

Opinion



Free Press Viewpoint

Little was asked of the candidates

From The Manhattan Mercury
After troops leave, then what? The Democrats who want to be president took pains during their debate Thursday night to express their disapproval of President Bush’s handling of the war in Iraq.

In fact they seemed to try to one-up one another. Four candidates — Sens. Joe Biden, Hillary Clinton, Christopher Dodd and Barack Obama — hurried to the debate in Orangeburg, S.C., after having voted earlier in the day for a proposal that would tie supplemental funding for the war to a timetable for troop withdrawal.

The candidates touched on a number of other topics — among them abortion, climate change and health care — but not in any reasonable depth for much more than sound bites. The eight candidates shared just 90 minutes during which the war and national security were the dominant topics.

That only makes more conspicuous the dearth of discussion about what these Democrats who can’t end the war soon enough would do when that occurs. What, for instance, might America’s future relationship with Iraq be? Having contributed to the destruction of its infrastructure, what would our role be in rebuilding it? How many and which of the Iraqis who have risked their lives to help the United States in the last four-plus years would we welcome to our shores. And having urged minority populations to participate in democracy, would we abandon them?

What steps would the candidates in Thursday’s forum take to regain the respect our country has lost during this war and to restore America’s reputation as an international champion of civil and human rights? It isn’t enough, as Sen. Biden would do, to promise not to engage in pre-emptive wars or force regime change on other lands.

How would these candidates lead America in the war on terror? What balance would they strike between protecting lives and property and preserving the liberties that have long set the United States apart from other nations?

What course should the United States pursue in the Middle East beyond Iraq? What should our relationships be like with Iran, Syria, the Palestinians, and how should those goals be pursued?

And what of our exhausted volunteer armed forces and their tired equipment? Our military, too, needs restoration, difficult and expensive though that might be in an often hostile world.

If there is one advantage to an election campaign as long as this one promises to be — Americans won’t choose their next president for 18 months — it is that candidates and voters alike will have the time to develop and debate possibilities.

Little was asked of the Democratic candidates in the format followed Thursday night. All they had to do was criticize the president and avoid a memorable mistake.

Once we stop doing what we’re doing — in Iraq, the Middle East and here at home — what then? That’s what they have yet to explain.

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 or pdecker@nwkansas.com. Opinions do not necessarily reflect the *Free Press*.

COLBY FREE PRESS

155 W. Fifth (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963
Colby, Kan. 67701

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.

John Van Nostrand - Publisher
jvannostrand@nwkansas.com

NEWS

Patty Decker - Editor
pdecker@nwkansas.com

Tisha Cox - General Assignment
tc Cox@nwkansas.com

Jan Katz Ackerman, Area Reporter
ackermanjk@ruraltel.net

ADVERTISING

Crystal Rucker - Advertising Sales/Director
crystalr@nwkansas.com

Kristi Powell - Advertising Sales
kpowell@nwkansas.com

Emily Wederski - Advertising Sales
ewederski@nwkansas.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Jeanette Applegate - Bookkeeping, Ad Building
japplegate@nwkansas.com

Everett Robert - Circulation, Classifieds
erobert@nwkansas.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support@nwkansas.com

NOR’WEST PRESS

Jim Bowker - General Manager

Richard Westfahl, Lana Westfahl, Judy McKnight, Jim Jackson, DeLisa Allen, David Erickson, Betty Morris, and Dana Huthansel

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 \$40, 8 months \$56, 12 months \$74. By mail in Colby and the nine-county region of Thomas, Sheridan, Decatur, Rawlins, Cheyenne, Sherman, Wallace, Logan and Gove counties: 4 months \$53, 8 months \$65, 12 months \$82. Other Kansas counties: 4 months \$60, 8 months \$70, 12 months \$85. All other states, \$85, 12 months.



A common part of Kansas

The devastation of Greensburg Friday night by a tornado was the stuff of nightmares. But as any Kansan knows, the possibility of a tornado striking their community is very real.

I’ve been through Greensburg many times. When I was in college, it was a stop to get gas and snacks on the way to Oklahoma. It is also home to the hand-dug well and a meteorite that were, up until this weekend, a popular tourist spot.

I just can’t imagine the community not being there now. But pictures and video prove that most of the town as it was is now rubble.

The story was the lead headline online at Yahoo and Google News, and was also the top story on a couple of Canadian news sites Saturday. It was also the lead story Saturday on NBC Nightly news.

Last month, I saw up close and personal how devastating a tornado can be when passing through Holly, Colo., on the way to Denver for a mini vacation.

The damage there started at the southwest corner of town, a few hundred yards east of the old horse racing track, and the swath continued northwest through town. On either side, there was little to no damage. But in that strip about 100 feet wide, houses were smashed and trees toppled.

“Sobering” doesn’t even begin to describe it. I have been through five tornadoes in my life.



Tisha Cox

● Off The Beaten Path

However, I know that living in Kansas, tornadoes can happen.

Here is a reminder why tornadoes are so dangerous.

“Tornadoes are considered to be the most violent storms on earth. The amount of devastation they cause for their size makes them a topic of interest to scientists worldwide.”

“Tornadoes are small compared to other storms. An average tornado will be 400 to 500 feet wide and will only travel four or five miles on the ground. Most tornadoes only last for a few minutes. Mile-wide tornadoes are extremely large and are rare.

Some tornadoes can be less than 100 feet wide.” (<http://www.rpi.edu/~masonm/TechInfo/about.html>)

Hurricanes can be predicted, and people can take measures to secure homes and property, and even have time to evacuate.

With tornadoes, no one is that lucky. Tornado

whistles blowing a few minutes before is the most warning people usually get.

The weather service can put out watches and warnings when the conditions for tornadoes exist, but they can’t yet accurately predict them.

Science is getting closer, but isn’t there yet.

On the flip side, I’ve seen on a few occasions tornado chasers going through the area — tourists who pay to see twisters. I think people who live outside tornado alley find tornadoes a novelty. Why else would they pay to come ride around and take pictures of them?

In that vein, I have a friend from Colorado who is a photographer, and unfazed when it comes to the fact his life could be in danger when he shoots tornadoes. But he makes it a habit to get as close as he can. He spends part of each summer out on the plains east of Denver, waiting for word of warnings so he can head out and maybe get a few shots. People always buy them.

Even here in Colby last year the tornado that barely missed town turned up in many photos taken by people around town who just happened to have a camera handy.

But while that tornado was a fluke in that it didn’t cause much damage, others won’t be.

Tisha Cox is a general assignment reporter/photographer for the Free Press. Her column appears on Mondays. tc Cox@nwkansas.com.

Why is America so violent?

By John Whitehead

Violence begets violence, and it is contagious. America is a nation plagued by violence — in our homes, in our schools, on our streets and in our affairs of state, both foreign and domestic. Violence permeates our entertainment culture with its glamorization of death and destruction in movies and video games.

Indeed, it is estimated that by the time a child reaches 18, he or she will have witnessed 200,000 acts of violence, including 40,000 murders on television. Our nation has one of the highest murder rates and levels of incarceration of all industrialized nations in the world. We even export violence, with one of this country’s most profitable exports being weapons. All too often, these same weapons fall into the hands of our enemies.

America is now seen as a violent empire with continual wars that stretch back to at least the beginning of the twentieth century.

But why is America so violent?

Starting with the genocide practiced against millions of Native Americans and continuing through the era of black slavery, the Civil War and onward to the present-day conflicts in the Middle East, our nation’s collective history has been indelibly stained with blood. America’s history, which few have knowledge of, is not about memorizing dates but understanding what happened in the past and how to deal with it. We have yet to truly come to terms with or make amends for our past actions. The truth is that we must deal with our problems or they’ll keep haunting us. America needs an exorcism of its past.

Some suggest that this failure to resolve our violent past has predisposed us to continuing along a path of violence. Others point the finger at a proliferation of weapons, increasingly impersonal technologies, a disparate distribution of wealth, materialism, the erosion of families, isolationism and so on. Certainly, these are all factors. But in the words of the Russian writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, we have forgotten God in the equation.

A basic premise in the founding of America was that human beings were created by God. People as such were seen as special, and life was considered precious. However, this view of God and ourselves is increasingly being set aside. I often hear America referred to as a Christian nation. Yet while we might have a large number of churches and people who profess to believe in God, that’s as far as it goes. At the end of the day, it is our actions that speak for us. And our actions show us to be a nation lacking in spirituality, morality, compassion and community. These values are neither practiced nor taught. There’s no such thing as right and wrong because there are no categories anymore.

Community is a spiritual thing, and we’ve largely lost that as well. We’ve become isolationists, caught up in our own private worlds where no one communicates. We turn away from the homeless, the suffering and those in pain. The parable of the Good Samaritan was not merely a Sunday school lesson about helping others; it was a reminder that community is integral to a healthy spiritual life.

The American community that once bound us together has been shattered. The loving relationship between parent and child is now separated by mom and dad’s 24/7 connection to work in the form of a BlackBerry, computer or their maniacal attachment to a cell phone. More and more children grow up living out of a suitcase, shuttled between households of divorced parents.

And the watchful, caring eye of a parent or neighbor has been shelved for youth online communities where teens don’t have to learn to deal with the difficulties of real-life, face-to-face relationships.

Materialism has eclipsed both spirituality and community, stripping us of the very things that once gave our lives meaning and worth. As Holocaust survivor and psychologist Victor Frankl has pointed out, “People have enough to live by but nothing to live for; they have the means but no meaning.”

We have lost our moral compass, and it’s de-

stroying us as a country. The majority of Americans today, especially the younger generation, have no sense of what is right and wrong. It can be seen throughout society, from the kids killing homeless people for a game, to the 250-pound man who beat an elderly woman to the ground. Having traded our spiritual values for a bowl of materialistic porridge, we have failed to impart meaningful lessons to our children about right and wrong.

It may be that Virginia Tech gunman Seung-Hui Cho was simply a deeply disturbed individual, but we cannot ignore the fact that he was also a product of American culture. Having lived here for 15 years, he had more than enough time to absorb American values and reflect the lack of them. Thus, the question is not so much “Why is there a Cho?” but “Why aren’t there more Chos, McVeighs and Klebolds?”

To borrow from Shakespeare, the fault is not in our stars but in ourselves. The problem lies with us, in our communities, our families, our growing isolation from one another and our lack of spirituality and values.

If we are to reverse the tide of violence in America, the principles of nonviolence must be taught in our homes, churches, schools and communities. However, we remain a society that is armed to the teeth. Our culture glorifies violence. Even security guards at shopping malls now carry weapons. Our government is especially guilty of using violence as a quick fix. How can we teach nonviolence if our government leaders subscribe to violence?

Unless something drastically changes, America’s future is violence. The answer does not lie in gun control; nor is it metal detectors in the schools. What must change is the way we think about and relate to one another. It’s time to get our children away from headphones, get parents away from cell phones, stop hiding behind technology and be human again.

Constitutional attorney and author John W. Whitehead is founder and president of The Rutherford Institute. He can be contacted at johnw@rutherford.org.

Mallard Fillmore

● Bruce

Tinsley

