

Opinion



Free Press Viewpoint

Nominee may have fresh viewpoint

What makes a person a great judge?
Many mouths dropped a foot when President George Bush nominated his friend and White House counsel Harriet Meirs to be a Supreme Court justice.

His nomination of Meirs to replace retiring judge Sandra Day O'Connor does preserve the gender balance on the court, but without any judicial background Meirs may be the first outsider to be nominated to the highest court of the land.

Meirs is a corporate lawyer, and a longtime loyal friend of Bush, which makes many conservatives feel she will decide cases along the same ideological lines as President Bush would, supposing he could appoint himself to the high court.

Her unknown quantity with no judicial background gives rise to wild speculation about how she will address complex cases, and many groups are nervous because of that uncertainty.

We have no illusions that Meirs is anything but a person with true conservative leanings.

To many, there is a sense the legal system is a bit inbred, with the assumption that anyone who is a judge must first be a lawyer. Having a fresh look at the judicial decisions by someone who has not made hundreds before could be a good thing both for the court and for the entire system.

Meirs is being touted by the Focus on the Family people as the kind of justice who would rule against abortion, and they are happy with that idea. No one has heard from the lady herself about her views on the issue, and after the recent confirmation of Chief Justice John Roberts without getting many answers, there is little expectation we will learn a lot during her confirmation before the Senate.

Unless something of a big bomb appears before the hearings, there is every likelihood she will be the new woman on the Supreme Court.

No matter how it goes, there is little doubt the conservatives feel they have been somewhat betrayed because Bush has not nominated someone who they can brand with their litmus test on abortion rights.

The position of associate justice is a tough responsibility, and one that takes as much common sense as it takes legal understanding of the intent of the Constitution and the Founding Fathers.

We will watch as the interest groups pull at Meirs to try to tie her to a specific position, especially on abortion. What we want is to know if she has the ability to use her legal training and experiences plus common sense in forming decisions on the many cases that reach the highest court.

The court has been under fire, and Meirs will be a new breath of air in the middle of the musty air of the judicial club of judges.

Tom Betz

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COLBY FREE PRESS
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State award-winning newspaper, General Excellence, Design & Layout Excellence, Column Writing, Editorial Writing, Sports Columns, News, Photography.
Official newspaper of Thomas County, Colby, Brewster and Rexford.

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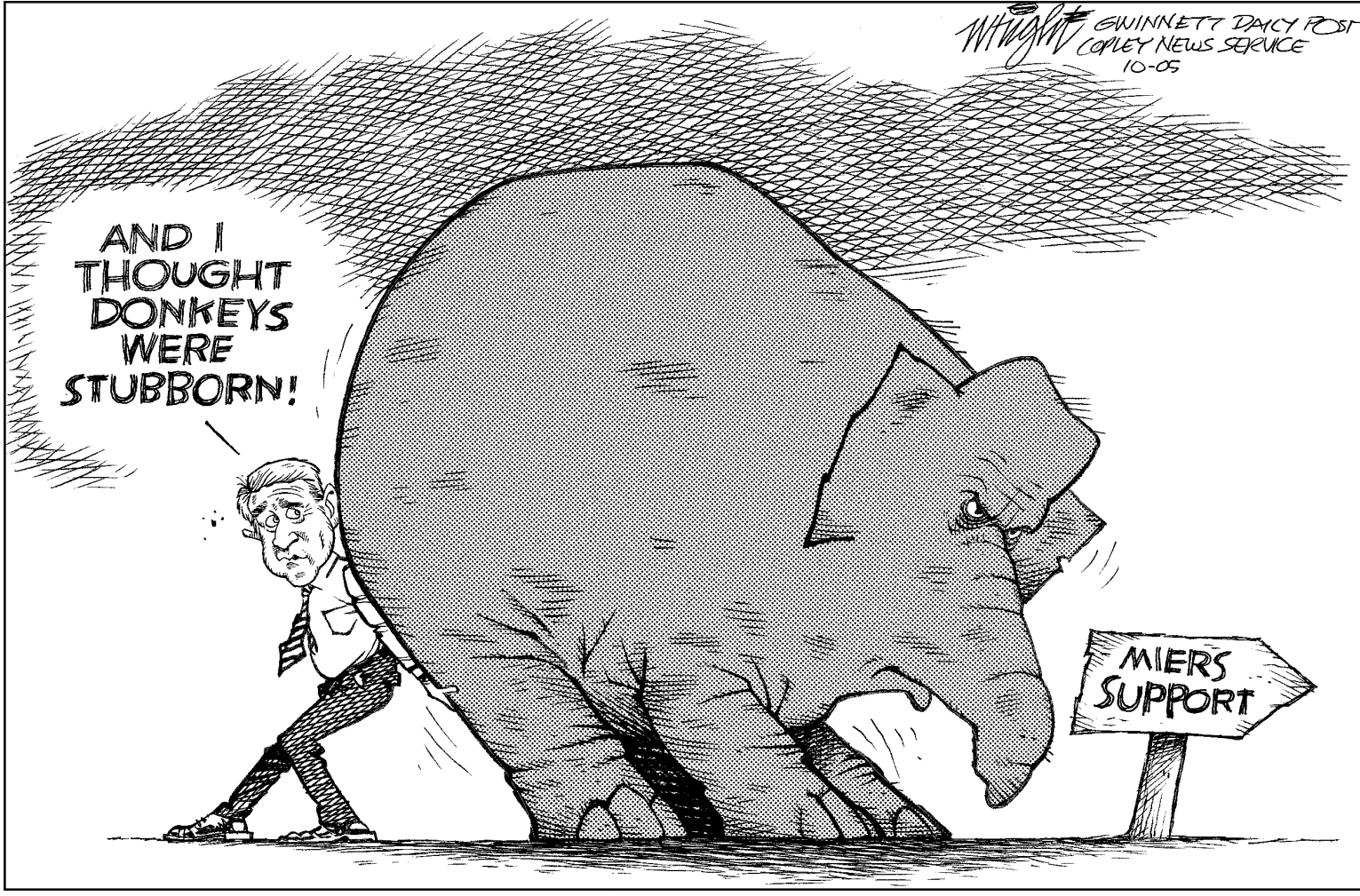
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THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the day observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Haynes Publishing Co., 155 W. Fifth, Colby, Kan., 67701.
PERIODICALS POSTAGE is paid at Colby, Kan. 67701, and at additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to The Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth, Colby, Kan., 67701. THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday to Friday, closed Saturday and Sunday. MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, which is exclusively entitled to the use for publication of all news credited to it or not otherwise herein. Member Kansas Press Association, Inland Press Association and National Newspaper Association. **SUBSCRIPTION RATES:** In Colby by carrier: 4 months \$38, 8 months \$53, 12 months \$70. By mail with in Colby and the nine-county region of Thomas, Sheridan, Decatur, Rawlins, Cheyenne, Sherman, Wallace, Logan and Gove counties: 4 months \$50, 8 months \$62, 12 months \$78. Other Kansas counties: 4 months \$57, 8 months \$67, 12 months \$81. All other states, \$81, 12 months.

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Update given for feline friends

Cats.
I haven't given any updates in quite a while, so all you feline fanciers gather 'round. The rest of you go read the sports section.

As most of you know, we have been taking two out of the four resident cats to Colorado with us.

April Alice sits quietly in her kennel for the nine to 10 hours it takes and only starts to get fidgety if nature is calling and we're still dawdling.

Molly Monster fights the whole process. She growls. She yawns. She meows quietly to herself after having a tranquilizer forced down her throat.

The other two — Rupert and Jezebel, youngest daughter's cats — are just happy to have the house to themselves while our two are gone.

Jez doesn't take any guff off of any of the others, and only Molly ever tries to cause her grief.

Rupert, however, is at the bottom of the scratching order. Everyone but Jez makes her hide under the furniture. She misses us when we're gone, but she sure doesn't miss the other cats.

Down in South Carolina, youngest daughter is now catless, having given away her last feline



Cynthia Haynes

- Open Season

so that her boyfriend can visit her without resorting to innumerable allergy pills.

He never complained to her, but her sister, with whom he works, said that he always felt like he had a hangover on Monday after visiting his girlfriend and her three cats.

He did have to put up with one visitor this last week, however.

Oldest daughter and her husband, also the owners of three cats, went to Europe for two weeks.

Two of their cats they left at home with a friend to come in to check on them.

The third, however, had gotten into a fight a week before they were to leave. Louie ended up with an infection that required both oral and

topical (on the skin) antibiotics.

Oldest daughter was not willing to leave a cat that required medicating with a friend. She was also unwilling to spend \$10 a day for two weeks to keep the cat at the vet.

She compromised with her sister's help. She left the cat at the vet for a week and her sister took it for a week. Youngest daughter has spent plenty of time medicating her own cats, so she knows the drill — grab cat, force mouth open, shove pill or dropperful of medicine down throat, get bandages for scratches on hands, arms and torso.

And then you have to deal with the topical cream....

Son and his two felines are still hanging out in Lawrence with no particular ups and downs except that Frank doesn't seem to know he's neutered and still sprays occasionally. Better in son's apartment than my house, I think.

Daughter called yesterday and said she and hubby were home from Turkey and that she had gotten me pictures of cats in three out of the four countries they visited.

Gee, how did she know I like cats?

Your turn

Dear Citizens of Thomas County,

In light of the recent front page article on the Colby Free Press, one might think that our county offices are quite unprepared for a "disaster."

This is not really the case. This might cause some misunderstanding with someone not involved in the everyday operations of our offices. We are contracted with a software company out of Hays. Every single night we do a backup of the information on the AS/400 computer. These backup tapes are kept off-site in a bank vault. The tapes have all the county payroll/AP information, the voter's registrations, the tax and appraisal information, etc.

We have also talked about, but not yet acted on the idea of having a website with tax and

appraisers information "searchable". If this was done, we would have two more backups done of our information, one would be located in Scott City, and one in Hays. All it would take to get this information back and running is one stand alone PC with an Internet connection. Simply a matter of setting one up in the school, the hospital, the office complex? The possibilities there are endless.

This doesn't even touch what happens with the motor vehicle. Those records are kept on the mainframe in Topeka. We don't actually keep that information in our local building. You also should have your registrations in your vehicles. All it would take to start tagging and titling vehicles again is an Internet connection, and some "borrowed" inventory

from a neighboring county, give us a few hours and we are up and running again.

This letter is not to say we do not need a plan, we very much do. Where do we plan to have the "emergency offices" is really more the concern. These are the things that will be looked at, but do not think your county is "insecure".

Your elected officials and the computer companies they work with make sure your information is safe and secure from many threats, but do look forward to polishing up the "rough" edges with the assistance of Emergency Director Engel.

Nonnie Trail, Thomas County Deputy Treasurer

Newcomer enjoys harvest experience

When it was confirmed that the corn was dry enough and Jason Berning was out cutting, Henrietta and I got in the car and headed south. Driving past fields of ready-to-be-picked corn, sunflowers and milo, past already-picked fields of wheat, barley and soy beans, we made our way down Kansas Highway 25 to Leoti, where we turned left and drove a short way to Marienthal.

When we got to their house, Jason's wife, Tommie, was waiting for us. She took us out to the fields, where Jason was already out harvesting the corn. He drove by and invited me (Jim) aboard his John Deer Combine. Climbing the ladder, hoping to avoid any embarrassing Charlie horses, I entered the two seater with a big grin on my face. Something about Kansas has really gotten into my blood. Watching the farmers plow and harvest has been a thrill for this city boy, and now I would get my turn to play farmer.

The tractor has two gears: forward and re-

verse. Even I could handle that. At 3.5 miles an hour, I can afflict only the slightest of damage on his organic corn crop. "More to the left. Gotta put it between the rows." The adjustable width row crop header has to have its pointers (that's what we city folk call them) set between the rows. I back the combine a couple times to get it right—feels like a big boat and then start cutting, shucking, and removing the corn from the cob, all in one action. The computer tells us our bushels-per-acre, the moisture in the corn and other vital facts that mean absolutely to the novice driver, who is just trying to keep going straight and not make a fool of himself. After four acres of picking, grinning and picking up three hundred-plus bushels of golden yellow corn, we throw it into a grain cart, which carries about nine hundred bushels.

While Henrietta gets up to take a ride, I get down and watch the carrier throw the corn into the back of the semi. Jerome (Jason's dad) in-

vites me to ride to town, where we come to a grain storage unit owned by father and son. Underneath the truck he places the conveyor belt, which leads to an auger that will carry the corn up into the storage unit at the rate of forty-five bushels a minute. Smelled like fresh popped popcorn.

The organic corn will go for feeding organic chickens and cattle. The Bernings also grow soybeans, barley, blue corn, red corn and sunflowers - all organic. Once the corn is all picked, Jason and Jerome will begin planting winter wheat on the same field as the corn.

Even though Henrietta was born in Kansas and lived here on and off for sixteen years, she had never ridden on a combine. It was a wonderful treat for both of us and we hope to experience wheat cutting next year.

Jim Vollmer, Colby, recently moved to Colby and enjoys writing.

Doonesbury

- Gary Trudeau

