# Jpinion



### A Kansas **V**iewpoint

### Slow down and save?

From The Wichita Eagle

The trucking industry is reminding Americans about one of the easiest ways to save on gas — slow down. Former Kansas Gov. Bill Graves, president and CEO of American Trucking Associations, the industry's largest trade group, recently unveiled a proposal that could reduce national fuel use and greenhouse-gas emissions by getting truckers and all motorists to ease off the pedal.

Among the group's recommendations:

Reduce the national speed limit to 65 mph for all vehicles. A truck traveling 75 mph burns 27 percent more fuel than one going 65 mph, the report notes; install engine governors to limit new big rigs to 68 mph; reduce congestion by investing in highway improvements, with an initial focus on eliminating key bottlenecks; support stricter fuel-economy standards for trucks. ..

Employing all of the strategies would save, the ATA plan estimates, about 86 billion gallons of fuel over the next decade and prevent 900 million tons of carbon dioxide emissions. ...

Not only would slowing trucks make our highways safer, it would ease the pressure on everyone's pocketbooks. ...

Graves called on Congress to help support the program.

Good luck on that. In 1995, Congress repealed a national speed limit, and 32 states, including Kansas, now have speed limits of 70 mph or higher on some highways.

No lawmaker has yet stepped forward to endorse the ATA pro-

Maybe that's because many Americans like to complain about gas prices but show little inclination to slow down or take other easy steps to make their tank of fuel go further.

Which raises a fair question: How serious are we about finding solutions to our looming energy and environmental crises?

#### 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.

#### Where to write, call

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202/224-4774

U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202/224-6521

U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 2202 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. 202/225-2715 or Fax 202/225-5124

State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St. Rm. 143-N, Topeka, Kan. 66612. 785/296-7676 e mail: jmorriso@ink.org web: www.morrisonfamily.com

State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol, 300 SW 10th St., Rm. 128-S., Topeka, Kan. 66612, 785/296-7399 ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

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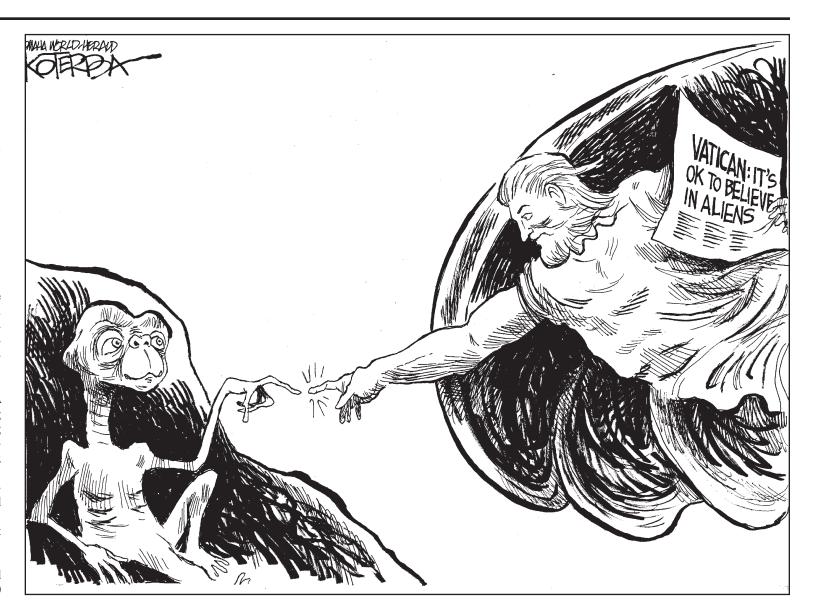
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Opinion 5-23-08.indd 1



# All in a day's work

From being out and about the last few weeks, it has become clearer than ever to me some people in this community simply don't understand the role of the newspaper.

Our job at the *Colby Free Press* is to report the news as fairly and accurately as we possibly can. Sometimes that news is positive and other times it's negative.

I try to promote organizations, teams and businesses as best I can, but I'm not a public relations consultant. Our job isn't limited to covering only the good things that go on in this community.

That's probably the biggest thing that bothers when I hear people preach to me what belongs in the newspaper and what doesn't. There are people who don't care to read one remotely negative story in this newspaper. If it were up to them, we'd be called the "Colby Happy Press."

I hate to break it to you, but that's not the way the world works.

Just because we're a community newspaper doesn't mean we should mask ourselves as simply a promotional vehicle for every person and every business in this town.

We're not ABC News or the New York Times, but that doesn't mean our journalistic standards should be any different.

This isn't Pleasantville. Plus, if we did run all positive stories that not only makes for a newspaper that's not credible, but also one that lacks any meat to it.

A certain amount of warm and fuzzy pieces are nice. Papers are more than that.

When I go to a school board meeting, there's a lot of glowing, wonderful things that get brought up. If I was employed by the Colby school district, those would be the only things that I would write about, but I'm not.

My job as a newspaper reporter at a school



#### Joe **Falkoff**

 A Sideline View

board meeting, for instance, is to cover the most important news and write about what I presume will be most interesting to the read-

I think it's great that we've had kids when awards or essay contests, and we've written at least one story for sure about those things, but does that take precedent over a good, hard news story?

At a respected newspaper it doesn't, even if that news is perceived as casting a black eye on something or someone.

As they say quite frequently in this business, don't blame the messenger.

Here, it's more like we don't even want a messenger unless that message is going to bring a smile to my face.

even take the time to respond. I'll make someone a promise, you bring me one negative article I've written, and I'll find

you 20 positive ones within five minutes. What's even more frustrating to me is how

people want to have it both ways. "O yea, we want the coverage all this coverage. Please come out and take pictures, write

a story." Then when something a little controversial comes up, it's like "just stay away. Why don't you write something positive for once?"

You've got to take the good with a bad.

That's the same way every person in every walk of life is evaluated.

My boss isn't going to forget all of the bad things I do just because I may have a lot of

It's the same way in newspaper, and people that don't understand that just have no concept

Someone in town who stands above the rest with regards to understanding the role of the media is Colby Trojan head men's basketball coach John Woods. That man has had every reason to avoid talking to the media the last two years, but time and time again he's been more than willing to be upfront and honest about his team. That's a truly standup guy for

Don't get me wrong, most every coach I've talked to has been great even after a loss, but there are a couple, and even a few athletes, that act totally different.

Anyone can talk to the media when things are going good. It's being able to talk after a loss or about a controversial topic that really shows someone's character.

Look, I'm not some investigative news reporter that's out to ruin people's lives. I'm a And for those who think all the stories I human being. I know the difference between rite are negative, that is so absurd I shouldn't trying to humiliate people and writing something that's actually newsworthy. Believe it or not, I do have a conscience.

> For the people out there that understand the newspaper's job is to report news good or bad, even if that makes some people upset, I applaud you. You get it.

For those that still believe we should only write about little Jimmy getting second place in an art contest, it doesn't work that way

-Joe Falkoff is a reporter for the Colby

## Each case has its own analysis

#### By Andrea Wyrick

Thomas County Attorney

Is it true that as you get older time goes by faster? I can't believe it is 2008 already and I am looking at completing my fourth year of working for the people of Thomas County.

Since there are still general questions about what the county attorney does, I thought this would be a good time to share with you what my office has been up to in the past year.

In 2007, our office filed 306 criminal cases, 37 juvenile offender cases, and 30 child-inneed-of-care cases. In addition, I have also consulted with the commissioners and Thomas county entities, worked on traffic cases and hot check cases, and worked with victims and law enforcement on alternative resolutions.

Another question I often get concerns plea bargains. Some of you want to know why plea bargains take place and why a felony would ever be reduced to a misdemeanor.

Again, this question has many different answers, but generally it is a case-by-case analysis. For example, if there is a problem with the evidence (making the case hard to prove) or the victim does not want to testify, then a plea

bargain is the best solution. Also, if the de- for a felony conviction, it might mean more to bargains might be appropriate for certain cases. Sometimes the victim or law enforcement even requests plea bargaining based on knowledge they have concerning the case. The other factor I have to consider is the Kansas Sentencing Guidelines. I know that in previous articles I have discussed the Guidelines and the role they play in plea bargaining, but they play a huge part in discussing why some felonies are reduced to misdemeanors. Although a misdemeanor doesn't sound as "scary" as a felony, they can be even more effective in restricting defendants and providing justice to victims.

It is very hard to send a defendant who commits a property crime to prison under the guidelines unless that defendant has an extensive criminal record. For most defendants, they fall under the "presumptive probation" range, which means they serve a nominal amount of time on Community Corrections, which is probation.

On the other hand, a misdemeanor can carry a one year jail sentence, with 12 months supervised probation with court services.

In a case where the guidelines state a defendant should serve six months on probation

fendant is young, or a first-time offender, plea a victim of that crime to have the defendant plea to a misdemeanor and be supervised longer, and have a longer jail sentence than the

Because the guidelines don't apply to misdemeanors, misdemeanor convictions can result in a more favorable outcome for victims and law enforcement. Both felonies and misdemeanors accumulate on the defendant's criminal record. While there are still cases where felonies are more appropriate, I hope this explanation provides you with information on why misdemeanors are equally important. The bottom line is that in each case a prosecutor must make a judgment call based on the facts involved, the applicable law, and the wishes of both law enforcement and victims.

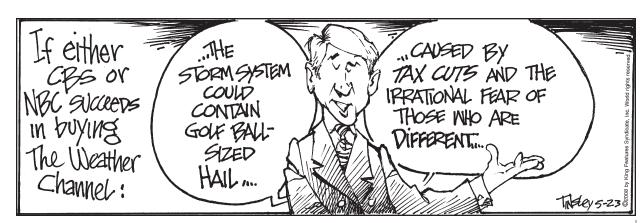
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