

Opinion



Free Press Viewpoint

Don't permit them to close our schools

It's out in the open now. Eastern Kansas legislators want to close our schools. Not just the struggling "little" schools like Jennings, Brewster and Weskan. Under one plan on the table in Topeka, it's likely that every district in northwest Kansas, save one or two, would be forced to merge. The legislators say, of course, that they don't want to close schools. It's all about cutting administrative expense, they say. Bull. First, there's no way to save money by consolidating districts. Most have cut costs to the bone. Buildings still need principals. Someone still has to fill out the state and federal paperwork. Classes would still need teachers. Jim Has, a research specialist with the Kansas Association of School Boards, put it well: "The only way to have substantial saving would be to close buildings." One plan, by Rep. Candy Ruff, a Leavenworth Democrat, would cut to just one district in any county with fewer than 26,000 people, which is all of our counties. That would eliminate 122 of the state's 302 school districts. Another, by Sen. Phil Journey, a Wichita-area Republican, would require merging all districts under 1,000 enrollment. In northwest Kansas, only a handful would survive. And at first, perhaps, schools would remain open in county seat towns. Forget about the little ones — Brewster, Rexford, Weskan and the like. They'd be closed. Many are on the edge anyway. But two things happen in school consolidations: The town with the votes gets the schools, no matter what promises are made at the outset. Ask people in McDonald. And since closing buildings is the only real way to save money, someday it'll happen. Students in St. Francis, Atwood, Oberlin, Sharon Springs, Hoxie and other smaller county seats will wind up being bused to "efficient" high schools in larger towns. Even those schools will have less money than they get today. And people in the cities will neither notice nor care. Their taxes won't go down, education won't be any better for anyone, but rural kids will spend hours on a bus every day of their school lives. This is no joke, folks. The Legislature is under the gun to do something about school finance. Eastern Kansas has the votes. Unless we start screaming now, our schools are toast. People in Topeka, Johnson County and Wichita are stoking the fires. It will be up to our legislators, our school leaders and our people to make a case for small schools. Let's hope we are up to it, because nothing could be more important to our survival out here on the Plains.

Steve Haynes
Nor'West Newspapers

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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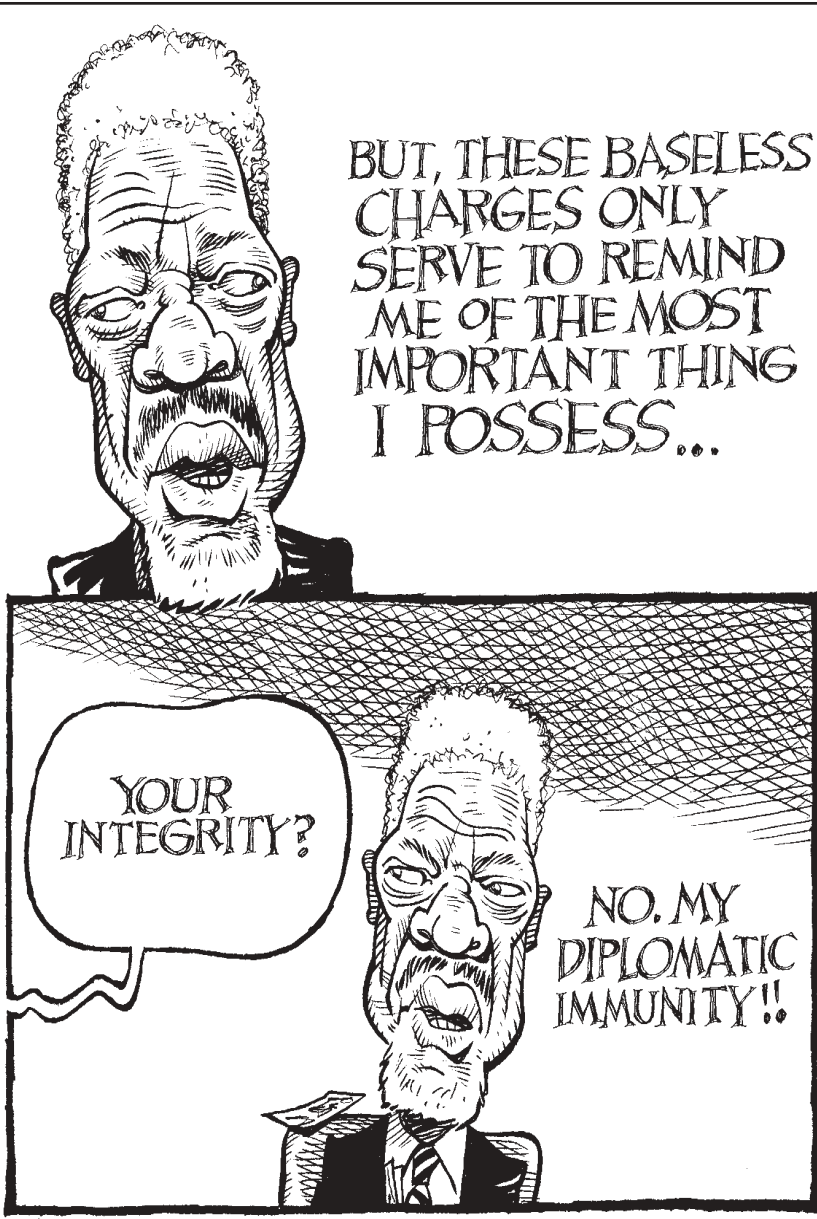
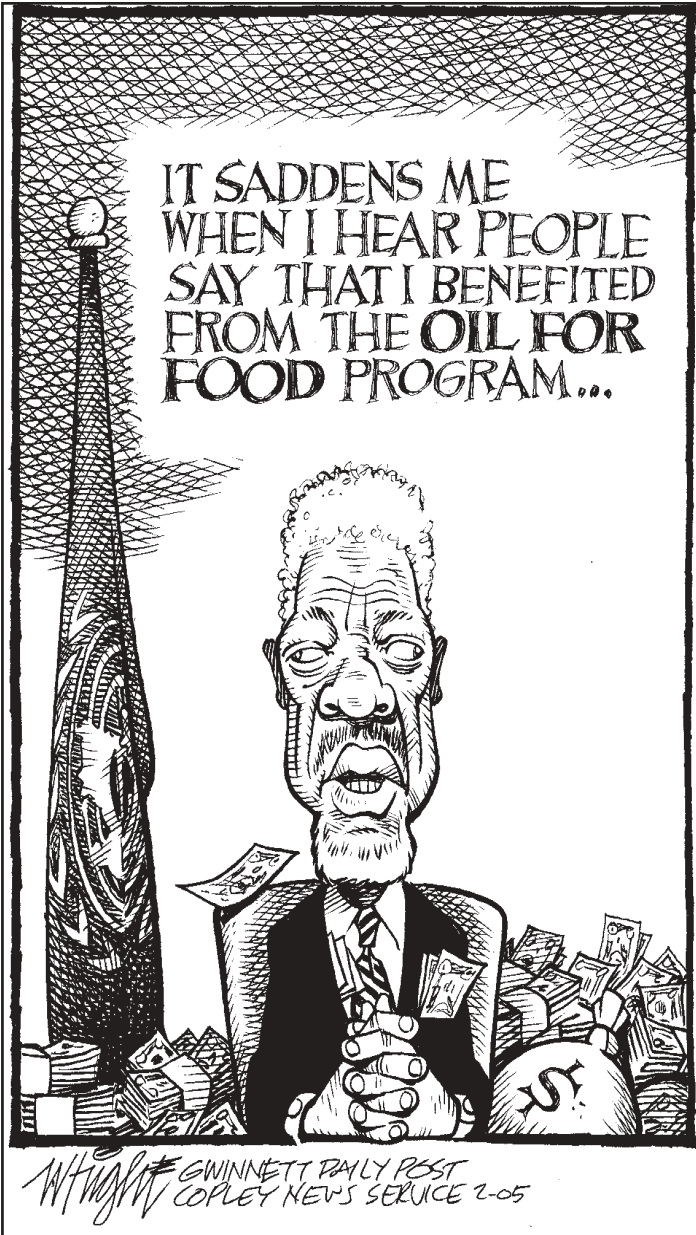
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Sign question stumped them all

NOBODY came through with the correct answer to Question #9: "What lighted Colby sign is not what the lettering conveys?" Of the 26 respondents, slightly more than half focused on "Colby, the Oasis on the Plains." In some form or another most said the slogan doesn't capture the true essence of the community. One sarcastic response is best left corked. They must have had a slogan contest and that person lost.

The answer is the lighted "City Limits" sign that greets you as you exit I-70 coming in from the west. The reason I picked that sign was due to the comment made by visitors a little more than a month ago who pulled into Colby after dark and thought it was unique that the city would light up their "City Limits" sign for benefit of travelers. They were surprised to learn that it was a restaurant/bar combination and not what they thought. We dined there that evening and the next morning they were still talking about the great steak they ate at Colby's city limits. Rest assured they will be passing that along to friends back at their home.

A friend in Goodland said the only sign he could think of was the *Colby Free Press* sign (although it isn't lighted). Asked why, he said smartly, "Because it isn't free!" Hadn't thought of that. Now to Question #10: "In what northwest Kansas town will you find things that remind you of at least six different states?" Free movie tickets to the winner. Email me at td@nwkansas.com, call 462-3963, fax 462-7749 or drop by the office at 155 W. 5th.

HERE is today's tip: To keep milk from turning sour, keep it in the cow.

WHAT television used to be like would best



Tom Dreiling

• My Turn

sum up this item. But while watching KAKE-TV last night the interruptions for what I suppose were too technical to understand, reminded me of what it was like watching television many, many moons ago. In this day and age of the much boasted state-of-the-art this and that, I find it almost unacceptable that a television station in this day and age has that kind of trouble. I started listing the interruptions somewhere around 10 p.m. but they got so numerous that I stopped plotting. This was probably the worst of the evenings but for some reason that station seems to have technical memory lapses more than any other station I watch. Of course my picture's quality leaves so much to be desired but perhaps my television set being 6 years old might explain that. Or maybe it's just because we are out in what some call "sparsely populated rural areas." Don't know about you but I can't say that reception the past few years has been anything to write home about.

EVERY now and then an email finds its way to my computer telling all of us who are concerned with Social Security's future that part of the remedy might be to make all Senators and Representatives pay into the Social Security program. That all sounds good, but it's in error because as the *AARP Bulletin* (newspaper)

points out in its February issue, while responding to a letter writer, "...all members of Congress have participated in, and paid into, the Social Security system since 1984." Before passing emails along do your homework, research. You'll be mighty surprised how many of those well intentioned emails have no basis whatsoever. In most instances they are concocted by people with little or nothing to do so they climb into cyber space and begin creating situations.

LOOKS like Charles, future king of England, is finally going to tie the knot with his longtime girlfriend — a romance that has been ongoing since the middle '70s. A wedding two months down the road will occupy that nation as well as the rest of the world. Talking heads are wondering just how Charles' two sons, William and Harry, are taking to this news. I would suspect, at their ages now — and they aren't kids anymore — they understand. But boy can't you just see the media already laying cable from all points of the planet to record this historic event? Historic? Being a family newspaper prevents me from telling you just what I think about this upcoming royalist ring exchange.

WELL, I've run out of things to talk about so I best get this thing moving so it appears in today's paper.

HAVE a good evening and a good weekend. And remember to take some time out of your schedule to reflect spiritually in the company of family and friends in the house of worship of your choice.

Tom Dreiling is publisher of the Free Press. His column appears Wednesdays and Fridays.

It is so cold that. . .

Two good items to pass along today. Enjoy. td

Today's question: How cold is cold? (Degrees Fahrenheit)
60, Californians put on sweaters (if they can find one)
50, Miami residents turn on the heat
45, Vermont residents go to outdoor concerts
40, You can see your breath. Californians shiver uncontrollably. Minnesotans go swimming
35, Italian cars don't start
32, Water freezes
30, You plan your vacation to Australia
25, Ohio water freezes. Californians weep pitifully. Minnesotans eat ice cream. Canadians go swimming
20, Politicians begin to talk about the homeless. New York City water freezes. Miami residents plan vacation further South
15, French cars don't start. Cat insists on sleeping in your bed with you
10, You need jumper cables to get the car going.
5, American cars don't start.
0, Alaskans put on T-shirts.
-10, German cars don't start. Eyes freeze shut when you blink
-15 You can cut your breath and use it to build an igloo. Arkansans stick tongue on metal objects. Miami residents cease to exist
-20, Cat insists on sleeping in pajamas with you. Politicians actually do something about the homeless. Minnesotans shovel snow off roof. Japanese cars don't start
-25, Too cold to think. You need jumper cables to get the driver going
-30, You plan a two week hot bath. Swedish cars don't start.
-40, Californians disappear. Minnesotans button top button. Canadians put on sweaters. Your car helps you plan your trip South.

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• At Week's End

-50, Congressional hot air freezes. Alaskans close the bathroom window.
-80, Polar bears move South. Green Bay Packer fans order hot cocoa at the game
-90, Lawyers put their hands in their own pockets

Be careful what you say

This is something to think about when negative people are doing their best to rain on your parade. So remember this story the next time someone who knows nothing and cares less tries to make your life miserable. A woman in a distant city was at her hairdresser's getting her hair styled for a trip to Rome with her husband. She mentioned the trip to the hairdresser, who responded, "Rome? Why would anyone want to go there? It's crowded and dirty and full of Italians. You're crazy to go to Rome. So, how are you getting there?" "We're taking Continental," was the reply. "We got a great rate!" "Continental!" exclaimed the hairdresser. "That's a terrible airline! Their planes are old, their flight attendants are ugly, and they're always late. Where are you staying in Rome?" "We'll be at this exclusive little place over on Rome's Tiber River called Teste." "Don't go any further. I know that place. Everybody thinks it's gonna be something special and exclusive, but it's really a dump, the worst hotel in the city! The rooms are small, the ser-

vice is surly, and they're overpriced. So, whatcha doing when you get there?" "We're going to go to see the Vatican and we hope to see the Pope." "That's rich," laughed the hairdresser. "You and a million other people trying to see him. He'll look the size of an ant. Boy, good luck on this lousy trip of yours. You're going to need it." A month later, the woman again came in for a hairdo. The hairdresser asked her about her trip to Rome. "It was wonderful!" exclaimed the woman. "Not only were we on time in one of Continental's brand new planes, but it was overbooked and they bumped us up to first class. The food and wine were wonderful, and I had a handsome 28-year-old steward who waited on me hand and foot. And the hotel was great! They'd just finished a \$5 million remodeling job and now it's a jewel; the finest hotel in the city. They, too, were overbooked, so they apologized and gave us their owner's suite at no extra charge!" "Well," muttered the hairdresser, "that's all well and good, but I know you didn't get to see the Pope." "Actually, we were quite lucky, because as we toured the Vatican a Swiss Guard tapped me on the shoulder and explained that the Pope likes to meet some of the visitors, and if I'd be so kind as to step into his private chamber and wait, the Pope would personally greet me. Sure enough, five minutes later, the Pope walked through the door and shook my hand! I knelt down and he spoke a few words to me." "Oh Really? What did he say?" asked the hairdresser. He asked me, "Where'd you get that lousy hairdo?"

Send your submissions to td@nwkansas.com, fax 462-7749 or call 462-3963.