where I am today. Okay, maybe I would have changed one thing — I might have hit the snooze button just one more time today.

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*Hawkins is Family Page and Religion Page editor, and also a general assignment reporter/photographer for the Colby Free Press. Her column appears on Tuesdays.*

*In Addition: I am STILL working on a special column about "Famous people we are related to," ALTHOUGH, I have had several responses. Please contact me about your famous ancestors...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.*

## Candidates avoid honesty about budget

Hooley.  
Poppycock.  
Blarney.  
Flapdoodle and garbage.

Whatever words voters want to use, they're still getting plenty of it whenever the major party candidates for governor talk about the state's budget problems.

Democrat Kathleen Sebelius and Republican Tim Shallenburger continue to make promises they almost certainly can't keep, draw up plans that will be nearly impossible to execute and perpetuate a fantasy that they can solve Kansas' financial difficulties without inflicting much pain.

The irony is that under some scenarios, promises to make government more efficient, conduct a top-to-bottom review of state agencies or go after welfare and tax cheats would be significant. But Sebelius and Shallenburger have made too many promises for those scenarios to play out.

A review of the state's financial problems starts with revenue projections for the current fiscal year.

The official forecast is that the state will collect a little more than \$4.5 billion during the current fiscal year, enough to cover its \$4.4 billion in spending.

But no one familiar with the budget expects that prediction to hold. Revenues fell \$212 million short of expectations for fiscal 2002. Legislative leaders and State Budget Director Duane Goossen expect the same for fiscal 2003.

If the state collected \$4.3 billion, the current assumption of the Legislative Research Department, it would have to cut \$103 million from current spending to avoid a deficit on June 30.

If it collected less — and some officials worry that it might — the required cuts would be larger.

In their last report on the budget, legislative researchers also assumed modest growth in fiscal 2004, leaving the state with revenues of about \$4.44 billion.

If that seems optimistic, state officials and university economists are likely to consider more pessimistic numbers when they meet — on Nov. 5, Election

John  
Hanna

### • Kansas Focus

Day — to issue new revenue forecasts.

In addition, the state supported some programs in the 2003 budget with about \$94 million in federal funds that won't be available again in fiscal 2004. The state must either cut those programs back, or shift money from someplace else.

But the problems Sebelius and Shallenburger create for themselves in trying to solve the state's budget problems start with transportation spending.

Both have said they will protect the state's \$13.6 billion, comprehensive transportation program, started in 1999.

The Legislative Research Department estimates that, under Kansas law, keeping the program whole will divert \$193 million in general tax revenues to highway projects.

Keeping the promise lowers available revenues for everything else to \$4.25 billion in fiscal 2004, using researchers' latest scenario.

The promise would force Sebelius or Shallenburger to find at least \$164 million in cuts over 18 months, just to prevent a budget deficit on June 30, 2004. That's 3.7 percent of the current budget.

But both Sebelius and Shallenburger have promised not to cut aid to public schools, some \$2.3 billion, or 52 percent of the entire budget.

With that promise, cuts must be made from the remaining \$2.1 billion in spending. That \$164 million would represent almost 8 percent of everything else.

Shallenburger has said an average 10 percent cut in everything else would be reasonable, but such reductions would in fact be difficult to achieve.

The higher education system; social services for the

poor, elderly and disabled; and the prison system account for most of that remaining spending, about \$1.7 billion in all.

The prison system seems an unlikely candidate for big cuts, given continuing increases in the inmate population.

So, too, does the Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services, where any cuts — closing offices, reducing child care for working families, raising health insurance premiums for those same families and cutting spending on services to the disabled and mentally ill — are offset by increased costs in federally mandated medical services.

In the Department on Aging, 86 percent of the budget is consumed by reimbursements to nursing homes that care for elderly Kansas, payments federal law says must be based on costs.

Those factors point to the higher education system as the biggest potential target.

Yet, asked last week whether he could trim 10 percent from higher education spending, Shallenburger said simply, "I don't know."

But if Shallenburger's task looks difficult, consider that Sebelius is promising not to cut higher education spending either. That means in her administration, 68 percent of the total budget is off limits.

She'd have to find her \$164 million with only \$1.4 billion left on the table — most of it in social services and prisons.

Pressed last week to explain where she would find enough savings she said: "Well, that's what we've got to look for."

Voters deserve better.

The choices facing Kansans are tough and stark, and any course of action is likely to involve some significant pain.

But instead of hearing an intelligent debate on the budget from the major party candidates, voters are getting flapdoodle.

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*John Hanna has covered state government and Kansas politics for The Associated Press for a number of years.*

Doonesbury

• Gary Trudeau

