

# Opinion

**Free Press  
Viewpoint**

## It's that time again to publish salaries

It's nearly time for Kansas school districts to publish their executive salaries again.

We want to serve fair notice that this newspaper will once again print the salaries reported by area districts and compare them with those of other districts and other public officials.

The reporting requirement is sort of a screwball law, but it's not a bad idea. It originated a couple of years ago when someone found that an old Kansas law required Kansas school districts to pay for a legal notice to publish administrator's pay.

There was much wailing and gnashing of teeth, and school groups tried to get the Legislature to repeal the law. Instead, it was changed so that districts only have to give out a press release with the salaries. It's up to newspapers and broadcast stations what to do with it.

We happen to think it's a healthy thing for the voters to know what they pay public officials, elected or appointed. Salaries of all public employees are open information, and any citizen can go to the courthouse or the school office and see them.

In some states, in fact, county and school payroll is published each month. There would be nothing wrong with that.

One of the things you give up when you take a tax-paid job is a certain amount of privacy. As a public employee, you know when you take a job that you may be in the public eye, and your salary is public information.

We think it's hardly fair to pick on school administrators, though. If their salaries are going to be in the paper, we think other public executives — county officials, city administrators, hospital executives — should be there as well.

These people are your employees, your administrators, running your tax-supported agencies. You pay them; you deserve to see how much.

School people seem to be a little defensive about this, because on the whole, they make more than most public officials. They may well be worth it, considering the years of education and experience their jobs require, and the importance of the task they are charged with. That is not for the newspaper to decide.

Rather, the voters need to have this information so they can make informed judgments on who gets what, who needs what and who deserves what. Maybe some of the other officials are underpaid.

We plan to present the information in an objective manner, and let you, the taxpayers, voters and readers decide what you think.

We won't be revealing any secrets, but unless somebody does the legwork, it's hard to make comparisons. All the officials will get a chance to comment. The voters always have the final say.

And that's how it should be in a democracy.

*Steve Haynes*

*Nor'West Newspapers*

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), call (785) 462-3963, fax (785) 462-7749. All submissions must be signed by the writer, and a daytime telephone number and an address must also be included. The telephone number and address are used for verification of the writer only, and not generally included unless the writer so desires.

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## Come on, we can do better than that

Partisan politics is a dirty game. But, it doesn't have to be. There are legitimate differences in how to meet the needs of society. Why can't we focus on more than one or two emotional issues? Why can't we understand that we sometimes don't get everything we want or need? Why don't we demand both our major parties present platforms that do more than espouse emotional platitudes and empty promises?

When one of our major political parties is resorting to demagoguery in their impassioned plea to bring religion to the forefront in the coming election, it is rather difficult not to respond. The hype over sexual persuasion and abortion, both emotional and theological issues, is so loud that they have become single issue causes that overshadow the other issues that face the common folks of all religious and ethnic origins in our society (education, health, food, child care, shelter, security, economic equity, etc.).

Such statements as, "How can you be a Christian and vote Democrat?", is a shallow attempt to belittle the privacy and validity of a personal relationship. In other words, if you don't interpret scripture as I do, or if you don't support my political agenda, you are not a Christian.

I will stand very firm on declaring those tactics to be any thing but a reflection of Christ's instructions to his followers. I recall reading about Him challenging a group of self righteous enforcers of God's will and judgment to cast their stones on the basis of their own perfection. The prosecutors dropped their stones to the ground and apparently dropped their charges against the

**Ken Poland**

• Ken's World

"sinner." It would appear the woman was acquitted of her sin and infraction of the law. No, Jesus did not give approval of her lifestyle. He did however indicate her infraction to be no more egregious in society than the sins of her accusers. I'm not too sure that God approves of our holier than thou attitudes and our ranking of sins to be legislated against.

If you are looking for the sinless candidate to cast your vote for, you will have a blank ballot. I'm not expecting Jesus to be a candidate for political office.

The righteous indignation over the wannabe first lady telling a reporter (representing a right wing news rag) to "shove it" is almost hypocritical. Where is the outrage from those same critics when the sitting vice president loses his cool in the halls of congress and tells a senator to "go — yourself"? What does it say about a man's skills at diplomacy and Christian witness when he says, "I feel better after saying that."? What does it say about the party leaders who declare that such profanity needed to be said? Where is the outrage when the president stands up and

belligerently challenges the enemy to "bring em on"? Have we had about enough of the "bring em on" game?

You might even have to check your tally sheet when trying to determine who has flipped and flopped the most. The present administration bitterly opposed the 9-11 commission and then flopped over and praised them. They have changed their reason or justification for invading a foreign country three or four times. They got elected with a promise of trimming "big brother's" long arms and then have extended governments invasion into local government and private lives even further.

They stirred up the hornet's nest so they could sell protective netting. They declared war on terrorism and dethroned a toothless tiger. They decried the "tax and spend" party and then plunged us into record deficit spending.

What does it say about a promise of providing tax relief to the middle class and then coming out with refunds and a policy that actually widens the gap between the "haves" and the "have nots"?

What does it say when the compassionate conservative promises help to the beleaguered middle and lower income segment of society and then starts cutting funds from the very programs designed and passed by the legislators to give assistance and hope to the masses of needy families?

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## Bring those surplus troops home

The Bush administration recently announced plans to bring home roughly 70,000 U.S. troops currently based overseas. This proposal has met considerable resistance from critics who worry that it signifies America's withdrawal from the world and who question the expected savings to the U.S. taxpayer. Yet the plan will help the United States develop what it has needed since the end of the Cold War — a military that is smaller, lighter, and more mobile; one better prepared to face the true threats to our national security.

In fact, any savings will be modest and won't appear immediately due to the lengthy realignment process, and the upfront costs of bringing home thousands of people and tons of material and upgrading the bases that will receive them. But saving money is not the main reason to undertake such a fundamental change in U.S. security policy.

We must shift from our current policy emphasizing a small number of huge overseas deployments to one that increases our access around the globe.

Some critics make it sound like we are abandoning our traditional allies, yet this is far from true. The 70,000 troops being withdrawn from Europe and Asia represent only one third of total U.S. forces stationed in those areas. Despite the drawdown, thousands of U.S. troops will remain in Germany, South Korea and Japan, and throughout these regions.

Further, the huge forces in these three countries are exceptions to the evolving U.S. basing strategy, not the rule. The roughly 40,000 troops in South Korea, 40,000 in Japan, and 75,000 in Germany represent two-thirds of all U.S. forces permanently based overseas, not including those in Iraq and Afghanistan. Of the more than 130 countries where the United States has forces,

**Christopher Hellman**

• Guest Commentary

nearly eighty percent have fewer than 100 U.S. troops stationed there.

Nor does reducing our presence mean we are weakening our commitment. In South Korea, for instance, the U.S. force has always been insufficient to play a decisive role in case of a North Korean attack, but serves as a "tripwire," relying on additional troops being sent to the region to turn the tide of battle.

A smaller force could easily fulfill this function. Meanwhile in other regions of the world, the United States is able to demonstrate its commitment simply through such activities as joint training exercises, temporary deployments, and repositioning equipment.

Clearly, given the current situation on the Korean peninsula, it would be preferable to make any withdrawal of U.S. forces contingent on improvements in North-South relations or some concession by North Korea on nuclear weapons, but this specific situation is not enough to justify scrapping the entire rebasing effort. Moreover, actual implementation of the withdrawal could still be linked to a compromise with the North.

In addition to improving our security strategy, the proposal could address several problems created by keeping large numbers of troops overseas. First, taking so much of the military "out of circulation" places a greater burden on other

units. Second, troops based overseas become targets, as were the Marines in Lebanon and U.S. forces stationed at the Kobhar Towers in Saudi Arabia. Third, having large numbers of troops overseas often has an unfavorable impact on host communities; the Marines deployed in Okinawa being just one example.

If there is a downside to the Pentagon's proposal, it is its likely impact on the Defense Department's plan to conduct a new round of military base closures in 2005. There is already discussion in communities across the country about delaying or derailing the process entirely in light of the Pentagon's decision. That might get some of the returning forces stationed at their local bases in the hope that facilities receiving new units will be less likely to close. This will put considerable new pressure on members of Congress to "go to bat" for bases in their districts, and will further undermine the already shaky support on Capitol Hill for this critical cost-saving process.

The United States needs to adopt a policy of "global reach" rather than "global presence." When called upon to do so, the U.S. military should be able to "reach out and touch someone" anywhere our vital national interests are at stake. Only this kind of flexibility will allow us to successfully meet future challenges to our security.

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### Doonesbury

• Gary Trudeau

