

Volume 120, Number 124 Monday, August 10, 2009



**Free Press** Viewpoint

# Debate demands a return to civility

Whatever you think of the health-care issue, the protests at town hall meetings have simply gone too far.

These kinds of protests have happened throughout this century, but the fact that six people got arrested for disrupting a forum in St. Louis, last week is an indication that we - some of us, anyway - have forgotten that civility, politeness and restraint matter in politics.

Everyone is the hero of his or her own story. Everyone thinks they have the right answers and anyone who disagrees is wrong. Now this isn't bad in and of itself, but it has led to a lack of respect for other people, and in some cases even hatred.

It's a terrible thing when our political discussions have devolved the point where ordinary people are driven to hate their neighbors simply because they want or don't want a government-administered health plan.

We need a return to civility in politics. We need to get back to respecting those on the other side, to accepting that we may be wrong, or at least that they might be just as right as we are.

This does not mean we all need to have the same ideas, be in the same political party or be the same in any way. Disagreement is great. Passion is great. People need to feel strongly about the issues or there's no point in even participating. Without passion, no one would run for office, lobby, join a political party or even vote. However, being passionate to the point of getting arrested over a political issue accomplishes nothing.

These people will tell you that they showed the ultimate passion for their cause. To get arrested in the name of something you believe is just short of dying for it. Maybe they're right.

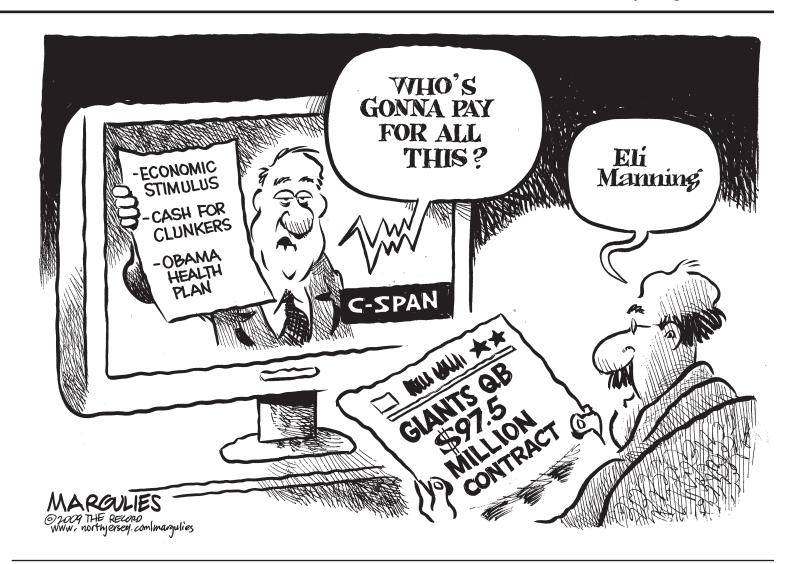
Unless the goal of these protests is to show everyone how far people will go to oppose new laws, the arrests didn't accomplish much at all. They have shown us that there are people who vehemently disagree with any public option in health care. Big deal. We knew that already. There have been loud voices for and against this idea for decades.

When you're supporting or opposing an issue like this, don't you want to persuade people that your take on this is the right one? And isn't the best way to persuade people still a wellreasoned argument?

If you come up to a person yelling and waving a sign in their face, does that make them more or less inclined to join your side? Even people who see you on television will merely shake their heads in disapproval and then go back to their vacuuming. Now if you come up to them, engage them in a civil conversation, you have a much better chance of convincing them you're right. Didn't we all learn this when we were kids?

One thing they might accomplish is to end these town hall meetings on the subject, which is too bad. They are an excellent way for government officials to really engage in a dialogue with the people. But they aren't going to happen if they keep getting disrupted.

With an issue this important, there needs to be debate. A lot of it. We need to have senators, congressmen and presidents alongside ordinary citizens expounding their ideas and opinions with passion and force and verve. But shouldn't they also do so with dignity, civility and respect for the other side, who, after all, are Americans too? This was what the founding fathers, who often disagreed vehemently with each other, had in mind. If you want your opinion out there, and you want to be respected and listened to – and most of all, if you want to show people that you are right – then show you are also willing to listen with respect.



## News and books hold fascination for all

A newsroom is a fascinating place, with a new topic every hour, it seems.

Taxes and veterinarians, accidents and school budgets, file cabinets and farm woes, have all been in the air around my desk the last few days. Sports and foreign travels, and how to make them all fit on the page, are on the front burner all the time.

Yet the stories that are talked about today are pushed aside tomorrow. They aren't new anymore, and must step aside for others.

As the name of my column implies, I'm fascinated by the connections between all these very different pieces of our lives.

Another place that never ceases to astound me by the sheer diversity I find there is the public library (or any library, for that matter). I visited the book sale Saturday afternoon – the last half of the last day – and came away with only three - boxes, that is. I've learned over the years that I have to wait until they've been picked over, or I get just too many. I've also learned that it's sensible to only take books I can easily imagine picking up and reading within the next week. This defends me somewhat from the lure of such items as "The Statistical Abstract of the United States" from 1995.

In books, as in newspapers, there are new topics all the time. The cycle is longer - it typically takes months to publish a book – but topics come and go. Some get used up, like all. One of my favorite genres is science ficcelebrity scandals. Some get used up and are tion, in which any and all rules may be suslater reopened.



tory of World War II. I understand that he's currently considered to be a bit of a misogynist, but I still think his voice is an important part of the story of his times.

That's one thing I notice about books. The voice of the storyteller is often as important as the story being told. A storyteller who experienced the Battle of Britain speaks in a different way from a storyteller who experienced Woodstock. That is one of the truths a newspaper sometimes doesn't show as well. Our stories are current, and they are written to convey facts rather than interpretation, for the most part.

Books, though, can be lavishly interpretative. Some take facts, and work at understanding what they mean for us. Books on food and nutrition, for example, seek to translate scientific findings into practical, usable tools. Knowing what is good for you doesn't matter if you don't like it and won't eat it.

Other books don't start with many facts at pended. Interstellar vacations, talking planets, Several of the books I got the other day are machines controlling people - these are just a tor for the Colby Free Press. She collects ideas, ones that are somewhat out of favor right now, few of the avenues explored by science fiction. which are more portable than other stuff. such as Winston Churchill's five-volume his- Yet somehow these books always come back

to the common elements that unite us all - life and death, family and isolation, unity and diversity, war and peace. The unusual settings bring out the common elements.

What do all forms of literature have in common? They are a means of teaching and learning. Sometimes they don't teach much of value, as in the tabloid articles about being kidnapped by aliens. Sometimes you stumble across something that is literally life-changing. It could point to a new career, explain a weird medical symptom or simply give your imagination a boost. It could be the key to unraveling a puzzle, or the comfort that ends a long personal struggle.

What books do - what newspapers do - is make the world bigger. They help us to imagine places and things we've never seen before. We here at the Colby Free Press seek to be faithful to this calling, helping you to know our community better. We are constantly learning new things and seeking to pass them on to you through the written word.

We can't bring the whole world to your doorstep, any more than a single book can tell you every detail about every subject in the world. What we can do is bring the community to your doorstep. If you know of something we've missed, we need you to bring it to us, so we can pass it on. After all, everyone can benefit from shared knowledge.

Marian Ballard has collected careers as counselor librarian pastor and now convedi-

- Kevin Bottrell

#### Colby Free Press (USPS 120-920)

155 W. Fifth St. Colby, Kan. 67701

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THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday Thursday and Friday, except the days observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Nor'West Newspaper, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

PERIODICALS POSTAGE paid at Colby, Kan. 67701, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701

THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday to Friday, closed Saturday and Sunday. MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, which is exclusively entitled to the use for publication of all news herein. Member Kansas Press Association and National Newspaper Association

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: In Colby, Thomas County and Oakley: three months \$35, one year \$85. By mail to ZIP Codes beginning with 676 and 677: three months \$39, one year \$95. Elsewhere in the U.S., mailed once per week: three months \$39, one year \$95 Student rate, nine months, in Colby, Thomas County and Oakley, \$64; mailed once per veek elsewhere in the U.S. \$72

### Be wise to the ways of the rays

The next time you take time out of the sun, dust off one of those old family photo albums. You know the ones that date back to the '30s, '40s, '50s and even early '60s. If your family farmed, you'll see photos of your relatives attired in wide-brimmed hats.

Look at their shirts. You'll see they wore loose-fitting, long-sleeved, light-colored garments.

Now fast forward to the late '60s and early '70s. Clothing styles have changed. You don't see too many long-sleeved shirts any longer. Broad-brimmed hats have been replaced with ball caps proclaiming seed, feed, tractors, organizations and just about any company logo under the sun.

Today's farmer no longer wears the clothing of yesteryear - clothing that afforded protection from the sun's ultraviolet rays. Instead, he or she wears a smaller, softer, snug-fitting cap that will not blow off and bump into machinery. Farmers like their hats cheap or free, and they want them colorful.

This ball cap is comfortable and affordable, but it does not protect the temples, the tender, delicate ear tips and the back of the neck. The low-profile cap doesn't extend far enough to guard against the sun.

Numerous studies have been tracking skin cancer and the sun's harmful impact on farmers and other segments of our society since the early '80s. Kansas Farm Bureau Safety Director Holly Higgins reports more than 67,000 new cases of skin cancer will be diagnosed in the United States this year.

Ultraviolet rays are the leading carcinogen on the farm today, Higgins notes. But with



early diagnosis, treatment is possible. The safety director encourages farmers to insist on inspection for skin cancer as part of their regular physical each year.

"You just can't have sun without skin cancer unless you take protective measures," Higgins says. "Dermatologists recommend that anyone working or playing in the sunshine protect their skin completely by wearing clothing and a wide-brimmed hat."

Others, including the American Cancer Society say there is a skin-cancer epidemic in this country. The number of cases is rising as fast or faster than any other tumor being charted today.

A major reason skin cancer may be on the rise is more leisure time and more exposure to the sun. Today, more people spend longer time in the sun and wear less clothing.

While it may be too late for some older farmers and ranchers, education for teens and young farmers on skin cancer may help them later in life.

Working in the sun is unavoidable for some occupations. However, there are ways to reduce your exposure to the harmful UVA and UVB rays the sun emits.

"Avoid direct exposure to sunlight - espe-

cially between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.," Higgins savs. "Wide-brimmed hats, protective clothing and sunscreen with a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of 30 all work together to safeguard your skin."

Farm supply stores and catalogs offer specialized clothing and headwear made with sunprotective fabrics to help you avoid sunburn, premature aging, immune system suppression and skin cancer.

Today's farmers and ranchers would be well advised to take a chapter out of their dusty old family albums and return to those days of floppy, wide-brimmed straw hats and longsleeved, baggy cotton shirts.

Who knows?

Maybe they could start a new fashion craze as well as protecting their skin from the damaging rays of the sun.

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm near Seguin, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

### Write us

The Colby Free Press encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of general interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

We do not publish anonymous letters.



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