

Opinion



Monday's Salute

Thumbs



to . . .

✓**Graduates** — of Golden Plains High School. Well done!

✓**Cassandra Britt** — new director of Thomas County Big Brothers Big Sisters.

✓**Jim McGuire** — on your efforts to get the clock face frames repaired in the Thomas County Courthouse tower.

✓**Kay Weber, Irene Cressler, Judy Watkins** — on your thoughtful “thank you” gifts for military personnel.

✓**Donna Henry** — and your Colby High journalism students on an exceptional May 10 issue of the *eagletalon*.

✓**Citizens Medical Center** — on the program to aid victims of sexual assault as announced in the *Free Press* this past Thursday.

✓**Judy and Rich Epp** — on your untiring efforts to bring the very best in gospel music to the stage at the Colby Community Building.

✓**Volunteers** — for helping the people Saturday morning at the Prairie Senior Living Complex beautify their area.

✓**Wild West Foundation** — good luck with your ambitious project which will impact the entire area.

✓**Bev Rucker** — on your efforts to lend a hand for the betterment of your community.

Readers are encouraged to submit a names or names to this column. E-mail td@nwkansans.com, fax 462-7749 or call 462-3963. Thanks to those who, in part, made today's column possible. No birthdays or anniversaries, please. - td

Comments to any opinions expressed on this page are encouraged. Or e-mail td@nwkansans.com

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COLBY FREE PRESS

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We need to be more creative

I kept a close eye last week on the announcement about President George W. Bush's energy bill.

After hearing his ideas, I can say I think his energy policy is irresponsible and outdated.

Nuclear power and 'clean' coal?

Instead of moving forward, we're taking a decades-leap back when it comes to energy.

Oil is not the major concern, although I do feel strongly against exploring for petroleum in the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge.

I think a more important issue is the refusal to invest in renewable energy sources already being developed.

Wind could easily replace natural gas as the medium to produce electricity. Unfortunately, no one will buy into the technology because they don't think it's viable. If that's the case, why are there large wind farms in California?

Our future energy needs can be addressed now.

Nature can provide most of what is needed. Imagine communities becoming self-reliant when it comes to energy.

A community like Colby could have a wind farm and solar cells that provide all of the needed energy. I know it's a pipe dream, but one day it could be a reality.

Conventional wisdom has it renewable energy sources are still in their infancy.

The federal government has invested in the future with the National Renewable Energy Laboratory in Golden, Colo., one of the leading sources of renewable energy research.

The lab does research and technology development in wind, solar, biomass, geothermal power generating and hydrogen and fuel cells.



Tisha Cox

• Off The Beaten Path

Wind and water power are already a reality. Solar and geothermal technology is still being developed.

These technologies are vital to the country's future and only through research and investment will they become viable, and I know it will take time. And time is of the essence.

Exploration and development of domestic petroleum sources is a necessity. Then and only then can the country take back control of prices at the pump.

It's hard for me to admit that drilling in the Alaskan refuge is needed, but I know the technology exists to extract and move the oil without much of an environmental impact.

My only question — is it worth the cost?

Yes, if it can buy time to develop more fuel efficient cars and possibly vehicles that run off fuel cells.

Oil is an issue, mainly the country's dependence on foreign imports.

The key to oil is conservation. One day it will run out but not now, five years down the road or even 20. The same goes for natural gas.

People will drive what they want but many are choosing to drive more fuel-efficient cars.

Toyota and Ford have made their first forays into hybrid vehicles, the Prius and Ford's modified Escape which both incorporate hybrid gas/electric engines that are more fuel efficient.

People don't have to be environmentalists to affect change.

I know the "E" word is sometimes considered a dirty word, but it doesn't have to be.

Being "green" can take as little as making a few changes around the house to increase energy efficiency or keeping the car tires inflated and the car running properly to maximize fuel intake.

As far as natural gas goes, the country is sitting pretty. Western Kansas has the Hugoton Gas Field, which is still going strong and offshore discoveries last year in the Gulf of Mexico are set to be used in the future.

Though a fossil fuel, natural gas is clean-burning and has a variety of uses, from heating and a clean source of electrical generation.

The country has gone through periods of boom and bust with oil and natural gas, with strikes and droughts, high prices and the bottom falling out.

Through those years, the U.S. has managed to bounce back, and need has spurred developments in technology, like new methods to extract and refine oil in different forms and strata.

As they say, necessity is the mother of invention. Here's to hoping it spurs another outburst of American ingenuity.

Tisha Cox is a general assignment reporter/photographer for the Free Press. Her column appears on Mondays. tcx@nwkansans.com.

It's an immoral budget

Mary Ellen McNish

• Guest Commentary

Our moral values call us to "speak up, judge righteously, champion the poor and the needy" (Proverbs 31:9). Unfortunately, the federal budget that President Bush wants Congress to approve champions those who have the most in our society at the expense of those who have the least.

Communities of faith must speak loud and clear: A federal budget that champions tax cuts for our nation's richest people while shredding the safety net for our nation's poorest people is not a moral budget.

A federal budget that champions tax cuts for millionaires while slashing vital infrastructure and services such as education, environmental stewardship, affordable housing, and public health and safety, is not a moral budget.

Budget decisions made this year will have profound and lasting consequences.

The federal budget is full of numbers, but behind those numbers are men, women and children around the country whose lives will be affected greatly by choices made in Washington.

The president chooses to expand tax cuts for millionaires while making budget cuts that will result in more hunger, homelessness, ill health and hardship for millions of low-income workers, seniors, the unemployed, people with disabilities, and their families.

As the Children's Defense Fund points out, for the annual price of the tax cuts for millionaires — which will average \$136,298 a year apiece when fully phased in — we could fund the following: health insurance for 3.1 million children; full immunizations for 6.8 million unimmunized infants and children; childcare places for nearly 736,000 children of working parents; Head Start programs for more than 641,000 poor preschool children; and nearly 145,000 new elementary school teachers.

Which is the moral choice? A \$136,298 a year

tax cut for millionaires, or childcare, health care and education for our nation's neediest children?

As people of conscience, we cannot accept a budget that increases inequality, poverty and injustice. We cannot accept a budget that undermines our future.

Most Americans understand the lack of fairness behind these kinds of budget and tax cuts. Polls show that most Americans advocate spending more on education, health care and economic development instead of cutting taxes. Most also believe that upper-income people pay too little in federal taxes, not too much. They support universal health insurance coverage for everyone, a higher minimum wage and stronger environmental policies.

The president has it backwards. We should roll back tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans and corporations, not extend them. We should strengthen programs that help people survive and ensure our nation's progress, not cut them.

The president's so-called "Ownership Society" would break the New Deal social contract of a partnership between government and our people to build a better society for everyone. It would withdraw from the War on Poverty, increasingly privatize Social Security and other public sector functions, and continue to transform the tax system into one that favors the privileged. The president's "Ownership Society" means less opportunity for the many and more

ownership by the few.

Our country faces a fundamental choice. Should the United States revert to a pre-New Deal era where people are left to fend for themselves in the face of poverty, low wages, sickness, old age, and increasingly insecure jobs in the global economy?

Or should we commit ourselves anew to the U.S. Constitution's promise to form a more perfect union, establish justice, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty for ourselves and our posterity?

Twenty national faith-based organizations including the Episcopal Church USA, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the United Methodist Church/Board of Church and Society, and my own, the American Friends Service Committee, have issued an interreligious "Faith Reflection on the Federal Budget." We concluded, "Our government should be a tool to correct inequalities, not a means of institutionalizing them. The federal budget should share the burdens of taxation, according to one's ability to pay, and distribute government resources fairly to create opportunity for all."

We must champion a strong public-sector role in promoting the general welfare and providing for the common good. We must champion a federal budget that reflects widely shared values of human dignity, equal rights, economic security, fairness, opportunity, and stewardship. We must champion the course of justice.

Mary Ellen McNish is general secretary of the American Friends Service Committee, a co-recipient of the 1947 Nobel Peace Prize. AFSC is a Quaker organization that includes people of various faiths who are committed to social justice, peace and humanitarian service. www.afsc.org. This column is distributed MinutemanMedia.org.

Doonesbury

• Gary Trudeau

