

# Opinion



## Free Press Viewpoint

### Remember what's not on the table

As you sit down Thursday, or during the next four days — whenever your Thanksgiving dinner is held, remember to be thankful for the positive things going on around you, not just the food that is in front of you.

For you who live in Colby, and other northwest Kansas towns, be thankful for the quiet, comfortable town you live in. With car bombs, and other explosive devices, going off in faraway places, we don't have to live in fear of what is happening outside the front door.

Be thankful we all have access to quality health care. The first Thanksgiving recognized those who survived the first year at Plymouth Rock. Disease, and a brutal winter, took the lives of many that year with little, if any, health care around. Today, some countries around the world don't have solutions to some of the most simple ailments.

Be thankful for the country we live in. We have the right to question what we don't like and attend the church of our choice. People in other countries are threatened with death if they don't follow the laws.

Colby, and other like towns, should be thankful for the variety of education available. Colby has its public school system and the two private schools, Heartland Christian and Sacred Heart. And if that is not enough, when a student is ready for college, all he has to do is attend Colby Community College.

Farmers should be grateful for the strong fall harvest this year. Maybe the yields show the Great Plains is coming out of the drought and there is still enough water underground. Remember, the efforts of our grain and livestock producers across the country are put on our tables three times a day.

As you savor the bites of turkey, dressing, sweet potatoes or pumpkin pie, also remember to savor the blessings, we have been given.

*Publisher John Van Nostrand*

#### 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.

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 [jvannostrand@nwkansas.com](mailto:jvannostrand@nwkansas.com) or [pdecker@nwkansas.com](mailto:pdecker@nwkansas.com).

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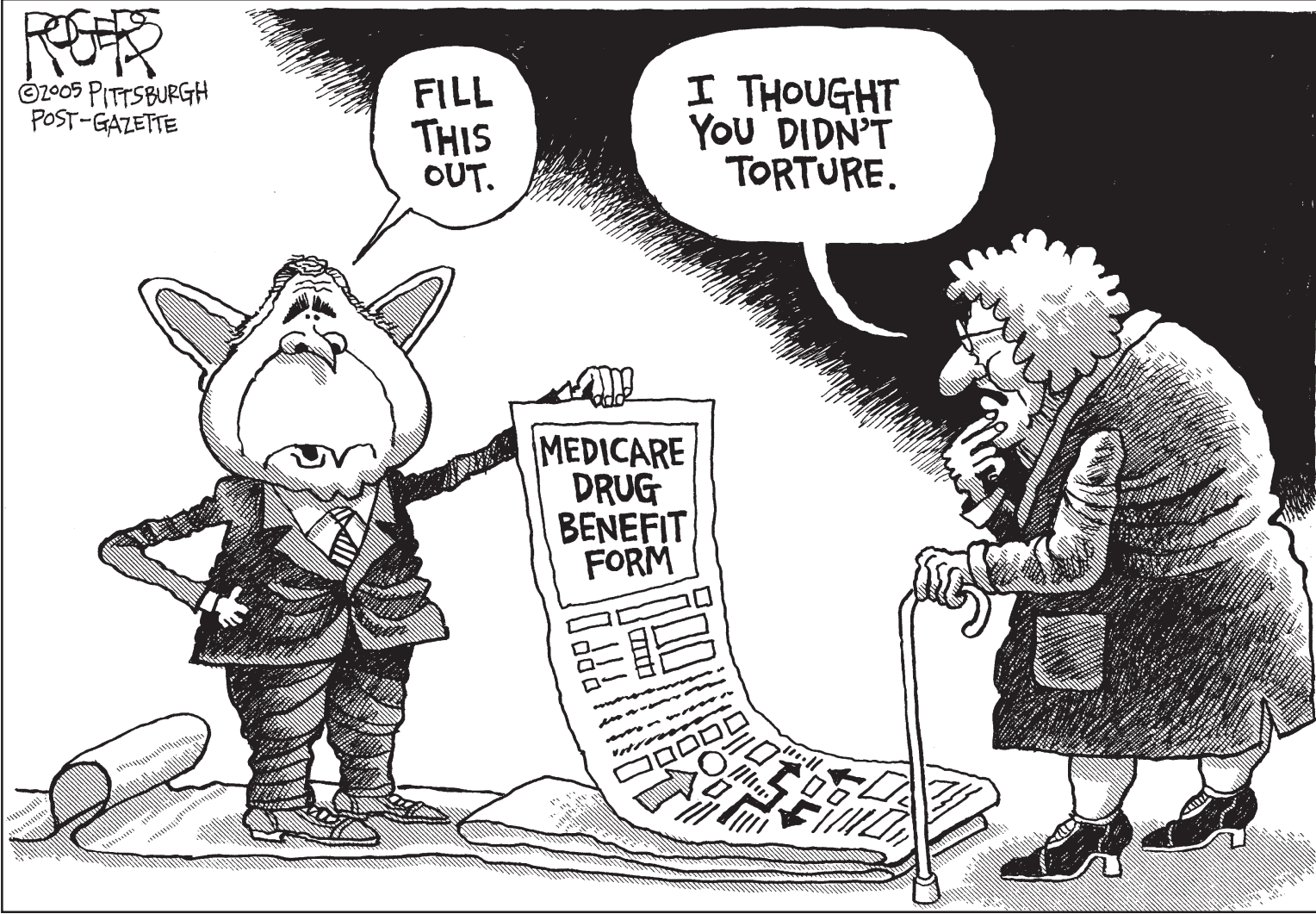
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THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the day observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Haynes Publishing Co., 155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



### Gifts are closer than you think



**John  
Van Nostrand**

#### • Line in the Dust

In two days will be the hyped-up, biggest Christmas shopping day of the season. Retailers are hoping the economy is strong enough to provide a worthwhile holiday. Shoppers are thinking the same thing.

When wife Jennifer and I decided to move to Colby, we realized the situation we would be living in.

Where we lived in Greenfield, Iowa, the capital city Des Moines and its massive retail base were an easy 60 miles away. Greenfield has basic necessities and a little bit of shopping, but the variety isn't there. The pull of Des Moines' four malls and specialty shops captured many people in the area.

And if that were not enough, Omaha, Neb., and its stores were only 100 miles away.

As we all know, Colby doesn't have the kind of retail typically seen in major cities. But Colby is to Winona and Selden like Des Moines is to Greenfield. Colby has something for somebody. I've already heard it's common for Colby people to head to Denver, Colorado Springs, Hays or Salina if they want a bigger selection of shopping.

Cities, like the ones I've mentioned, love the rural population because they know and expect those people to come their way. (Initially, Iowa's metro areas approved an additional sales tax to fund local school improvements. Much of that tax is paid for by out-of-town shoppers.)

But things have to be considered when shopping out of town.

Gasoline at about \$2 a gallon will be around for a long time, if it is not permanent. Filling up the minivan takes \$50 these days. So if you go to

Salina, spend \$250 on Christmas, don't forget to tack on the \$50 for the gasoline — your own shipping and handling.

Want to make it sound worse?

You may need another \$50 of gasoline when you get home because the needle hit E. Tack another \$50 on the gift bill. Depending upon when you fill up, your \$250 could be \$350. Gasoline alone is about 30 percent of that total cost.

You also take the weather risks this time of year. If it snows too much and can't go the day you planned, you now put more pressure on yourself to reschedule your life so you can go. The stress of the holidays intensifies.

"But X, Y and Z gifts can't be found in Colby," some people will claim.

That may be true.

But who says you need to purchase gifts X, Y and Z?

You can be creative and find the right gifts all here in Colby. Not every gift has to be wrapped and placed under the tree.

• Get a special picture of that friend or relative custom framed.

• Gift certificates from fast-food restaurants may make a little kid's Friday night.

• Find out where you friend or relative has their car's oil changed and pay for it for them in advance.

• New parents may crave at least one night away from 3 a.m. feedings. Get them a room at one of our hotels and watch their newborn for them.

Pay attention to the daily routines of the people you give gifts to. You will probably think of something appropriate or clever for them. And most importantly, you will be able to find it right here in Colby.

If you look hard enough, Colby may have gifts for more people than you think.

And rather than paying for the gasoline to get the gift, you can put more into the gift itself.

Happy shopping.

— — —

I spoke a little too soon last week.

In my column last week, I mentioned some possible problems with the city utility bills because I didn't get my first one, when I thought I should. I called the utility desk and was told I had a balance, and of the billing problems in the past. My bill was due the next day.

A follow up visit, to pay the bill in person, ended up with me not paying at all. I was told I was too new to the system to get a bill. There should not have been a balance on my account, yet.

Finance Director Debbie Zerr said last week there have been no problems with the new billing program.

### Your turn

### Moran helps himself at other's expense

*Pam Pohly  
Hays, KS*

Last Friday was a tragic, yet also a truth-exposing day for constituents of Congressman Jerry Moran.

On Nov. 18, Rep. Moran helped himself to a pay raise with your tax money - just hours after he helped to pass a cruel measure that will drastically reduce emergency food, basic healthcare, student loans, funding for child-support enforcement, and other vital services to disadvantaged or disabled Kansans.

He and his co-conspirators are squeezing students, the elderly and the poor to subsidize tax cuts for the richest - and pay-raises for Congress.

Your Republican Congressman gave himself an approximate \$3,100 pay raise on Friday (averaging \$165,200 a year per Congressman). He exercised his "right" to increase his own personal salary based on increases in costs-of-living.

Moran seems to think that the costs of living in America only increase if you are among the "haves." If you are a "have-not" or if you have stumbled upon hard times, Moran's actions say, increases in your gasoline, heating, grocery, and healthcare costs won't hurt you. Do you believe that?

Moran voted to cut funding to services to the poor by \$50 billion dollars. He will surely try to tell you that the Medicaid and Student Loan pro-

grams have been growing every year and that he is just being fiscally responsible by stopping the growth. He will without doubt fail to point out to you that these programs have grown each year because of costs of living and economic downturns. Remember, Moran doesn't seem to think that cost of living is an issue for the poor. He seems to think costs of living are only issues for the already rich.

Moran may try to earnestly convince you that the \$50 billion dollar cutbacks he voted for in reduced funding to Medicaid, Food Stamps, and Student Loans will not be detrimental to Kansans, or anybody you have ever met.

Not hurt Kansans? Here are the facts. You decide. Moran voted to cut student loan programs by \$14.3 billion. Over 83,000 Kansans currently rely on Student Loan programs for their education. Moran voted to cut 220,000 people in the U.S. from the Food Stamp Program.

Currently, 170,000 Kansans rely on Food Stamps to put food on their family dinner tables. Moran voted to eliminate \$11.4 billion in Medicaid funding. Right now, over 300,000 Kansans rely on Medicaid for the most basic and life preserving medical services.

Strangely, Moran also voted for a measure that will force Medicaid recipients to bring more cash with them when they see a doctor or get a visit from a hospice worker. By way of his ac-

tions, the message is, "If these folks don't have the extra cash - then, they just plain shouldn't be allowed to get these basic life-saving healthcare services."

We need to be reasonable. Where will poor people get cash? These are people living in real poverty. That's the whole point of Medicaid. Medicaid is a safety net for senior citizens, veterans and children whose pockets are already completely empty. By requiring them to shell out more cash, in effect, grandmothers may be unable to go to the doctor at all.

The \$11.4 billion that Moran voted to shave off of Medicaid will likely create triple that much in savings for his cronies - just by scaring poor folks away from the hospital. I suppose one effective way for Congress to save money is to just encourage poor people to go on and die.

What do Moran's actions show that good Congressman believes in? Through his recent votes in Congress, Moran shows that he favors robbing from the poor and disadvantaged - to give money to the already privileged few - including gifts to no-bid government contractors, multinational corporations and even himself. This is the Congressman's pre-Thanksgiving empty plate offered to disadvantaged Kansans. Now, I shudder to think how scary and sad Christmas will be this year for our less fortunate neighbors.

#### Doonesbury

• Gary Trudeau

