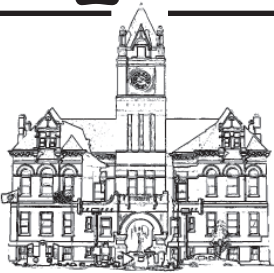


Opinion



Free Press Viewpoint

No tax won't help

By John Van Nostrand

Don't do it, Sen. McCain. The problems it will cause will be greater than the benefits you think it will create.

This week Sen. John McCain, yes, the GOP presidential candidate, asked Congress to waive the federal tax on gasoline and diesel fuel from Memorial Day to Labor Day as a way to ease the price burden on travelers. The tax on gasoline is 18 cents per gallon. The tax on diesel is 24 cents per gallon.

In the past year, gasoline has increased in price by 18 cents in a matter of days. Diesel fuel's increase has been so great, truckers around the world recently staged protests. Here in Colby, paying \$3.27 after the tax cut won't really make people feel better about it. It will just remind them when gasoline was \$3.27 a gallon — still too much.

But the bigger picture is the image it gives to taxes. Taxes are created, and paid, for a reason. The federal taxes on gasoline help to pay for road improvements like on Interstate 70 and U.S. Highway 83. The cracks and potholes in those roads will eventually show up. They will need fixed. If the funds to fix them are not there, the problem gets worse. People won't, and don't, like driving on poor condition roads, no matter how much fuel is.

Taxes can't be treated this way — as the proverbial carrot to make people temporarily feel better about a situation. Taxes should only be lowered, permanently, when the entity responsible for using them does not need as much in the past. Taxes should not be treated as a door prize.

This is not the first time a government entity has made such a suggestion. Several states have sales-tax free weekends, usually in August to spur back-to-school shopping for families. Again, like the fuel tax suggestion, sales taxes are created to continue a government's operation. The amount of taxes lost during those times could easily make some major, needed equipment purchases. Besides, most stores offer sales at that time that usually beat the amount of sales tax.

McCain, it is honorable you care about the economy and fuel prices, misdirected as your fuel tax waiver suggestion is. If you want to help with taxes and the economy, ask Congress to get rid of the loopholes some companies jump through to avoid paying taxes to begin with.

—John Van Nostrand is publisher of the Colby Free Press.

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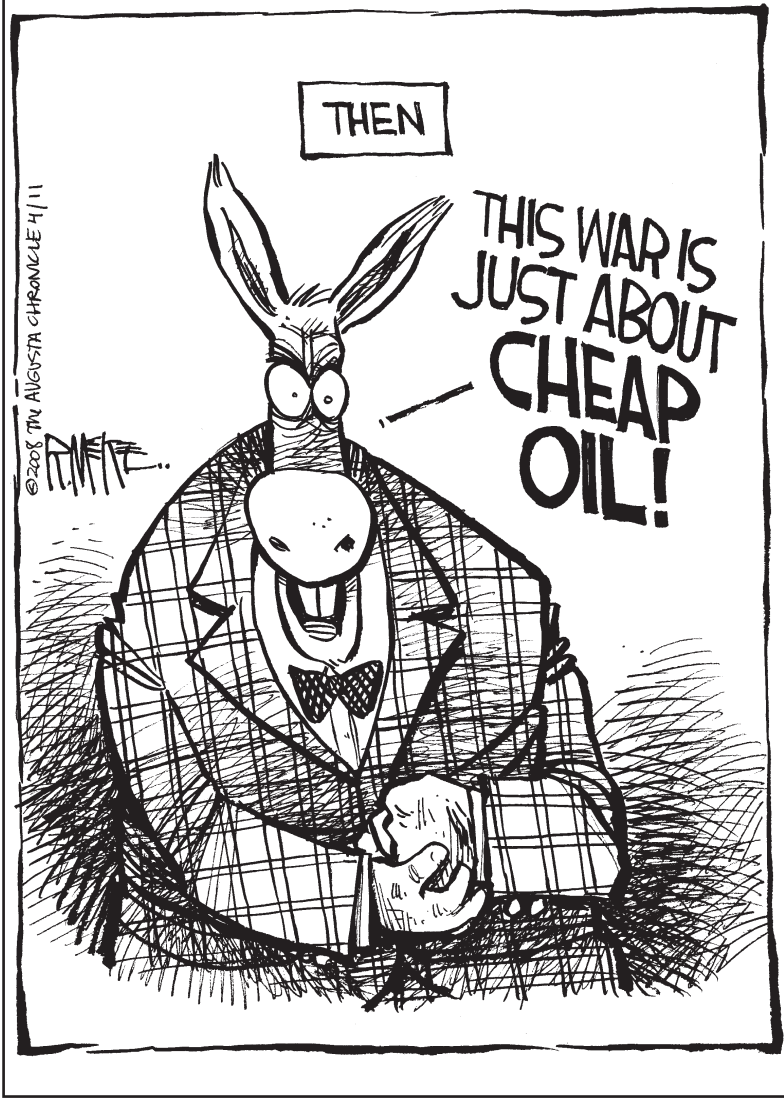
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Don't miss out



Joe Falkoff

- A Sideline View

Since I moved to Colby last July, I can recall talking to exactly three people about the NBA this year.

The interest in this area seems limited, to say the least.

I can totally understand why that's the case. We're three-and-a-half hours from the closest city (Denver) with an NBA team, and they're not even in the same state. Beyond that, I suppose the next closest team would be the Dallas Mavericks.

Colby isn't exactly what you would describe as a great locale for NBA basketball, but it's that way with most Midwestern towns.

Other than the Chicago Bulls and Indiana Pacers, there's just not a whole heck of a lot of teams to root for in this part of the country.

That's why even in Kansas City or St. Louis, the NBA is not nearly as popular as Major League Baseball, college basketball, college football, the NFL or even hockey in some cases.

There are other reasons, too, why Midwesterners have a hard time supporting the NBA. The fact remains the NBA is a very urban league, and we're in a very rural part of the country. It's hard for a 55-year old farmer in Atwood to identify with someone like Carmelo Anthony or Dwight Howard.

That's the same reason I don't like hockey. I can't identify with any of the game's great players, because I didn't grow up near any of them. Had I been raised in Canada or somewhere in the northeast, it's a lot more likely I would follow the sport.

The NBA also has a negative stigma around it. It's not as bad as it used to be five to seven years ago, but a lot of people still think all the players are troublemakers. They think they make way too much money. In essence, they think NBA players are a bunch of spoiled

brats.

But no matter what you think about the NBA or the majority of players that comprise the league, I'm pleading with everyone here to at least give it a chance this post-season.

The NBA playoffs begin Saturday afternoon, and if the regular season was any indication it's going to be the most competitive two months in league history.

All eight teams in the West won at least 50 games for the first time ever. In the East, you've got at least four teams with a legitimate shot to get to the Finals.

You look at the matchups, and there's a few like Boston/Atlanta and Detroit/Philadelphia that will likely be over quickly. But I could see every other series legitimately going six or seven games. A lot of people think the Lakers are the favorites in the West, but there are so many good teams out there you can pretty much flip a coin to decide who is going to emerge from that conference.

I hear people complain the NBA playoffs are too long and prefer the one-and-done drama of the NCAA Tournament. I don't know about anyone else, but I like to see the best team be the one holding the trophy up at the end of the year. In a one-game situation, you don't know whether you're going to get that or not.

In baseball, it's even worse. Anytime the Colorado Rockies can get to the World Se-

Because we're not somebody



Steve Haynes

- Along the Sappa

There's been a lot of political hysteria about supposed "security breaches" with presidential candidates' passport files, but it seems to me that what the whole thing shows is that the State Department's system works.

It'll be a long time, I'd bet, before a contractor or regular employee tries to hack a VIP profile. State Department computer security people were onto the violations almost as soon as they occurred.

And with computers, there's not much more you can ask.

Security is supposed to keep people from getting into sensitive information, of course, but these were workers with authorization to look into passport files as part of their duties.

They got caught playing around, and they paid the price. The records were protected, no damage done.

Because people are people, this kind of stupid curiosity is to be expected. A security system can't keep insiders out of a file. It can flag violations. That's what happened.

So what does this mean to you and me?

Most likely, someone at State or another government agency could look in our passport files. It's not clear if we have the same kind of security that a presidential candidate gets, but

we may not need it.

Most of us don't have a Secret Service detail, either, but nobody wants to kill us and nobody wants to hack our files. Because we're not *somebody*.

It also shows the inherent dangers in government databases, dangers which will only grow as the databases become larger and more closely linked.

The security apparatus always pushes for more data and more linkage, but that's not always to the public's advantage.

Security people say they only want more power and more linkage so they can catch bad guys. And sure, that might happen, but information is information. It can be used against anyone.

Just ask Gov. Elliot Spitzer, whose bank

turned him in for having too much cash.

Some might say if you haven't done anything wrong, you have nothing to fear from the databases, from the security people who run it or from abuse. But that's not entirely true.

Information has a lot of uses, not all of them aboveboard. And if government contractors with idle time on their hands can get into Hillary Clinton's passport file, they surely can get into yours or mine.

So could people with mischief on their minds, political operatives, who know who all else. The average person would never know who has been snooping in his or her file.

Or what use they put that information to.

Maybe none. Maybe it's just harmless fooling around.

Maybe they got your Social Security number or your birth date.

The only way you'll know will be when something happens, and by then, it'll be too late.

The myth that data banks are our friends is just that, a myth. We'd all be better off if the government knew a lot less about us. But in this day and age, that's not likely to happen.

—Steve Haynes is president of Nor'West Newspapers including the Colby Free Press.

Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

