

Opinion



Free Press Viewpoint

A weighty issue

In “The Simpsons” 350th episode, Bart Simpson becomes addicted to junk food when a new vending machine is installed at his elementary school. Bart’s steady diet of processed foods leads to massive weight gain, health issues, and eventually a heart attack, at the tender age of 10.

Being a cartoon, “The Simpsons” has a unique way of exaggerating today’s social problems, but the show makes a valid point. Obesity is on the rise and childhood obesity is a serious issue in the United States. According to the Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (<http://www.cdc.gov/>), an estimated 9 million schoolchildren between the ages 6 and 19 are overweight. That number has doubled since 1980 and tripled among adolescents.

With our children getting heavier and their risk of health problems growing, parents, teachers, doctors, and lawmakers have become concerned and are working together to combat the problem. The question then becomes: What is causing the weight gain? Is it vending machines, school lunches, or something else?

Bearing the brunt of the blame are the snacks and drinks found in school vending machines. The American Beverage Association (<http://www.ameribev.org/>) has recently approved new guidelines regarding the drinks that should be sold in machines at schools.

These guidelines call for vending machines in elementary schools to dispense only water or 100 percent fruit juice. For middle schools, the machines should not sell full-calorie soft drinks during school hours or any full-calorie juice drinks containing 5 percent real fruit juice or less. In high schools, the beverage industry is asking that no more than 50 percent of a vending machine’s options be soft drinks.

These new rules only affect the vending machines, not the drinks sold in the cafeteria or in other locations. While this might be an encouraging step in the right direction, one must remember that these are guidelines and not laws.

Various school districts around the country have responded to this problem by getting rid of soda and candy in vending machines altogether and replacing them with healthier items. A number of states have considered or enacted laws establishing nutrition standards in schools, including whether students should have access to vending machines.

Of the 38 states that considered legislation dealing with school nutrition, 15 have enacted legislation that addressed the issue in some way. North Carolina passed a measure that was similar to the ABA’s recommendations; however, it bans soda in elementary schools as well as middle schools and mandates that no more than half of the beverages offered to high school students can be sugary soft drinks.

School lunches have also come under fire in the blame game of childhood obesity. Children need a balance of proteins, carbohydrates, and healthy fats for the body to develop properly. Studies show that an improper diet can limit a child’s ability to learn.

One school that has addressed the problem in a unique way is the Appleton Central Alternative School in Wisconsin. It collaborated with Natural Ovens Bakery to create a healthy nutrition program for its students, which included a physical education program.

In New York City, public schools have created salad bars, changed whole milk to skim, removed unnutritious snacks from vending machines, and plan more changes. California and Texas passed laws that limit junk food sold on school grounds. Districts in New Mexico and Washington are incorporating produce from their local farms in their lunches, known as Farm to School program.

Congress also passed a law requiring each local educational agency participating in the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s school meals programs to establish a local wellness policy by the beginning of the 2006 to 2007 school year.

Even with individual school districts moving in the right direction, these improvements only solve part of the problem and more changes are needed. It’s also important to realize these changes were brought about through educating government officials and school districts about the problem and pushing for changes within the system.

It would be good get to involved and find out what’s happening in your own community.

Patricia Rojas is a program assistant for WHY’s (World Hunger Year) National Hunger Clearinghouse. Web site: www.worldhungeryear.org

COLBY FREE PRESS

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Colby, Kan. 67701

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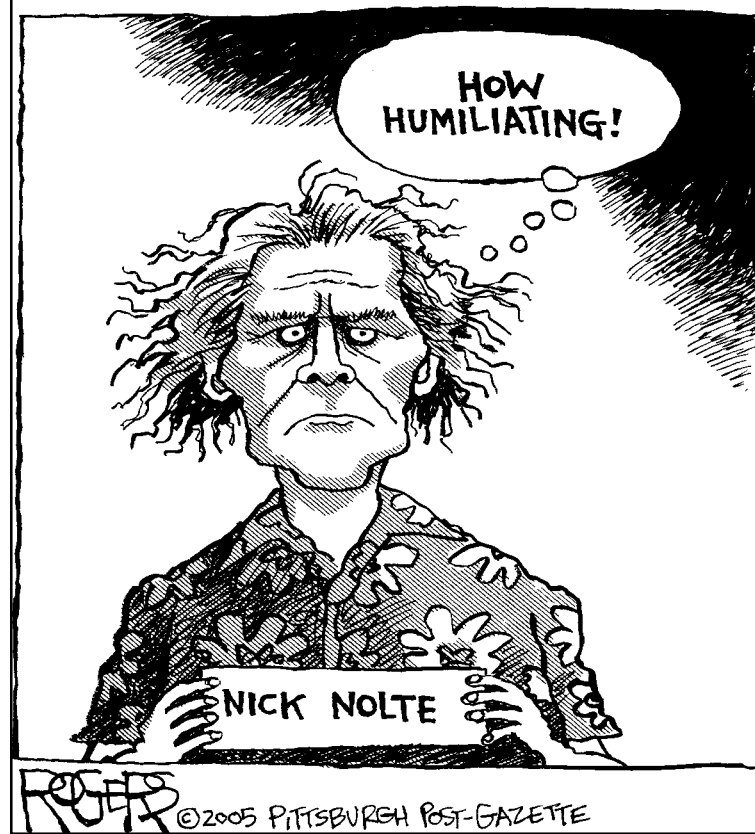
THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the day observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year’s Day, by Haynes Publishing Co., 155 W. Fifth, Colby, Kan., 67701.

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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WHAT MOST PEOPLE THINK DURING THE BOOKING PROCESS...



WHAT TOM DELAY THINKS...



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What’s the cost of non-compliance?

Whether taxpayers in Sheridan County want an elevator in their courthouse or not is a question Commissioners Ron Schamberger, Keith Kennedy and David Zimmerman need to answer.

Last month’s fall by a Colorado man indicates the county commissions’ 13-year lag of complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act needs to end. Yes, past commission boards, of which Kennedy was a part, have researched installing an elevator in the three-story building which was constructed in 1917.

Sure, it could cost Sheridan County taxpayers close to \$1 million dollars, but what’s the cost of non-compliance to the Act? Will the commissioners apply for grant money to install an elevator or somehow renovate or even build a new courthouse?

How many employees and members of the public have to fall or have trouble walking the stairs before the commissioners take action?

Do taxpayers want to continue wondering when, not if, they will be sued because someone takes the county to task about compliance with a federal law?

The county carries \$1 million dollars in liability insurance per incident, but how many incidents do taxpayers want? How many can they afford?

Kennedy’s remark Monday that it “cost too much money,” in my opinion, shows an irresponsible mentality that all patrons can navigate the marble stairs.

When John Bergman, 77, of Aurora, Colo. fell on Sept. 22, he sat on the courthouse floor until



Jan Katz Ackerman

• From Where I stand

someone came along and helped him up. Bergman is disabled from multiple hip surgeries, and although he can walk up stairs, he must descend going down backwards.

Add the fact he had paperwork in his hands while he tried to grasp offset handrails, Bergman fell down some 10 feet of stairway.

While Bergman’s bruised ribs and shoulder have healed, what about his dignity?

Do Sheridan County taxpayers want members of the public staying away from their courthouse in fear of not being able to have access to all offices within?

Sheridan County taxpayers need to speak out about the fact putting an elevator into their courthouse is more than an issue about money.

It’s a moral issue.

The Americans with Disabilities Act became effective Jan. 26, 1992, and 13 years after the fact it’s time to do the right thing. The right thing being either install an elevator in the existing courthouse or build something accessible to Sheridan County’s aging population.

The problem isn’t going to go away.

A place for the emotions

Walking in His shoes is a moving experience.

That’s an understatement, but how can you explain the feeling?

We stopped Saturday in tiny San Luis, Colo., county seat of one of the poorest counties in the U.S., at least in terms of family income.

San Luis, nestled in a corner of the giant San Luis Valley in southern Colorado, home to 3,700 souls, is rich in heritage, tradition, faith, beauty and people. On the edge of one of the giant Spanish land grants that dot the western landscape, it has never been a wealthy place, but it is not a bad place to live.

Settlers first came this way from Mexico nearly 400 years ago, and San Luis claims to be the oldest town in Colorado. Descendants of the early settlers make up most of the population today. Some of the state’s leading families have come from this area, including that of Colorado’s new senator and U.S. representative, Ken and John Salazar.

From the center of town, across from the 125-year-old courthouse, are the steps leading up to the Stations of the Cross. It’s a rocky path, much like Christ must have walked to Golgotha.



Steve Haynes

• Along the Sappa

At nearly 7,500 feet elevation, the way up the mountain is steep. At the top sits a church, a Catholic chapel. Along the way, San Luis sculptor Hubert Maestas has created striking brass interpretations of the traditional Stations of the Cross.

Churches, starting with the local parish, but spreading all across Colorado, raised money to build the shrine. It has become an international attraction. Mr. Maestas sells copies of the brass sculptures from his studio; the Episcopal church in McCook has a replica of his final piece, the Resurrection.

But the main attraction is walking the Via Dolorosa, the Way of the Cross.

There are people here most days, at any time of day. Tourists stop. Many have come this way just to see the shrine, to walk as He walked.

At Easter, it’s just plain busy.

How to describe the feeling? Emotion welling up. Great sadness. The thought of unspeakable cruelty, and Maestas does not spare the viewer the detail, the spikes through bone and flesh.

His statues lead walkers through the traditional 14 stations of the cross, from Pilate condemning Him to die, to the cross itself at the top, and to the tomb. We stop at each one and read the scripture aloud.

From the top, the view is across the verdant valley to the Sangre de Cristo mountain range, named “Blood of Christ” by Spanish explorers for the color the west-facing peaks take on just at sunset.

Then, the final piece, a soaring depiction of the resurrection, which breaks the gloom and brings the visitor back to hope.

It’s a striking experience, humbling, depressing and exalting all at once.

I recommend it.

Doonesbury

• Gary Trudeau

