

Opinion



Free Press Viewpoint

Education leader needs right word

From The Topeka Capital-Journal

One of the words often found in news stories about the appointment of Alexa Posny as state education commissioner is “credibility.”

Mark Tallman, lobbyist for the Kansas Association of School Boards, said Posny already is well-known among the state’s 296 school districts and knows the Kansas system. As former deputy commissioner, she implemented several programs to meet the federal goals of No Child Left Behind.

“That will give her more credibility in continuing to push ahead,” Tallman said.

What was implied in many such positive comments was “compared with her predecessor.”

It’s no secret the reason Posny finally got the commissioner’s job she originally sought in 2005 is that the political makeup of the Kansas State Board of Education shifted in November.

Her predecessor — the man who beat her out of the job in 2005 — was Bob Corkins, whose appointment was controversial from the day it was announced...

Then in November, Kansas voters chose some new board members and swung the political balance 6-4 toward the moderate to liberal side. Corkins resigned in November, rather than waiting to be fired when the new state board took office in January.

But saying Posny is just an alternative to Corkins doesn’t give her the credit she deserves. She has paid her dues for entrance into the upper echelon of education management...

Still, saying she will restore “credibility” to Kansas education isn’t exactly the right word.

Credibility is often defined as “believability.”

Belief isn’t what was lacking during the past 18 months in Kansas. We had too much belief. What was lacking was an emphasis on teaching children facts and how to find facts when they are curious about something.

So, let’s enjoy the comfort that comes from having a pro take the reins of overseeing one of the most important things that government does — preparing our kids to be useful and productive citizens.

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

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We can’t forget

John Van Nostrand

• Line in the Dust



2004. Before that was the earthquake in Iran in December 2003. It’s easy to forget about the disasters on the other side of the world. Since we are so far away physically, it’s easy to be far away mentally.

Kansas has its own memorable moment now. The deadly tornado that destroyed Greensburg will be two weeks old Friday.

I think the tornado and Greensburg will be on most Kansans’ minds for months to come. Those organizing efforts to provide for the survivors are telling donors to stop donating. What a good problem to have. It’s not that there is too much stuff donated, it’s just there is no place to keep it all.

The timing of Greensburg and the tornado is intriguing. We were given a little sample of tornado destruction in late March when Holly, Colo., and Bird City were damaged. That one hit close to home as my wife has two sets of aunts and uncles in Holly. One set escaped harm. The others were injured. They have since recovered

from their injuries and are staying with one of their daughters in Greeley, Colo., until they decide what to do.

Not everyone has that kind of connection to every disaster. But that does not mean we should not pay attention, or forget. Tornadoes will get lost in the shuffle of the kids’ summer schedules, new tires for the pickup and weeding the garden.

May is barely half way over and we have at least three more months of weather that could produce tornadoes. Remember, Colby’s tornado last year was in early August.

What happened in Greensburg can easily happen here.

We should all think of Greensburg now when the severe-weather warnings interrupt the baseball game on the radio or the television shows. It’s the risk we take living in the Great Plains, just as hurricanes are the risk living along the coasts of the South.

I’m sure we have all thought about how Colby would respond if the tornado that hit Greensburg hit us. Thomas County Emergency Management Coordinator Jim Engel told us that same tornado would have stretched from about Colby Ag to Dougherty Implement. That’s a lot to think about in between.

There is so much still to learn from Greensburg. Let’s not forget

John Van Nostrand is publisher of the Colby Free Press.

Your turn

Board president supports capital levy

Tracy Rogers

President, Colby School Board

I would like to take a minute to address the comments in your article and in our board meeting from Mr. Theimer.

First of all, I resent the comment that was made about the education community not caring about the agricultural problems we’ve had in this area. The Colby Public School district is in the eighth consecutive year now without a capital outlay tax levy. Almost all school districts in the state of Kansas have some kind of a capital outlay tax to cover their buildings/equipment needs.

In the six years that I’ve been a member of the school board, not one time have we tried to reinstate the levy for the district. The main reason for that has been because of what the agriculture industry has been going through. I know there has been drought, and high input costs, and this past winter the hardships for cattlemen. Many

people who depend on agriculture have sacrificed for several years now, myself included.

My job is directly related to how successful farmers are so I fully understand what’s been happening.

I also understand what the district has been sacrificing for eight years now by not having a capital outlay levy. We have a fleet of buses and suburbs that is wearing out by the day. We have not been able to replace vehicles at a rate that should be happening. Both activity buses have broken down several times, several Suburbans have well over 200,000 miles and are constantly used for activities, several route buses are nearing the end of their 20-year cycle.

Ask any teacher or student how many times they’ve been on a trip where a breakdown has occurred. We have to update our fleet, and soon.

In our district, 76 percent of the computers are over 5 years old. Most schools that are doing a

laptop 1-to-1 initiative do so with a three-year lease for the computers. That’s because of the constant change and upgrades in technology. Again, ask teachers or students how productive they can be when they can’t use the tools we have. The state assessment tests are now required to be taken online, which is great because the test results are available quicker. But that also means that while those tests are being taken, the computer labs are not available for other classroom teachers.

These are just two examples of some needs in our district that have not been able to be addressed because of lack of funds. It was mentioned in the article that a committee is getting put together to discuss what our needs in the district are, and how we can best attain those. I think the recommendation of that committee is the need for a capital outlay levy, I would support that decision.

About those letters . . .

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• Bruce

Tinsley

