

Opinion



Free Press Viewpoint

How bad is it?

So much for a heated debate between those Colby residents upset with the condition of the streets and Colby City Council.

That heat could have been used to fix the problem — if there really is one.

Since the last snowflake fell Dec. 31 and city crews attempted to remove the 19 inches of snow from the streets, we've heard countless people say the city did a horrible job. Cars get stuck in the ruts and drag the bottom of their cars. Intersections turned into quicksand with the cars that got stuck and needed either pushed or pulled out.

But where were those complainers?

No one at Tuesday's Colby City Council meeting addressed the council about the streets' condition and how they were cleared. It was the first meeting since the snow.

But stand in line at the stores and you hear comments. Listen to the people who need their car pushed out and you will hear comments.

From the complainers' perspective, why say anything to city council? What's it going to help? The storm is over with and it's been so cold lately, it's virtually impossible to clear streets because of the massive formations of ice. It didn't warm up enough during the day to melt enough snow and ice to improve streets. So what comments now can change the city council and employees' strategies?

But from the council's point of view, it's much different. Council members are usually smart, and in public, enough to know people are upset. But they should not hear the complaints only while at their job or over the phone in the evenings. Could that be the coward's approach?

Council meetings are for the residents and council to address, analyze and maybe even find solutions to problems. What a concept.

But sacrifices have to be made.

Residents who say things at council meetings are in a public setting. Yes, it's possible complainers could be on the front page of the paper where many more people will learn what happened. It's possible complainers at council meetings might even upset people they were not expecting to.

Council members' are in the same boat. Their comments are just as public and they too may upset more of their constituents. But it takes guts to be a council member.

If those complainers don't have the guts to talk to Colby City Council about the streets in the appropriate setting — they shouldn't complain at all.

— John Van Nostrand is publisher of the 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 jvannostrand@nwksas.com or pdecker@nwksas.com. Opinions do not necessarily reflect the *Free Press*.

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Remember those old wives' tales?

While glancing at a list of newly released books, one in particular caught my eye. Although the book might be worth a second look, it was the subject matter that brought back a flood of memories.

The book is a story about one woman's tribute to her father and how, when she was a child, the two of them would sit across the table from each other discussing life's most perplexing questions.

As a young person, I too, remember conversations with my dad at the dinner table or with both of my parents in the living room.

Not every discussion was memorable, but some of those were heart-to-heart and have stayed with me.

Like any adolescent, I thought my parents were old-fashioned in their beliefs, but many of those old myths and tales continue to be passed along to other generations.

Here's a few of those myths:

- Habitual knuckle-cracking causes arthritis. I don't crack my knuckles because when I was growing up my parents said it would result in oversized knuckles and deformed-looking hands. Then, I had children and all three were knuckle crackers. Sad to say, I still believed the myth and drove myself loony telling them to stop it. Many years back, I ended up owing each of them an apology when I finally decided to check it out and discovered I was wrong.

- Another hard myth to let go of was toads and warts. Hard to believe it, but I found myself saying the same thing my parents said to me, which was, if you pickup/touch a toad you will get warts. Turned out that was false too, but for many years one of my brothers struggled with warts on his hand and I was sure it was because he was picking up too many toads.

- Drinking coffee will stunt a child's growth. I really fell for that one too and passed it along to



Patty Decker

• Deep Thoughts

my children as well. As it turned out, my children still don't drink a lot of coffee and I didn't have my first cup until after age 18.

Superstitions:

- It never failed, but when my dad and I would be walking down the street, out of nowhere, he would throw a few pennies up in the air and not look back. The explanation was simply one of those simple acts of kindness. The thought being if someone came along and saw one of those pennies face up, it would mean good luck for them. Of course, if the penny was face down, the idea would be to turn it over for the next person to find. I still like that one, but I try not to be obvious about throwing money around.

- Ladybugs were another good luck charm. As a child, I was glad when a ladybug landed on my hand. The secret of this "good luck" item was that once it land, you couldn't squish it. Rather, it had to fly away on its own or be given a gentle nudge.

- Money superstitions haven't panned out for me. A couple in particular include if your right palm itches, money is coming your way and if your left palm itches, money is paid out. Must be that my left palm itches more than the right since I haven't gotten wealthy over the years.

- Pregnancy tales. I remember hearing a lot of those when I was expecting. Everyone knows about the myth that if someone carries a baby

high, it's a boy and carrying low means a girl. In my case, the opposite occurred.

But, there's more of those: If you crave sweets, you will have a girl; if you crave meat, it will be a boy; if you get red highlights in your hair it's going to be a girl or if your hands get dried and chapped it will be a boy.

Some old tales are good to follow, but not necessarily for the reasons given.

- A great example I remember was when my parents told me never to feed our dog chocolate or any sweets because it would give him worms. Believing it would hurt an animal, I didn't do that, but actually, chocolate wouldn't give the dog worms, it turns out it could be deadly.

- Another myth I hate to admit I believed for many years was about swimming and how I should wait 30 minutes after eating before jumping back in the pool. The reason being that if I ate and then right after went swimming, I would develop cramps. Turns out that was false too, but some experts believe that it is better to wait a little while because of digestion issues.

- Swallowing gum, watermelon seeds, etc., also carried some untruths ranging from the item laying inside the body for seven years to growing watermelons in your stomach. I didn't fall for that one as a kid.

I could go on and on about myths and old wives tales, like if the nose itches, you will have company; or spilling salt equating to not eating well for a period of time; or a black cricket in the house means prosperity — but I won't.

It was just fun thinking back about many of the myths passed on to me by my parents and how some managed to stick when raising my own children. Have a great weekend.

Decker is editor of the *Free Press*. Her column appears on Fridays.

Farm policy is ruining trade talks

By Thomas D. Rowley

Farm subsidies derailed the Doha round of international trade negotiations last summer. Next year's Farm Bill offers a way to get trade talks back on track, helping not only farmers, but also rural manufacturers and service providers who account for the largest share of the rural economy. Done right, the bill could even free up billions to revitalize the nation's rural communities. Here's a quick overview of the train wreck and needed repairs.

First, the way some spin it, the United States is negotiating from the magnanimous stance of how much we're willing to give up. In truth, we're violating agricultural trade pacts we already signed and are essentially negotiating how much cheating we're willing to curtail. In 1995, we agreed to remove trade-distorting subsidies by 2003; in 2005, we provided some \$24 billion in trade-distorting subsidies.

Yes, other countries share in this duplicity. But according to Bob Thompson, chairman of the International Food and Agricultural Trade Policy Council and professor of Agricultural Policy at the University of Illinois, we're being two-faced: telling everybody else to cut their agricultural subsidies, then increasing our own.

Second, hypocrisy aside, we've opened ourselves up to legal action such as Brazil's successful challenge of our cotton subsidies.

Those subsidies must stop or the United States will be penalized. Interesting and largely unnoticed is the fact that the penalty doesn't have to target the offending sector. Indeed, it probably won't.

According to analysis by Georgetown University's Matt Porterfield, rather than retali-

ate against U.S. cotton growers for damage done to its own farmers, Brazil will likely take revenge on our pharmaceutical or manufacturing sectors.

Why these sectors aren't screaming bloody murder is a mystery. But they will be when Brazil-with World Trade Organization (WTO) sanctioning-begins availing itself of U.S. patents, software design and other intellectual property rights worth as much as \$4 billion.

Pharmaceuticals and manufacturing will scream even louder when other countries with potential cases against U.S. farm subsidies start to file their claims. (There is even the possibility of Brazil reaping huge public relations benefits by distributing U.S. patented drugs for HIV/AIDS at low or no cost to developing countries.)

Third, trade agreements for all other sectors are on hold because of the agricultural stalemate. Georgetown's Robert Stumberg likens this to the proverbial tail wagging (and in this case killing) the dog. He cites a Ford Motor Company vice president's complaint that agriculture was "sucking all the energy out of the debate." And that was last year, before the talks fell apart.

What can be done? By carefully crafting a new Farm Bill, the Congress could achieve multiple wins: avoid further WTO challenges; stop undercutting farmers in developing countries and keeping them from earning a living; better help our own farmers (two-thirds get no payments under the current legislation); promote renewable energy; and free up billions of dollars to invest in fostering innovative and sustainable rural economies here at home.

That approach makes sense to Secretary of

Agriculture Mike Johanns, who, at a recent Washington event, said, "We can sit back and watch our farm policy be disassembled piece by piece, or we can begin a discussion about how to craft farm policy that provides a low-risk, meaningful safety net for our farmers and ranchers."

It also makes sense to three former U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretaries who testified before Congress a few months ago on the need to change the Farm Bill. As Clayton Yeutter put it, "why not enact legislation that will meet the domestic and global needs of American agriculture for years to come—irrespective of what is now happening, or not happening, in the Doha Round." We can do that, he said, with programs that won't distort trade. That, in turn, will enhance our negotiating leverage if Doha starts up again and will ultimately open up new markets for U.S. agricultural exports.

Obvious and sensible, however, are not necessarily politically expedient. The minority of farmers who stand to lose big subsidies are lobbying hard for an extension of the existing Farm Bill. How that will play out in Congress is anybody's guess. As former Secretary Dan Glickman put it, "If nothing else, farm bill debates have produced creativity and imagination—most for the good, some just bewildering."

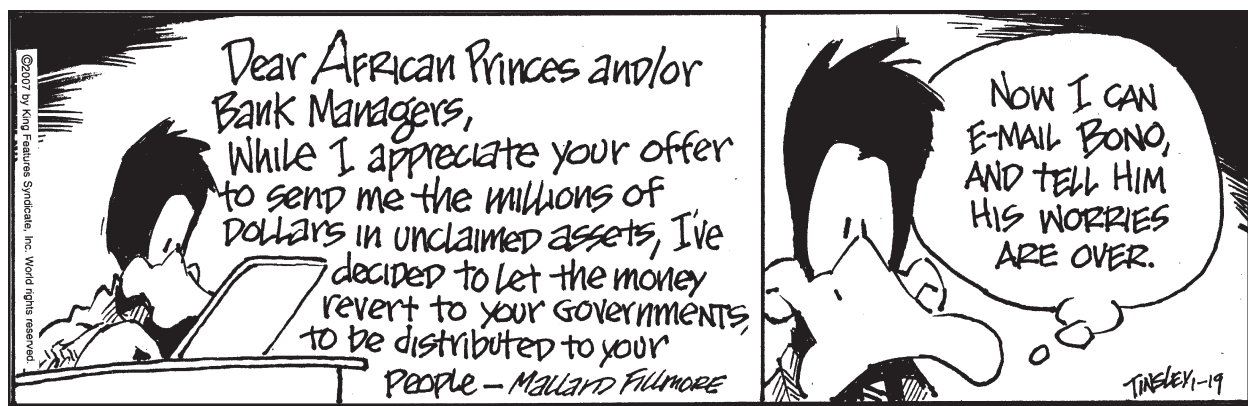
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