



Other Viewpoints

Ethanol mandate doesn't make sense

The Obama administration should heed the calls of livestock producers and suspend the federal mandate that gasoline contain ethanol. Congress should then move to end the mandate permanently.

The mandate that gasoline include a specified minimum amount of ethanol began in 2006 and was aimed at reducing our nation's dependence on foreign oil and helping farmers — two worthy goals. But the ongoing drought has helped push corn prices to more than \$8 a bushel, which is taking a toll on the livestock and poultry industries.

Not only are feed prices higher, so is the cost of fuel, as most ethanol is made from corn. These high costs are causing some ranchers to sell off livestock.

But the mandate didn't make much economic sense even before the drought.

It costs \$1.78 in subsidies for each gallon of gasoline that corn-based ethanol replaces, according to a 2010 study by the Congressional Budget Office. For cellulosic ethanol, the subsidy is \$3 per gallon of gasoline replaced.

This and other ethanol mandates also contribute to higher food prices, as about 40 percent of corn is diverted to fuel production. Though ethanol supporters say this has minimal impact on food costs, Texas A&M University estimated that the diversion cost Americans about \$40 billion in higher food prices over the past four years.

And producing ethanol isn't efficient. About as much or more energy is expended to plant, fertilize, harvest, transport and convert corn into ethanol as it replaces.

But eliminating ethanol mandates and subsidies has been politically difficult. Presidential candidates from both parties tend to promise to protect the subsidies while campaigning in Iowa. And many Republican lawmakers, who normally are against government interference, support ethanol because it is good for corn farmers in their home states.

Still, last year Congress let expire a credit of 45 cents per gallon that refiners got for blending ethanol, so the politics may be changing.

And the Environmental Protection Agency announced Monday that it had begun weighing requests from some state governments to suspend the ethanol mandate. It is seeking public comment and has until Nov. 13 to make a decision on the waivers.

Rep. Mike Pompeo, R-Wichita, raised a valid concern about temporarily ending the mandate. Pompeo, who opposes all energy subsidies, noted that energy markets are complex and that turning government mandates on and off could roil the markets and hurt market participants.

But it doesn't make sense to stay on this path, especially when it is harming livestock producers. A suspension of the blending mandate might finally give Congress the political courage to do what it should have done years ago: End the mandate.

— *The Wichita Eagle, via the Associated Press*

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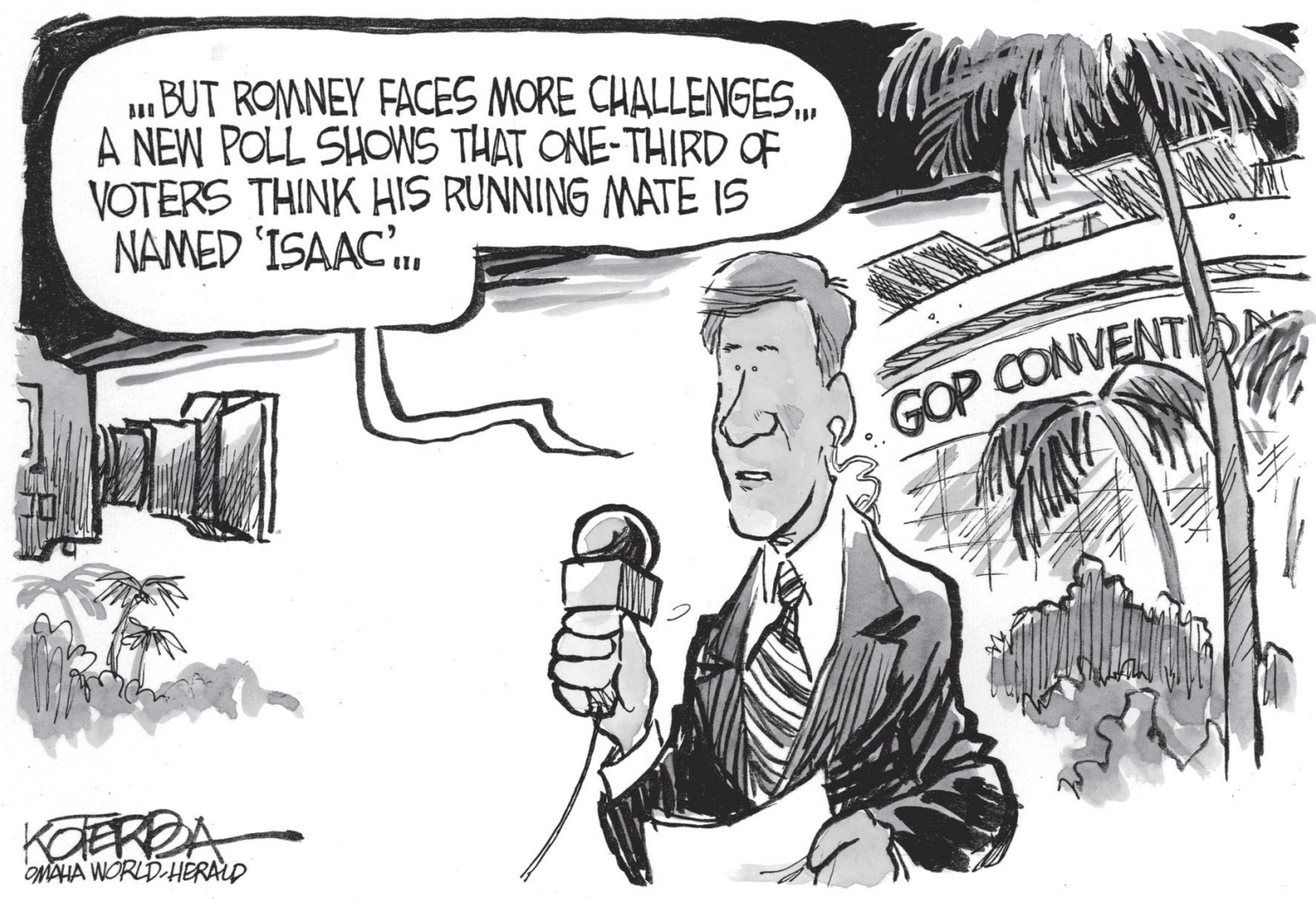
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Race to college begins early in life

Ready - Set - GO!

Maybe it was because of so much time spent watching the Olympics recently, but this week I was reminded that our society often views life as a race in which we all must participate. The understood goal for everyone is to run hard, distance ourselves from others and finish strongly.

That racing analogy has always resonated with me. As I have matured, however, my preference is to think of it more in terms of "heats" that we run before the final sprint. The new school year is the latest heat, and the students are the participants. At Colby, we just welcomed a brand new group of runners, first-time students, to higher education.

They don't all know what major or vocation they should choose. Nevertheless, with few exceptions, I have no doubt that they desire to run hard and finish strongly in this stage of their lives. Just as an athlete trains for months, even years, to win a race, so must students be well prepared before they enter postsecondary education.

Sadly, a lack of college readiness among entering freshmen continues to be a growing problem, as evidenced by the decline in college completion rates. A recent report by the Midwestern Higher Education Compact really brought this home to me. College readiness was defined as more than just a level of academic achievement — though that is important as evidenced by the statistic that between \$2 billion and \$3 billion is spent annually on remedial courses.

No, college readiness also includes maturity, motivation, aspiration and educational awareness. You might be apt to pass this off as someone else's problem or characteristic of "today's youth." Consider this: According to D.T. Conley, though 93 percent of middle-school students express a desire to one day attend college, only 70 percent graduate from high school, only 44 percent ever enroll in col-



Steve Vacik

• From the president

lege and only 26 percent graduate within six years. Imagine the impact this will have on our economy as technology advances and we have fewer and fewer citizens with the skills to adapt to the new workforce.

The report was intended primarily for educators and shares a number of action items for professionals to consider. I'd like to share a few strategies with parents that are not difficult and may help our students improve their level of college readiness.

Reading is fundamental. So, start reading to your children and grandchildren at the cradle. Buy more books and fewer video games. Set aside time as they grow older and require them to read. Ask questions about what they read. A student who can read and comprehend will be more successful, especially in college.

Challenge the young people you influence to excel in the classroom. You have heard it before, but "good" is the enemy of "great." All too often, we allow our students to give less than their best.

Last year I gave my son a bad time about a particular grade in a class — not because of the grade, which by some standards might have been good enough. I was confident that he had not given his best effort. (And yes, when your son or daughter brings home a grade, he/she earned it — it wasn't because a nice teacher gave it to him or a mean instructor slapped it on her.)

I can be as guilty as any, but if we cared as much about success in the classroom as we do about success on the ball field, our children

would be all the better for it.

Don't allow your student to choose classes he or she thinks will be easier. That is not a favor, either. Take on a role in helping to craft an educational plan that will help your son or daughter prepare for college and/or a career — and don't wait until the senior year.

Help them envision college as a reality — not something far away down the road. Encourage them to prepare for success and foster their educational aspirations, even if they seem improbable or impractical to you now. Colby Community College is in your home town — Lawrence is half a day's drive — Harvard is a four-hour flight from Denver. They are all within reach.

If your son or daughter is a freshman in college this year and was not quite prepared for college-level classes, and so was placed in remedial courses, do not allow that to be a discouragement. Some students think it is insulting — it isn't. Others won't give their best because "it doesn't count toward graduation" — don't let them.

I have seen too many students who started in remedial classes and ultimately graduated to not challenge all others to persevere. Lacking college readiness skills can be an obstacle for a student, but it is not insurmountable.

Finally, thanks to everyone who helped the college get off to a great start, especially the businesses, churches and civic organizations who assisted students moving into the residence halls, served pancakes, came to the Block Party or provided any other services. We could not be a community college without the community. I promise to share more on the fall events of the college very soon.

Dr. Stephen Vacik is president of Colby Community College. Vacik is a native of Fargo, N.D., and was vice president of instruction at East Mississippi Community College before moving to Colby.

Thanks for giving at 'Battle of Badges'

To the Editor:

The American Red Cross would like to thank all of you who participated in the 2012 "Battle of the Badges" blood drive, donors and volunteers alike.

Summer is a difficult time to collect blood, and this fun competition gives law enforcement officers, fire fighters, emergency medical technicians and paramedics an added reason to donate a pint of blood while many people are on vacation or out of town.

We gathered 128 units of whole blood, well over our goal of 114. And we had nine first-time donors.

After hundreds of ballots were counted and



Free Press Letter Drop

• Our readers sound off

re-counted, this year's winner was emergency medical services with 59 votes. The fire service came in second with 53 votes and law enforcement third with 49. This gives the ambulance crew the crown for two years in a row.

But remember, the real winners this year are hospital patients who need blood.

As we head into fall, we encourage everyone to consider becoming blood donors. The next drive in Colby will be Thursday and Friday, Oct. 25 and 26, at the National Guard Armory. Hope to see you all again!

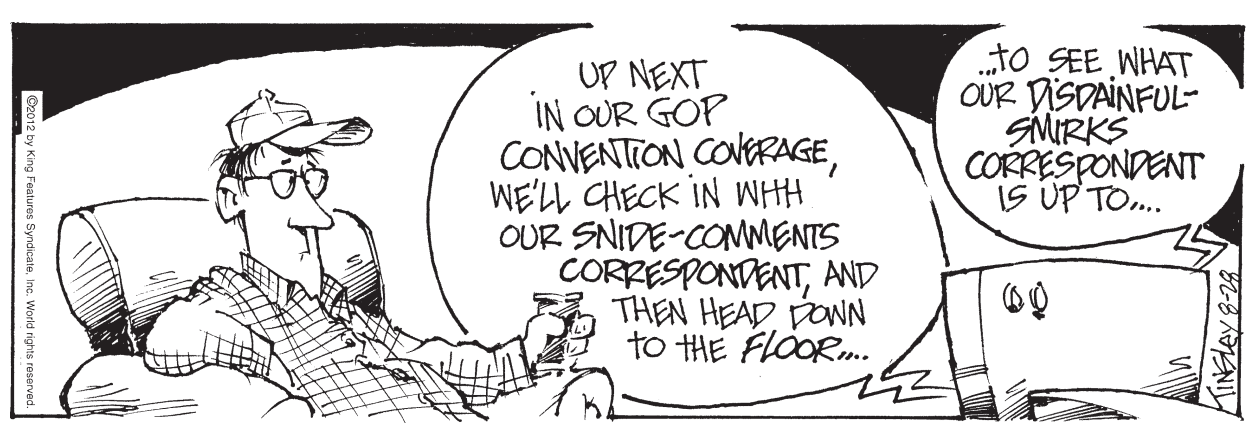
Learn more about becoming a donor or make an appointment by calling (800) 733-2767 or go to www.redcrossblood.org.

And thanks for supporting this year's Battle of the Badges.

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