



Free Press Viewpoint

Local elections important to locals

Are all politics truly local? If you watched any of the major news networks this week, you might come away with the impression that there were only about 10 important elections this year. How woefully inadequate that coverage is. Even in an “off year” such as 2009, there are hundreds of important elections all across the country, starting right here in Colby. The people of Colby on Tuesday approved a new 3/4 percent sales tax to pay for a swimming pool and fire station. This was not a regular election, of course, but one scheduled when the issue came up over the summer. Many cities had regular elections.

The city of Boulder, Colo., also approved a new sales tax in addition to three other ballot issues and five council members. The city of Minneapolis, Min., elected 13 city council members, a mayor, two members of their tax board and nine members of the Parks and Recreation Board.

Some cities had elections earlier in the year. The city of North Las Vegas, Nev., elected a mayor, two city council members and a municipal judge in June. Some have them later. Our neighbor to the northeast, the city of Oberlin, is having an election in December to decide whether or not to prohibit the city from building a new runway at the airport.

Perhaps the reason that so few elections have received national scrutiny this year is because there are so few this year for national jobs. Only two states plus the Northern Mariana Islands, a commonwealth and territory of the United States, were electing governors, and there were only five special elections for the House of Representatives. In a media culture where everything has been boiled down to Red State vs. Blue State, there must not be room for anything else.

Take the Mariana Islands, which will hold their elections on Saturday. They aren’t getting any attention because, while their representative can vote in committee, he or she cannot vote on the House floor in Washington.

Their gubernatorial election is far more interesting than it might seem, given the lack of coverage. Current Gov. Benigno Fitial left the Republican Party to found the Covenant Party in 2001. It advocates government and financial reform and, since its founding, has become a popular party. However, in 2007 the Covenant Party lost some ground in the Commonwealth Legislature. Fitial is the first elected official from his ethnic group, the Carolinians, to win the governorship. Fitial’s opponents are Heinz Hofschneider; a Republican legislator; Ramon Guerrero, an independent former senator; and Juan Guerrero, a former senator and congressman.

Polling currently puts Fitial and Hofschneider neck and neck. And while this may not seem a momentous contest to many of us, it is supremely important the people of Saipan, Tinian and all of the other Northern Mariana Islands.

This is why these smaller elections are no less important than those of so-called “national interest.” They often decide the fates of our mayors and council members, roads and bridges, our local economies and schools and in a very real sense, our quality of life.

— Kevin Bottrell

We encourage comments on opinions expressed on this page. Mail them to the *Colby Free Press*, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701, or e-mail s.haynes @ nwkansas.com or colby.editor @ nwkansas.com. Opinions do not necessarily reflect those of the *Free Press*, its staff or the owners.

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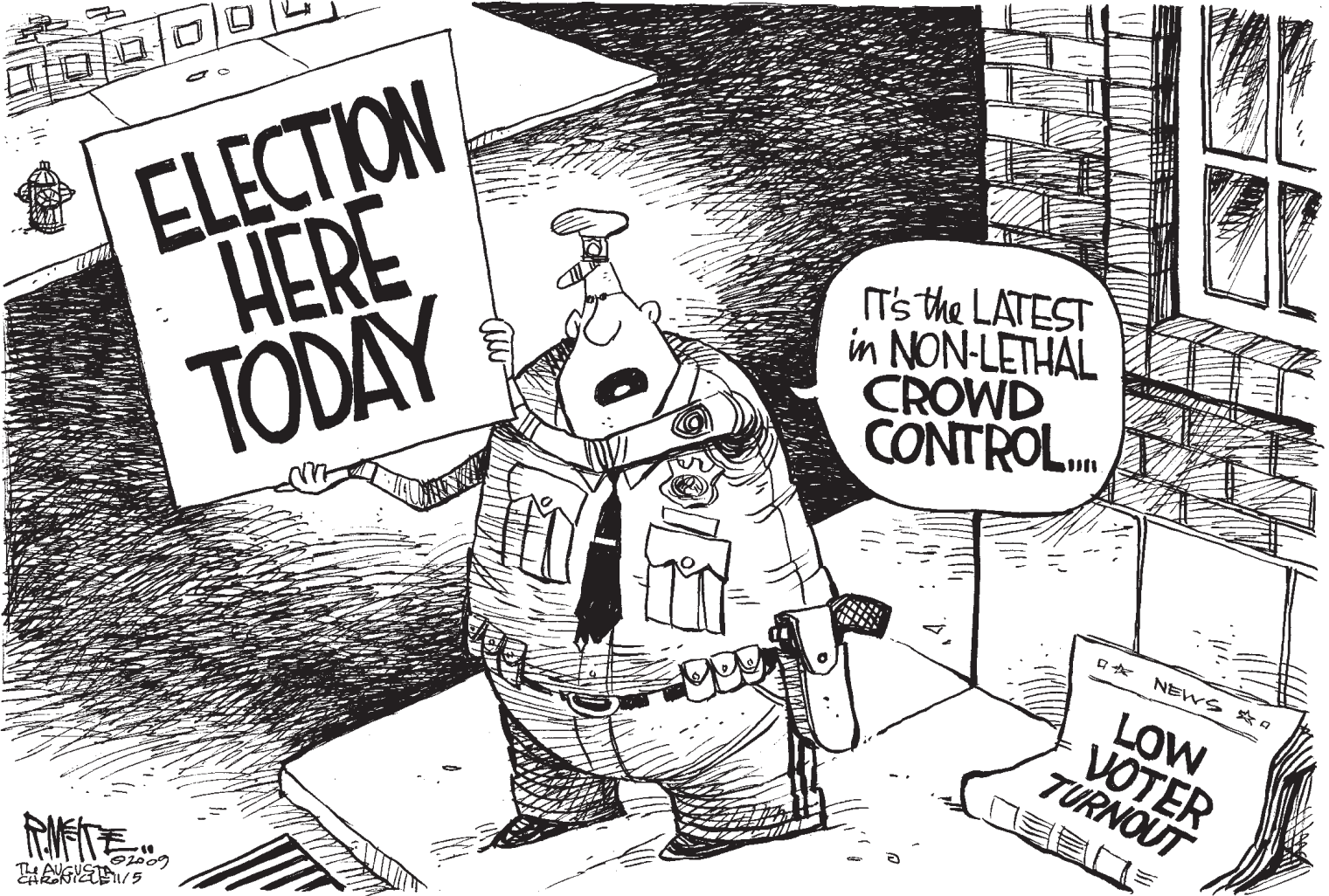
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Here’s to light in a darkening season

It’s probably odd, but I always associate fall, a season of shorter days, with light.

The sun is at a different angle and shines into windows which have been cast in shade all summer.

The shade trees, after faithfully protecting us from heat and glare all summer, have transformed their parasols into a winter quilt to keep their toes warm. The intricate traceries of twigs hidden for months are evident to all.

And there’s one more thing, a bit of an oddity in this first decade of the 21st century.

Throughout my childhood, one clear, warm autumn weekend would be dedicated to an annual ritual – putting up storm windows. Of course, the reverse process, putting up screens, was done in the spring, but that had to do with fresh air. Storm windows, on the other hand, welcomed in the light.

The old screens, far more than modern combination windows, tended to darken rooms. Not a lot, maybe, but when they came down the difference was immediately apparent. That, and the accompanying ritual, made the house seem instantly brighter.

And it was a ritual. The windows not in use, whether screens or storms, hibernated on the rafters of the garage. Dad would get up on the ladder and lift them down one by one, handing them off to whichever kid was big enough to



Marian Ballard

• Collection Connections

help. Being the youngest, I watched for a lot of years before I was trusted to take even one of the smaller windows.

As soon as they were down, the windows were lined up against the side of the garage, the house, and the picket fence that ran between them. A garden hose, a bucket of soapy water and a few handfuls of dry rags (old T-shirts seemed best) followed, and then every inch of glazing compound had to be checked and repaired. For you greenhorns, that’s the stuff that holds the glass in the window, sort of like caulking.

Meanwhile, Mom was busy in the house with her end of the job. If the weather was decent, the curtains came down to wash and were hung on the clothesline to absorb that special irreplaceable “sunshine” smell.

Venetian blinds were next. Those that weren’t too dirty got a quick vacuuming before being pulled clear to the top of the windows.

Others might get tougher treatment, with the slats taken out and wiped down in a bathtub full of soapy water. Mini blinds don’t work the same, which may be a good thing.

While all of this was going on, each window had to be opened enough to unfasten the screen, and then closed again. The screens came down, and it was time for window washing! Dad was outside with a ladder and a bucket. Mom was inside, with a step stool and a bottle of Windex. They did both sides at once, so streaks on either side could be found and wiped away. By the time they were done, the whole house seemed three shades brighter.

By evening, the storm windows were on, keeping those drafty breezes out of the newly cozy house, and the clean curtains were hung, bringing inside the freshness of the tail end of summer. For days afterward, the house seemed brighter.

I’m not much of an artist, but I’ve heard painters go to Mediterranean countries because of the quality of the light. As for me, I’ll take the High Plains on a clear fall afternoon.

Marian Ballard has collected careers as counselor, librarian, pastor, and now copy editor for the Colby Free Press. She collects ideas, which are more portable than other stuff.

Free publication sets a high standard

Many Kansas teachers have a classroom set. Scout leaders and park naturalists rely on them in the field. Serving thousands of readers (from elementary children to the homebound elderly looking out the window at their bird feeders), the 16-page *Kansas School Naturalist* continues to provide Kansans with an accurate and high-interest resource about the natural world.

The issue recently mailed describes “sericea lespedeza,” the bush clover invading westward across Kansas. Since grazing animals avoid it, sericea is taking over pastures. This issue describes how to distinguish it from the other Kansas bush clovers and provides maps and control measures. And the publication is completely free.

How can a publication operating in the public good (185 titles and over a million copies sent) be free? The only costs are printing and mailing. Authors contribute time. While there is a small university allocation, enough to print one issue a year, the cost of mailing that issue and printing others is now mostly supported by contributions from readers, from professional societies and agencies for specific issues, and from foundation grants. By staying a simple operation and working “in the public good,” the magazine is delivered to the desks of teachers and other readers very economically.

Similar publications moved off of this delivery system in an era that believed everything should be privatized. They either went online-only or charged subscriptions — and disappeared.

The *Kansas School Naturalist* is available online at www.emporia.edu/ksn/. But issues are mostly laboratory and field guides for use away from computer terminals. Printing of-line results in a poor-quality copy compared with high-resolution printing. We do provide supplementary teaching materials (and translations in Spanish and Chinese for some issues) online. But most website hits result in requests



John Richard Schrock

• Education Frontlines

for printed copies.

Publications that switch to online-only often lose readership, are no longer available by interlibrary loan, are no longer archived and completely disappear at a rate of 10 percent every 15 months.

Moving to paid subscriptions dramatically increases costs, requiring a secretary to keep records and mail expiration notices to subscribers. The *Journal of Outdoor Education* moved to paid subscriptions, and died. A private market model is too expensive and just not economical for a noncommercial service operating in the public good.

The *Kansas School Naturalist* began publication in 1954, modeled after famous Cornell Science Leaflets (now also gone) that spurred many youngsters into science careers. For many who ask: “Why are so few youngsters going into sciences today?”, some of the answer may be that far fewer quality natural history publications are making it into the hands of today’s kids.

The magazine relies on world experts to write issues. The world head of virus taxonomy co-authored the virus classification issue, a world authority on tardigrades wrote that issue, and the world’s expert on springtails authored the springtail issue.

The publication also serves one function of a biological survey: we publish checklists by authorities. While a kindergarten teacher can use the pictures in the “Checklist of Kansas Butterflies” to help a child identify an insect,

that same issue is also valuable to graduate researchers.

If you normally received the magazine but did not receive the sericea lespedeza issue, be sure to resubscribe. Due to new postal regulations, over 1,700 addresses had to be dropped in our last mailing because they used old “rural routes” and not new rural street numbers.

The following *Kansas School Naturalists* are still available free upon request: Making an Insect Collection, Pseudoscience of Animals and Plants, Scientific/Common Names, Butterflies of Kansas, Bone Names, Muscle Names, Springtails, Prairie Fires, Ants of Kansas, Yucca Plant/Yucca Moth, Backyard Birds, Animals in Succession, Dragonflies of Kansas, Tardigrades, Damselies of Kansas, Greater Prairie Chicken, Feral Pigeons, Centipedes and Millipedes, Carpenter Ants, Freshwater Muscels, Virus Classification, Toxicology, Stream Ecology, Permian Fossils of Elmo, Kan., Orb-weaving Spiders, Crab Spiders, Jumping Spiders, Ground Spiders and Sericea Lespedeza.

To subscribe free or request back issues, write to: *Kansas School Naturalist*, Department of Biological Sciences, Box 4050, Emporia State University, Emporia, Kan. 66801.

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