



## Free Press Viewpoint

# Gridlock blocks debate solutions

Is our federal government really broken? Maybe, maybe not.

Former Sen. Bob Dole argues that the Senate needs more cooperation and more civility, less name-calling and partisan hardball.

In his day, to some extent, we had that, and the system worked a little better on routine bills like transportation and budgets. Today, every bill seems to be a battle, every move political.

It's not that the parties shouldn't look out for their own interests, and especially their beliefs. But the hard liners on both sides tend to forget that the vast majority of Americans sit somewhere in the middle.

Americans believe in compromise, in getting along, in working things out. The great majority do not want either the ultra-left-wing agenda of the Obama administration nor the far-right destination of the ill-defined "tea party" movement. While both visions are helpful in shaping our debate, neither is likely to prevail.

Some argue that slow government is not necessarily bad. They say the founders, including both Hamilton and Jefferson, intended the system to move slowly lest it lay an egg. That's not a bad argument, and 20 to 30 years ago, you could see things that way.

Today, when the budget seldom is approved until we are well into the new fiscal year, and when many parts of the government move along with only "continuing resolutions" to authorize spending at last year's levels, their appropriations tied up in hopeless wrangling, you might not.

Careful deliberation and gridlock are not quite the same thing.

Yet, when the Democrats were in charge and "got things done," they passed a 2,000-page health care bill that many still have not read. The Department of Health and Human Services continues to issue regulations which, if anything, make things worse.

"Doing something" often is not the answer, especially when no one understands what they've done.

Congressional practices, from holding up judicial appointments to endless delays, do not serve the nation. Both parties have been guilty, and both must change.

People don't want burdensome regulations, but often they push for the government to "make things better," and the end result is more regulations, more government control. That is almost never good.

Americans tend to expect far too much from government. They expect the president to fix the economy, create jobs and make us safe, when in fact he can't do much. In short, we expect a miracle worker, candidates cater to us, and then we're disappointed when the one we elect can't perform.

The parties need to get together and make government work, but in a commonsense way. That could start tomorrow, or even after the 2012 elections, but it needs to start soon.

Government shutdowns, a shortage of judges and endless delays do not bespeak good government. Neither do huge bills that no one understands, or reams and reams of stifling regulations.

The change that's needed is not in our laws or, for the most part, in what government does. It's in the lack of responsibility shown by our "broken" system and the endless gridlock can, and should, stop. — Steve Haynes

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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 week elsewhere in the U.S. \$72.

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SISYPHUS and HISSYFITS

# For the facts, read your local newspaper

Despite all the doomsayers out there writing obituaries for the nation's newspaper industry, 150 million Americans — two out of three adults — read a local newspaper last week.

Newspaper Association of America research from 2011 by Scarborough USA indicates almost 70 percent of your neighbors read either a printed newspaper or its online counterpart within the past seven days.

How could that be?

Well, it's because newspapers still represent the most trusted source of news in America. I know that's hard to believe when you hear the "mainstream media" criticized at every turn on cable television.

But it's true.

When citizens want to get the facts, they turn to their newspaper.

This is National Newspaper Week, and this year's theme, "Newspapers — Your No. 1 Source for Local News," underscores the importance of the nation's newspapers in the daily lives of its citizens.

Newspapers certainly have their competitors out there: a hundred million websites,



## Other Opinions

• Doug Anstaett  
Kansas Press

hundreds of thousands of bloggers, Facebook, Twitter, billboards, radio and television. And that competition is formidable.

But where does the vast majority of the "authoritative" news coverage originate that other outlets utilize? Simple ... the nation's daily and weekly newspapers.

If print is dead, then why do more than 7,000 weekly and 1,400 daily newspapers still open their doors every day and report what is happening in their communities?

Because they take seriously the importance of local news. They know those who plunk down their hard-earned cash want their newspaper to cover those events that are unique to each community.

Every day, newspapers in our communities cover the big stories and the routine as well. Editors take to heart the newspaper's role as the most comprehensive source of a community's historical record, so births, deaths, weddings, engagements, business accomplishments, crime, courts, real-estate transactions and a myriad of other day-to-day news events are covered along with important government decisions that affect our lives.

Newspapers are the No. 1 source of local news in every city and county in America, because we show up each and every day and cover those stories. It's what our readers have come to expect.

And it's what we do better than any other news source in America.

Doug Anstaett is executive director of the Kansas Press Association and president of the Newspaper Association Managers, representing association managers nationwide. As publisher of the Newton Kansan, and later at the Topeka Capital Journal, he was an award-winning editorial writer.

# Not all coursework is created equal

The push by the Kansas Board of Regents to force state universities to accept all community college general education courses not only ignores faculty decisions on course quality, but also places Kansas students in the position of taking courses that will not apply toward graduate school. The problem: online courses hide under regular course numbers.

More and more U.S. schools of pharmacy, medicine and nursing are stating: "We do not accept online coursework." As these advanced programs experience the first generation of online students and their lack of lab skills, more are refusing to accept so-called "online laboratory courses."

The K.U. School of Pharmacy, along with schools of pharmacy at the University of Colorado Denver, University of Southern California, and many others reject online labs. Some extend their exclusion of online courses to all math and pre-pharmacy courses. The Texas Tech University School of Allied Health Sciences Physicians Assistant program accepts no online science courses.

The reason is explained by the University of California system: "... Online lab science courses will not be approved unless they include a supervised wet lab component. Since UC has not seen computer software that adequately replicates the laboratory experience, computer-simulated labs and lab kits will not be acceptable."

But some Kansas schools have placed their "labs" online. An online Kansas consortium even sends a lab-in-a-box each week to its "distance learners" enrolled in a microbiology "lab." Kansas taxpayers who have underwrit-



## John Richard Schrock

• Education Frontlines

ten hi-tech campus microbiology labs with expensive DNA analyzers to train the next generation of scientists should be appalled at this "lab-in-a-box" substitute.

Online classes in the visual and performing arts are likewise questionable.

Again the California faculty policy details the concerns: "Online visual and performing arts courses will not be approved because it is difficult for students taking online courses to experience the required performance component of performance arts courses and/or replicate the expected portfolio component of visual arts courses. UC faculty believes that performance is a necessary component of any performance arts course. Whether it is a course in band, choir, drama, dance or painting/drawing the immediate feedback and coaching of an instructor (e.g., adjusting the toe point of a dancer, correcting the musical intonation of a student musician, advising greater voice projection for a student actor or demonstrating correct technique for a student artist) is a critical and necessary component of any course."

Unfortunately, there is a big difference between the commonsense of faculty and student families, and some educational policymakers. In a survey just released in the *Chronicle of*

Higher Education, a full 51 percent of college presidents thought online courses were the future while only 29 percent of the general population agreed. A survey of faculty by the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities found 70 percent of faculty members believed online courses to be inferior or somewhat inferior when compared with face-to-face instruction.

Unfortunately, the Board of Regents' push to require acceptance of all Kansas community college general education courses means that regents schools will have to accept bioscience labs and performance courses. These courses will then be rejected by many advanced programs nationwide.

The problem is that online courses generally hide inside the same course numbers and names of bonafide face-to-face courses. If online advocates want to assert that their science labs and performance courses are just as good as face-to-face courses, it is only fair to student "customers" that the online courses be clearly named up front and separately numbered as "online" on the transcripts.

Students who want to pursue advanced coursework should be able to show that their courses were face-to-face bonafide on their transcripts. And regents schools should not be forced to accept online courses in general education articulation when those courses will not be accepted by advanced programs.

This is called "truth in labeling." John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.

## 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. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise. Nor do we run form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area. Thank-yous from this area

should be submitted to the Want Ad desk.

Letters will not be censored, but will be read and edited for form and style, clarity, length and legality. We will not publish attacks on private individuals or businesses not pertaining to a public issue.

Before an election, letters (other than responses by a candidate) will not be published after the Thursday before the polls open.

## Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

