

Opinion



Free Press Viewpoint

Are celebrities qualified for office?

OK, Kansas surely has its share of colorful characters. But one thing we haven't done is elect a movie star, professional wrestler or comedian to high office.

We can be glad right now we aren't Minnesotans, who surely will be the butt of some jokes for their apparent election of comedian Al Franken as their U.S. senator. After a long and painstaking recount, a state board has certified that the Democrat edged out Republican Norm Coleman by 225 votes. A challenge is still pending, so this isn't official.

Minnesota would be the same state that elected former pro wrestler Jesse Ventura as governor in 1998.

Movie stars sometimes rise high in politics. Maybe it should not be a surprise when that happens in California, which of course elected Arnold Schwarzenegger and Ronald Reagan as governor of the most populous — and sometimes the most goofy — state in the union.

Franken actually seems to be a serious, legitimate political aspirant. Still, it is hard not to see him as Stuart Smalley. We don't know if he's good enough or smart enough to be a senator, but, doggone it, they like him in Minnesota.

Said Franken in a statement about the election recount: "It has been a remarkable couple of months. Our recount brought national attention to Minnesota, and what Americans saw is that we take our democracy seriously."

Don't know exactly that we would say Minnesotans take democracy seriously. But Minnesota isn't alone. Minnesota, like California, joins the ranks of other states that have elected entertainment personalities and pro athletes to higher office.

Of course, Kansas elected Olympic miler Jim Ryun to Congress for a spell. But by and large, while we may elect folks who some regard as whackos, generally we stick to people with political qualifications.

— *The Hutchinson News, via The Associated Press*

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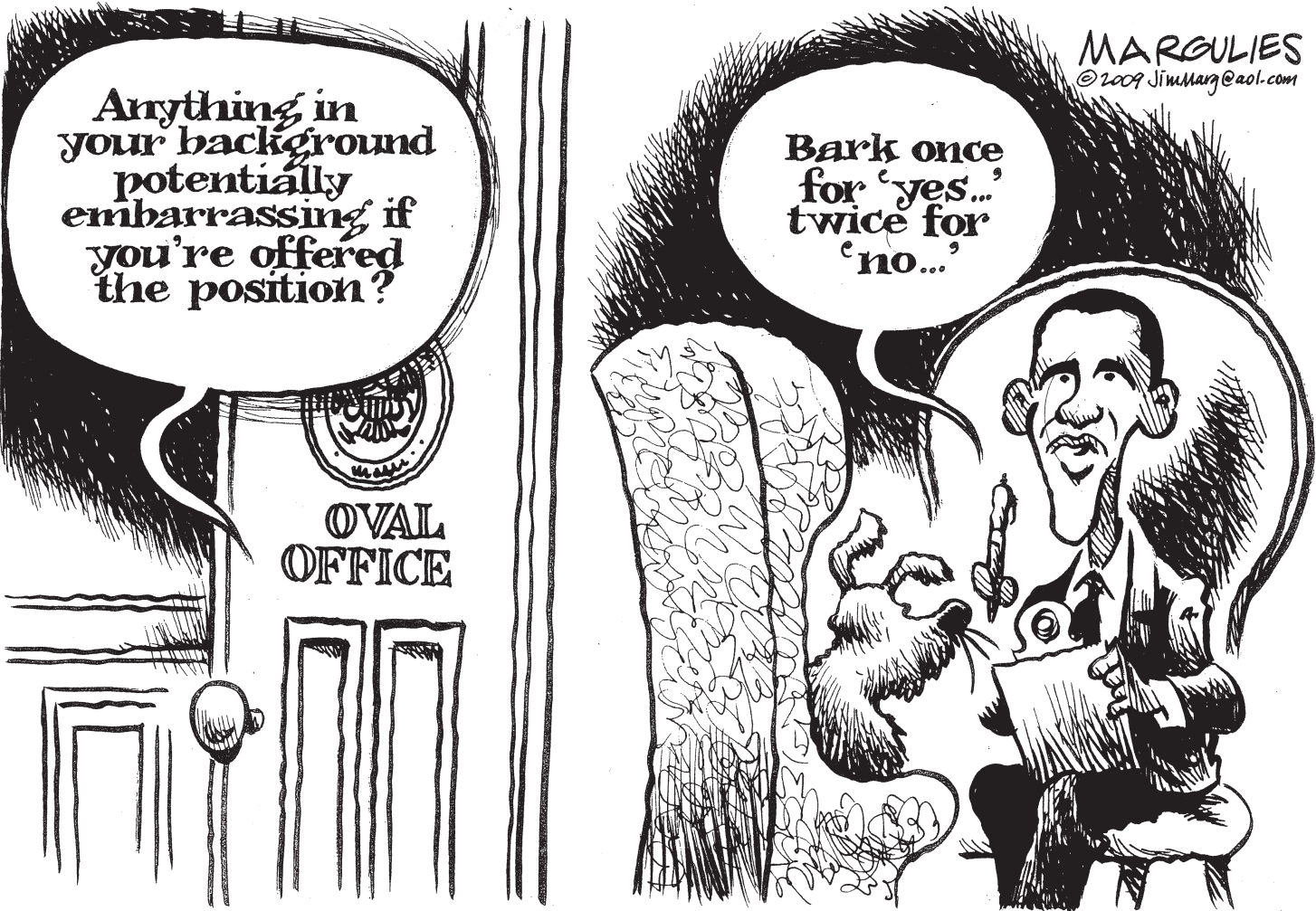
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Environmentalism must go mainstream

The future of America will depend on how we choose to deal with today's energy crisis. If we choose the wrong path, it will lead to problems that will take decades to overcome. But if we choose the correct path, it will lead to increased jobs, decreased poverty, a cleaner environment and a healthier, more stable economy.

I am convinced that the United States needs to restructure our economy to meet the environmental and economic challenges of the 21st century. To continue relying on our gray, pollution-based, throwaway economy is a recipe for disaster.

America can free itself from foreign oil, decrease our reliance on dirty coal and create millions of new green jobs in the process if we have the courage to act.

What we need is a "green New Deal" that will create millions of jobs for the upper, middle and lower classes.

Advocates for an economy that is environmentally friendly and economically feasible need to emphasize how many "green-collar jobs" would be created if we really got serious about promoting alternative forms of energy. The idea of green-collar jobs was coined by Van Jones, author of "The Green Collar Economy: How one solution can fix our two biggest problems."

It means "blue collar employment that has been upgraded to better respect the environment." Examples include electricians who install solar panels; plumbers who install solar water heaters; construction workers who retrofit buildings and weatherize houses, and rural workers who help build windmills. Other green collar jobs would be sorting recycled prod-



Andy Heintz

• Wildcat Ramblings

ucts, selling salvageable materials, growing and selling food from urban gardens grown in what used to be vacant parking lots, installing low-flow toilets, and putting up solar panels. These are just a few examples of what would be available in a clean energy economy.

Today's environmental movement is destined to face fierce resistance. Anytime someone comes up with a new idea, it is met with stiff opposition. This situation will be no different.

Today reformers will face an array of opposition groups who will stridently oppose any changes in the status quo. This group will include free-market fundamentalists, militant libertarians, corporate executives of pollution-based companies making obscene profits in the current system and people who distrust anything out of the ordinary. These groups are not full of bad people, but their vision is rooted in the past at a time when America needs to reinvent its economy so we can prosper in the future.

If the proponents of a renewable economy want to win the hearts and minds of the American people, they will need to drastically change people's basic perceptions about environmentalism. A significant portion of people residing in rural and urban America see the en-

vironmental movement as nothing more than an eco-elite composed of Hollywood actors, hippies and students from Ivy League colleges.

To put it simply, today's environmentalists are seen as foreign to many Americans. This exclusivist image could prevent environmentalists from gaining the support of the majority of Americans. In order to get the American people to accept its ideas, today's environmental movement will need to rebrand itself.

Jones may have discovered a way for environmentalists to do that. In his book, he argues that environmentalists can change public perception if they support eco-populist policies that provide eco-equity for all. I agree wholeheartedly.

While it's OK to try to help the polar bears, environmentalists should also promote greening the ghetto and installing windmills in economically impoverished rural towns. They should emphasize that green collar jobs can replace jobs that have been outsourced to other countries and they should support green jobs, not more jails in the inner city.

A green economy needs to be structured so it lifts all boats as opposed to a few yachts — belonging to those who are already doing quite well. A green economy can be set up so it preserves the environment and significantly decreases poverty.

Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate, is sports reporter for the Colby Free Press. He says he loves K-State athletics and fishing, sports and opinion writing.

Decision to relocate disregarded danger

On Monday, Jan. 12, the Department of Homeland Security announced that the Plum Island, N.Y., facilities that currently conduct research on dangerous and highly contagious animal health diseases such as foot-and-mouth disease will be relocated to Manhattan, Kan., smack-dab in the heart of cattle country.

The new lab will be called the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility.

What is disheartening about Monday's announcement is that the deadline for public comment on the Manhattan campus site's Environmental Impact Statement was midnight on Jan. 12. This tells us in no uncertain terms that the bureaucrats already had made up their minds to approve the Kansas location and chose to blatantly disregard any concerns the public may have submitted in formal comments. Only time will tell what sort of political favors were involved in this unsuitable decision.

Proponents of moving the Plum Island facilities to the U.S. mainland claim that jobs created and the economic boon outweigh any risk of foot-and-mouth disease escaping from the lab and ruining the U.S. cattle industry. Keep in mind that the Plum Island facility was offshore and had natural barriers to prevent this and other diseases from affecting animals and humans on the mainland. In 1978, there was a leak on Plum Island, but the natural barriers prevented a catastrophe.

Other Opinions

• Dr. Max Thornsberry R-CALF USA President

There are no natural barriers at the Manhattan campus site. Just last year, the campus was struck by a tornado, and foot-and-mouth can be transmitted long distances via air. In 2007 in the United Kingdom — due to human error — it leaked from a Merial vaccination lab and infected animals in the surrounding area. And don't forget what the UK suffered in the 2001 outbreak — almost total destruction of it cattle, sheep and hog industries.

Kansas ranks third in economic importance to the U.S. live cattle industry. Should a leak occur, it would pose a strategic vulnerability to the economic viability of the U.S. cattle industry as a whole. The highly contagious nature of this and other diseases to be kept in the lab dictate that only a site far removed from significant livestock and meat production — and one protected by natural barriers — should be considered. Only the Plum Island site meets these crucial criteria.

It is irresponsible for Homeland Security to

increase the inherent risk of a disease outbreak by willfully introducing disease pathogens in a strategically vulnerable location. The consequences of an inadvertent disease outbreak in such an area would most severely harm the very sectors of the U.S. economy and U.S. population that the facility is supposed to protect: the U.S. livestock herd, U.S. cattle producers and U.S. red meat consumers.

It is simply unconscionable that Homeland Security would proceed with its ill-conceived plan, particularly when the Government Accountability Office reports that there is no evidence to conclude that foot-and-mouth research can be done safely on the mainland.

R-CALF USA respectfully requests that the Department of Homeland Security abandon its plans to locate the facility in Kansas. There is no amount of job creation or economic boon that can justify the disaster that awaits this country should a leak occur. R-CALF will encourage Congress and the next administration to make certain this sort of disease research remains on Plum Island.

Max Thornsberry is president and Region VI director of R-CALF USA, the Ranchers-Cattlemen Action Legal Fund, United Stockgrowers of America, representing Arkansas, Kansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri and Oklahoma. A veterinarian, he also chairs the group's animal health committee.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

