

Opinion



Free Press Viewpoint

Everyone can help make a difference

What happened in the southeastern United States is everyone's business and, as evidenced by the outpouring of help around the country, everyone is taking on that responsibility.

For example, here in Colby, a small group of people are taking the first steps by coordinating efforts to relocate a family, devastated by the hurricane, to this community.

Watching this group brainstorming ideas and figuring out ways to involve others is a beautiful sight and has got to be inspired by something greater than ourselves.

And how can others help?

Maybe someone knows of a family that has lost everything they had to Hurricane Katrina. It might be a relative or a friend. If people here in Colby, Brewster, Rexford, Levant or other towns in other counties can identify any one of thousands of families evacuated that would be the beginning of our own success story.

From that point, let's say another person in the Colby area might know of a vacant house or may even have a house they would consider giving up temporarily for that identified family.

Then for those of us who might not have an extra house laying around, nor know of any families in need, maybe we might be able to offer furnishings for the house, clothing for the family, food when the family arrives, utilities, yard care, enrollment costs, and the list goes on.

As a business person, maybe owners could use some help on a temporary basis or offer a service. Individuals can also help by teaming up with fellow church-goers or by going to a sporting event that is giving its proceeds to hurricane victims.

Even just sharing more ideas to help Colby's hurricane relief project could be enough.

All of us have a talent or a way we can assist in easing the suffering of other Americans, who are just like us. These families have lost their homes, their jobs, their churches and schools — anything and everything that meant something to them is gone.

Those who initiated the idea of bringing a family to the Colby area do not want to be in the forefront. They want all of us to be working together and make this project everyone's mutual goal.

Let us all, through our actions, show Colby's generosity, love and positive nature by providing help to just one family victimized by Hurricane Katrina.

Who knows, maybe northwest Kansas will be able to do even more. We may never know unless we all take ownership.

— *Patty Decker, editor
Colby Free Press*

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 pjschief@nwks.com or pdecker@nwks.com.

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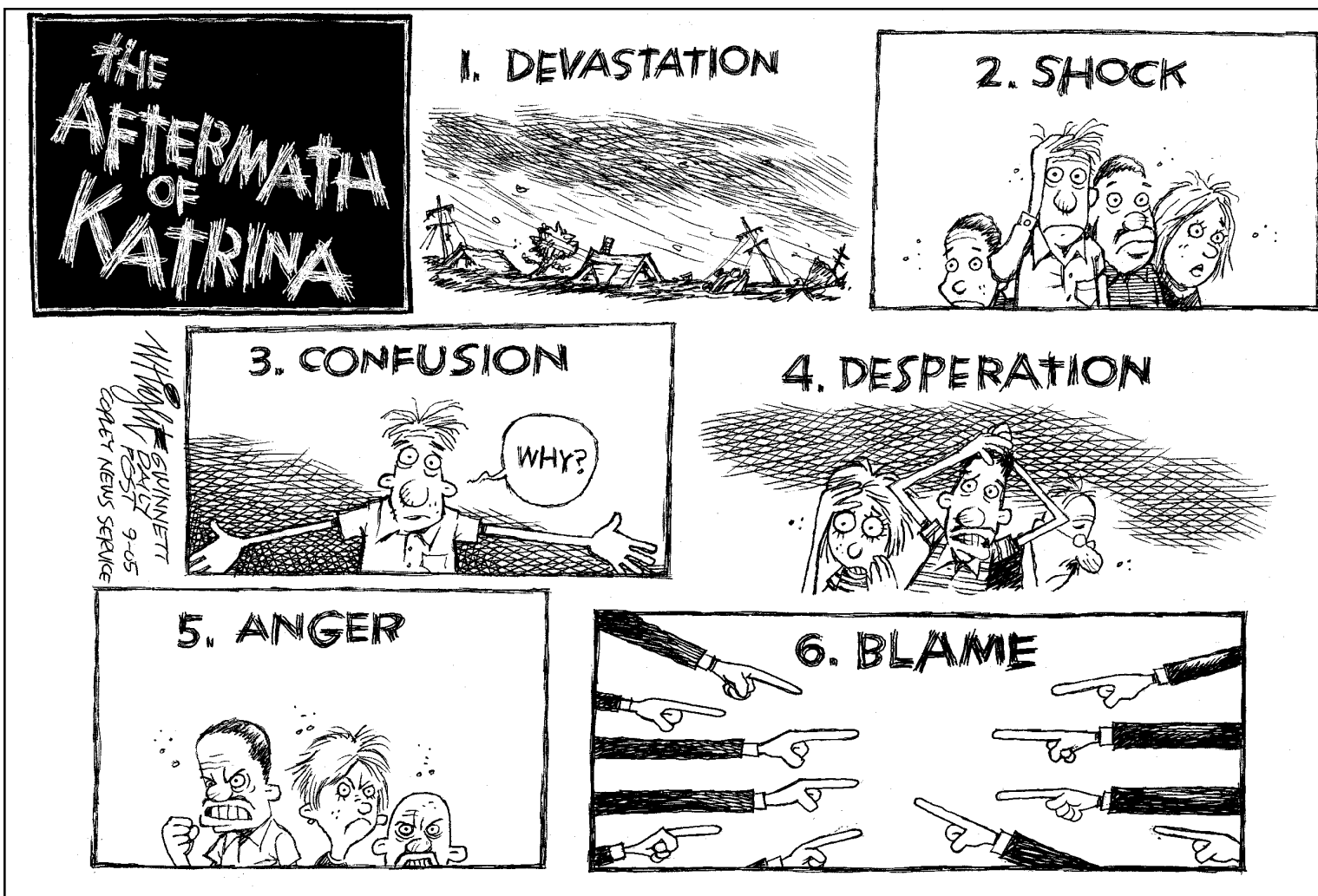
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Who could prepare for this?

There will be many heroic stories from New Orleans and the Gulf Coast in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, but the rap is that help came too late.

There is a lot of finger-pointing, a lot of complaints.

The recrimination will go on for years, obscuring a very real problem.

Let's face it: no nation is prepared for a disaster of this size.

Katrina may be the worst natural disaster in our history, certainly the most overwhelming since the San Francisco earthquake of 1906, which may have killed around 2,500 and spawned a fire which leveled the city.

Yet the fire moved slowly, and most citizens were able to get out of the way. In New Orleans, those who stayed behind were stuck: no communications, no power, no water, no sewers, no food.

There will be a report. There will be a death count, probably in the thousands, easily surpassing San Francisco and New York on Sept. 11, 2002.

Who's to blame?

An act of God, you might say, a hurricane bigger and stronger than most, aimed square at the most vulnerable city in the nation. Thousands fled during the evacuation, taking with them what they could.

Too many stayed behind.

Like San Francisco, New Orleans withstood the initial shock. The next day, when two levees collapsed, floodwater inundated most of the central city.

Was help too slow in arriving? Even the presi-



Steve Haynes

● Along the Sappa

dent says so.

Was it George Bush's fault?

Is it true, as one black entertainer said on national television, that the president "doesn't care about black people?"

Come on.

Arrival of National Guard and Army convoys three days after the levy broke is not that bad, maybe a day later than it could have been.

The most vociferous finger pointing comes from the mayor and other city officials, whose job it was to be prepared for an emergency. The federal government is just supposed to come in and help.

But New Orleans was overwhelmed. The police force, fire department, emergency services, despite years of warnings, all were unprepared.

All collapsed. And maybe, faced with a disaster of the same magnitude, that would have happened in any city.

In most cities, if there is a flood, the bulk of the town stays dry. You can base support and rescue efforts where the infrastructure remains.

Not in New Orleans.

That's the difference.

Could we face another such disaster? Would we be any more prepared?

Sure.

Imagine a terrorist attack with a "weapon of mass destruction" on New York, Washington or any other major city.

Imagine trying to evacuate New York. Or stop an unstoppable plague.

Imagine a massive earthquake along the New Madrid fault in Missouri, leveling both St. Louis and Memphis.

Would there be enough troops to pour in and help?

No, we have a lot to learn about disasters, man-made and natural. We could do a lot more to be ready.

The real answers, though, lie in planning and streamlining the bureaucracy, not in spending a lot of money preparing for what might happen.

We can't know what the next massive disaster will be, or when, or where.

But we can learn from this one.

And as the bodies stack up in those temporary morgues, God have mercy on their souls, we need to stop arguing and whining and start learning. Even a day's improvement in the response would have meant a lot.

And it will the next time.

Steve Haynes is president of Nor'West Newspapers.

It's time for an economy change

As on every Labor Day, the workers who had the most to celebrate this year were those at the top of corporate ladders. Pay for leading U.S. CEOs has soared to \$11.8 million, 431 times the average worker's pay.

To put that gap in perspective, consider that if average worker pay had increased as fast as executive pay since 1990, it would be \$110,196 today, instead of what it actually is: \$27,000. The federal minimum wage would be a whopping \$23.03 an hour, instead of \$5.15.

The good news is that there is a growing backlash of workers, investors, and even some chief executives against out-of-control CEO compensation.

The old argument is that CEOs are worth every penny as long as they make their shareholders happy. But there's growing evidence that executive pay has nothing to do with performance. For example, a new study by the Institute for Policy Studies and United for a Fair Economy shows that if you had invested \$10,000 in the company with the highest-paid CEO every year since 1990, you would have wound up with only about \$8,000 by 2004. That's a raw deal for investors.

If you had instead simply invested the same \$10,000 in the S&P 500 index, it would have grown nearly fivefold by 2004.

An increasing number of people also argue that CEO pay should be based not just on stock performance but also on how executives treat workers and society in general.

The current pay system often rewards CEOs for slashing jobs. For example, Bank of America chief Kenneth Lewis took home \$19 million last year, while the company was shedding 4,500 workers because of its Fleet Boston acquisition.

Sarah Anderson

● Guest Commentary

Another flaw in the system is that it allows corporations to lavish generous compensation on executives at the same time they are stiffing taxpayers. In 2003, 46 large companies paid absolutely no federal income taxes, despite collectively earning \$30 billion in profits. Some of these tax savings wound up lining the pockets of their CEOs, who made \$12.6 million last year on average.

Pfizer, the maker of Viagra, reported \$6 billion in profits in 2003, yet received a \$168 million refund from the federal government. The following year, CEO Hank McKinnell earned \$28 million. Boeing, AT&T and Time Warner were also among the tax-dodging companies with substantial profits.

One clear sign of the growing backlash is that shareholders, led primarily by the pension funds of the AFL-CIO, UNITE-HERE and other unions, have introduced more than 100 proposals at shareholder meetings this year to rein in runaway CEO pay. Some executives are hearing the message.

Best Buy Co. Inc. CEO Brad Anderson gave up a reward of \$7.5 million worth of stock options in 2003 and distributed them to outstanding non-executive employees.

This sent a strong message that the contributions of others were critical to the company's success.

Whole Foods Market Inc. CEO John Mackey

limits his pay to no more than 14 times the average pay of his employees. "We have a philosophy of shared fate, that we're in this together," Mackey explains.

Costco CEO James Sinegal also believes in reasonable pay, for himself and his employees. Last year he made \$550,000, less than 5 percent of the average large company CEO, and paid his employees considerably more than other discount retailers pay.

If we rely solely on voluntary actions by CEOs, however, the pay gap will almost certainly continue to grow. Rep. Martin Olav Sabo has called for reining in CEO pay through the tax code. Under the Minnesota Democrat's proposal, companies could pay their executives as much as they liked, but they could not deduct from their taxes amounts greater than 25 times the pay of the lowest-paid worker at the firm.

The Securities and Exchange Commission has proposed giving shareholders more power to elect corporate boards. This could shake up boards now stacked with other CEOs who have a vested interest in not challenging outrageous pay.

Thus far, powerful business groups have blocked these and other pay-related initiatives. It's time for the rest of us who are not on the top of the ladder to demand change. Our economy and our democracy would be stronger because of it.

Sarah Anderson is a fellow of the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS). The institute is an independent center for research and education in Washington, D.C. Email: www.ips-dec.org. The preceding article was distributed by Minuteman Media — email: MinutemanMedia.org.

Doonesbury

● Gary Trudeau

