Opinion



Free Press Viewpoint

Influence is mighty

By Steve Haynes

Why should freedom of speech and of the press be allowed? Why should a government which is doing what it believes to be right allow itself to be criticized?

It should not allow opposition by lethal weapons. Ideas are much more fatal things than guns. Why should any man be allowed to buy a printing press and disseminate pernicious opinion calculated to embarrass the government?

Practical reality, or antidemocratic thinking at its worst?

Government leaders sometimes think they know what is best for us. They think it would be easier to "get things done" if they could work behind closed doors. To this way of thinking, allowing the public or its representatives, the press, to watch the government process is just a waste of time.

Behind closed doors, that's how government used to operate in America, despite our two-century pretension to democratic ideals.

Political parties chose candidates nominated in smoke-filled rooms. Party bosses made the decisions, sometimes voting uncommitted slates, making deals for ambassadorships, cabinet seats and pork-barrel projects.

City councils and state legislatures often went behind closed doors. Ward healers delivered the vote in city precincts, and candidates did as they were told once elected.

A lot has changed in America since that day. We come a lot closer to living up to our ideals.

Presidential candidates are chosen in an open process, involving millions of voters and far fewer back-room deals. States have laws requiring government meetings to be open and allowing citizens to inspect public documents.

Still, many officials might be tempted to agree with the words above. After all, they believe they are trying to do what is right. From hard experience and great devotion, they know the city or county or school district needs.

They miss the point: It's not just what government does that people need to know in a democracy, but why and how a decision was reached. Then, and only then, can voters make intelligent decisions on their leaders.

All that may sound high minded, theoretical. But people need to know what their officials are doing and why. They hire the press—newspapers, magazines, television stations, bloggers—to tell them what's going on. And it's hard to get a story right when decisions aren't made in the open.

The author of those words above? V.I. Lenin, founder of the Soviet state. Lenin did not start out to build a soulless government. He thought he was doing the right thing for "the people." He'd allow no one to get in his way.

One of our founders, Thomas Jefferson, had a different view. He believed a free press provided the only way for a large population to know the truth.

"If I had to choose between a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I would choose newspapers without a government," Jefferson wrote.

His pen helped shape the First Amendment, still the greatest statement of freedom in our history. It's spare language says more than many books. Its influence is mighty.

Today, no doubt, it would take a couple dozen pages to say all

Lucky we are to live in the shadow of Jefferson, and not of Lenin.

— Steve Haynes, president of Nor'West Newspapers including 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@nwkansas.com or pdecker@nw kansas.com. Opinions do not necessarily reflect the *Free Press*.

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John Van Nostrand - Publisher jvannostrand@nwkansas.com

<u>NEWS</u>

Patty Decker - Editor pdecker @ nwkansas.com

 $\label{eq:continuous_sign} \textbf{Joe Falkoff - General Assignment/Sports Reporter}_{jfalkoff @ nwkansas.com}$

Jan Ackerman - General Assignment jkackerman @ gmail.com

ADVERTISING

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

Jasmine Stewart - Advertising Sales j.stewart @ nwkansas.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

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

Kathy Arendt - Circulation, Classifieds karendt @ nwkansas.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator support @ nwkansas.com

NOR'WEST PRESS

Jim Bowker - General Manager

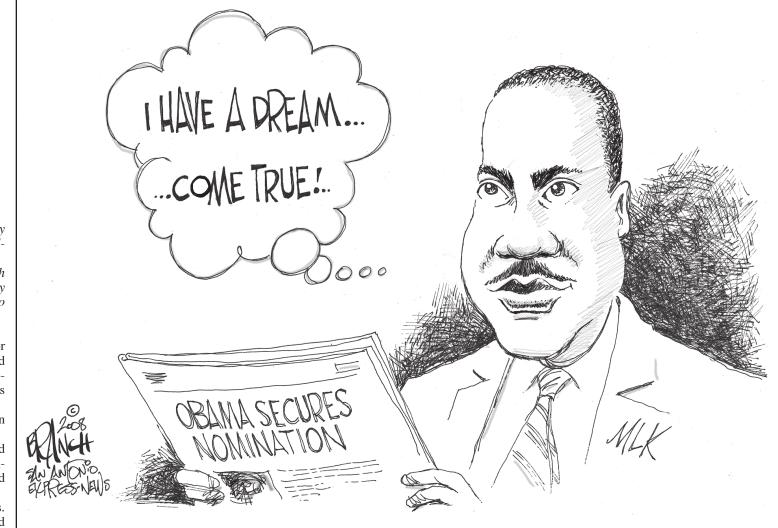
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Tomatoes? What's next?

The recall of tomatoes is a conspiracy.

I don't know who is conspiring what, but in my mind, it's got to be germ warfare or another ploy to drive up the price on something we want to buy. If they don't get us at the gas pumps, the next plot is the grocery store.

It's an election year so there's bound to be efforts to thwart our happiness one way or another - our wallets or our stomachs. Just watch, sometime between now and November's general election, one of the candidates, federal level that is, will announce he or she has solved the mystery of who is growing salmonella-laced tomatoes.

It beats me as to why Americans won't stop driving long enough to hold oil producers or refiners at bay, or wherever the high prices at the pump are coming from. And I'm sure going to be the last one to figure out what's up with the round, red, Roma tomato.

But, one thing I do know for sure is I can't wait until November. Not because that's when Thanksgiving takes place, but because the election commercials will end. That is until next year when the race for governor and state



representatives and local school boards begin.

Don't get me wrong, I think everyone has the right to run for an elected office, but come on, don't promise me the moon and only de-

liver the next block.

It is exasperating, but I did find one solution to my perplexity about the situation.

There, sitting on the counter of the local floral shop was something that exactly depicted how I feel about elections.

ith the round, red, Roma tomato.

A ceramic cup became the highlight of my day Tuesday morning as I picked it up, purait until November. Not because that's when chased it and went back to my desk.

A cup. How simple an object, but such a profound statement it makes.

A ceramic cup and painted on it was a draw- Colby Free Press.

ing of a woman that displays how I feel about elections.

Leaning backward against her kitchen cabinets, the woman stands planted on her right foot with her left heel slightly raised with her arms stretched out wide across the area where the kitchen sink rests behind her. She stands there, donned a lace apron, with her hair flying in all directions, knowing if she turns around the only think that will greet her is an army of dirty dishes.

The flowers in a vase on the window sill hang lifeless, almost touching a large pot to the right of the sink.

Plates, bowls, cups and saucers and a host of silverware are stacked high enough to almost reach the cupboards which hang on the wall on each side of the window.

But, the woman, who minus gray hair, reminds me of my late mom, and, out of her desperation of the situation (hers dishes, mine elections), utters....

"I need chocolate! Now!"

— Jan Katz Ackerman is a reporter for the Colby Free Press

Your turn

Are we for real?

By Carol Johnson Colby

I was watching a little television the other night when I was struck like a slap in the face by a statement of fact regarding a hotel in Las

Vegas.

The Luxor Hotel has a tower lit up like a lighthouse. The light uses 10,000 candlewatts of power and can be seen by airline pilots from 250 miles away. What a contrast to the extraordinary efforts on the part of Greensburg to go green in every way as they rebuild their

community.

That started me thinking about all the talk about environmental issues vs. how we really live in this country. I'm a firm believer that we are called to be good stewards of the earth, our home, and all its precious resources. Now, I'm not one of those people who will chain themselves to a tree and stop men from earning their living and other such radical actions. Those workers are not the problem. Those men are just trying to earn a living and feed their families. Rather it's the mentality of the

However, I do believe each of us not only should but must live as responsibly as possible for the sake of succeeding generations. Therefore, I recycle, use green products available from the store, remember most times to use my purchased bags instead of plastic at Dillons and Wal-Mart and try to make my home as energy efficient as I can.

On a microcosmic level, I've been frustrated in my recycling attempts. It seems a lot of the recyclable plastics are numbered #5. We have no #5 recycle bin at our local recycling center. The workers there told me to just throw them away. When I asked why we do not have a #5 bin, I was told "that's what we'd like to know."

Hmmm....look's like a simple step to me to improve our efforts at responsible living.

On a macrocosmic level, I return to the subject of the Luxor Hotel. As absolutely commendable as Greensburg's commitment is, let's face it – it's a drop in the bucket. Now remember: every drop in the bucket counts. It doesn't really solve the problem though does it? I shudder to think how much energy places like Las Vegas, New York City and other desti-

nation cities not just waste but squander.

Great word — squander. Webster defines it

as "to spend extravagantly or foolishly."

That's why so much of the world hates us.

Because we're foolish regarding how we use our resources while so much of the rest of the world goes without. We do it 'because we can' and the world sees it as selfish and arrogant, uncaring and prideful.

Now, I'm not advocating we go dark. That is not our culture. I am saying, however, that there needs to be a major change.

It's not necessary to waste so much in glitz and glam and frivolity. Until we choose to cut back, outlaw gross waste and truly rethink how we live, work and play we are only applying band-aids not addressing the systemic wound. In this culture we think of our children and sometimes our grandchildren. It's not enough.

Native Americans always thought out how every ecological action would effect future generations to five generations out. Will there be anything left for the fifth generation from today? Until we think this way, say what we will, we are not "for real."

About those letters . . .

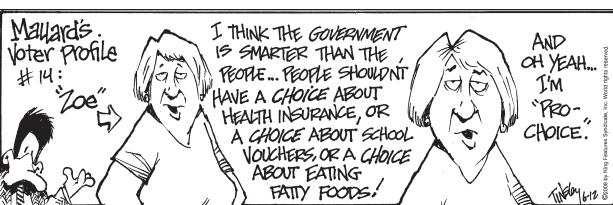
powers above them that are the problem.

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Mallard Fillmore

Bruce

Tinsley



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