

## Other Viewpoints

### Water conservation must include all

Bone-dry southwest Kansas enjoyed a nice rain last month. It was the first measurable precipitation in many days, and badly needed in a region and state all too familiar with drought.

In early December, the U.S. Drought Monitor reported all of Kansas in some degree of drought, with about 36 percent in the "exceptional" category and another 42 percent in the second-worst "extreme" category.

And southwest Kansas generally finds itself on the short end of that stick.

Discussions on how to deal with ongoing drought are common, naturally, and usually center on farming. Agriculture does indeed tap the most water from the Ogallala Aquifer as area farmers do their best to grow crops.

But scrutiny of water use has to extend beyond farm fields. Water pulled from the aquifer also goes to homes, businesses and industries, and for such recreational opportunities as parks and golf courses.

The trick is in finding the proper balance between conservation and economic growth. It's a complex problem that should be tackled from many angles.

With water being pulled from the ground faster than it can be replenished, everyone has a vested interest in the issue. So, it was encouraging to hear that representatives of the Groundwater Foundation, a Nebraska-based nonprofit group, were in town recently to engage representatives of government, businesses and other organizations in a conversation on the possibility of a community plan to encourage water conservation.

A similar program launched here several years ago failed to gain traction. Still, it's worth a try again, as a way to engage citizens in doing more to help alleviate the drain on a precious resource.

Western Kansas has no future without a dependable supply of water. While agricultural use will remain a chief area of concern, strategies to encourage conservation by everyone — not just farmers — are essential if this region is to stay viable.

Stepped-up education and awareness as being proposed by the foundation could foster more buy-in and lead to new strategies. We should be eager to pursue such a possibility.

— *The Garden City Telegram, via the Associated Press*

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### COLBY FREE PRESS

155 W. Fifth St. (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963  
Colby, Kan. 67701 fax (785) 462-7749

Send news to: [colby.editor@nwkansan.com](mailto:colby.editor@nwkansan.com)

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**Sharon Friedlander - Publisher**  
[sfriedlander@nwkansan.com](mailto:sfriedlander@nwkansan.com)

#### NEWS

**Kayla Cornett - Sports Reporter**  
[colby.sports@nwkansan.com](mailto:colby.sports@nwkansan.com)

**Marian Ballard - Copy Editor**  
[mballard@nwkansan.com](mailto:mballard@nwkansan.com)

**Sam Dieter - News Reporter**  
[colby.editor@nwkansan.com](mailto:colby.editor@nwkansan.com)

**Christina Beringer - Society Reporter**  
[colby.society@nwkansan.com](mailto:colby.society@nwkansan.com)

#### ADVERTISING

**Kathryn Ballard - Advertising Representative**  
[kballard@nwkansan.com](mailto:kballard@nwkansan.com)

**Janene Woodall - Advertising Representative**  
[jwoodall@nwkansan.com](mailto:jwoodall@nwkansan.com)

**Kylee Hunter - Graphic Design**  
[khunter@nwkansan.com](mailto:khunter@nwkansan.com)

#### BUSINESS OFFICE

Office Manager

**Melissa Edmondson - Office Manager**  
[medmondson@nwkansan.com](mailto:medmondson@nwkansan.com)

**Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator**  
[support@nwkansan.com](mailto:support@nwkansan.com)

#### NOR/WEST PRESS

**Richard Westfahl - General Manager**  
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### Tragedy points to need for weapons ban

The horrific mass shooting in Newtown, Conn., that left 27 people — including 20 children at Sandy Hook Elementary School and the shooter's mother — dead serves as an unwelcome reminder of how cruel and indifferent life can be.

Anytime a senseless act of violence takes innocent lives, it's a tragedy, but when children are among the victims, it puts the crime on another level.

These kids had their whole lives ahead of them. They had birthday parties to attend, friendships to build, dreams to chase, failures to learn from and future children of their own to raise. They still had to go on that first date, attend their first high school dance, tangle with their parents during those turbulent adolescent years, meet their first love, work their first job, own their first car and meet their future mate.

And that's what makes this crime so horrific — these children were taken long before their time. Parents should never have to visit the graves of their own children. That's just not the way it's supposed to work.

In the aftermath of this tragedy, I have switched my position on the assault-weapons ban: it should be implemented and made permanent. Whatever qualms I originally had about the ban possibly impeding citizen's Second Amendment rights have been superseded by the urgent need to do whatever it takes to quell the chilling level of gun violence in this



Andy Heintz

#### • Wildcat Ramblings

country.

Other steps that should be taken to decrease gun violence, especially mass shootings, include banning high-capacity magazines and closing the "Gun Show Loophole" that allows dealers to sell guns without doing a background check. Despite its nickname, this dangerous loophole not only allows guns to be bought at gun shows without a background check, but also through newspaper ads and on the Internet. That's insane and terribly irresponsible. That this loophole exists illustrates how much some politicians fear the National Rifle Association.

As for the association's proposal to have armed police officers in every school, I don't think this alone would be enough to prevent future tragedies. Any policies that place armed officers inside schools should be made at the local level.

While there's no hard evidence that mental illness played a role in leading Adam Lanza to commit his heinous acts, there is a need to

reform the U.S. mental health system. While people with mental disorders are no more likely than anyone else to commit violent acts — often they are the victims — some can be dangerous when not on medication or when under the influence of alcohol or drugs. As someone who has struggled with obsessive-compulsive disorder, the inadequate treatment — if they are being treated at all — often received by people with mental disorders is something that troubles me deeply. While my condition has vastly improved over the years, many people with severe mental disorders are living on the streets or languishing in a jail cell. Is this really the best this country can do for some of its most vulnerable citizens?

While it's true that none of us can be protected from every deranged individual in the world, no matter how many laws are crafted, that doesn't mean we should settle for the status quo. Stronger gun-control laws combined with an improved mental health system won't end gun violence, but it would represent a step in the right direction.

Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate and former Colby Free Press sports editor now living in Ottumwa, Iowa, loves K-State athletics and fishing, sports and opinion writing. You can find his blog at [www.orble.com/just-one-mans-vision](http://www.orble.com/just-one-mans-vision).

### New French Resistance is pro-marriage

SOS reads a large illuminated sign in front of a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It's near a blast furnace in Hayange, in eastern France. It means the same in France that it means here: Trouble with a capital T.

The Socialist government has seen the approval rating for its newly elected president tumble. Industrial decline and cultural turmoil go hand in hand in this beautiful land.

The Family Research Council's French friend, Pierre Jovanovic, has sent us news. This Tocqueville Fellow is a student at the prestigious Sciences Politiques. He reports there have been large demonstrations against the new Socialist president Francois Hollande's plan to grant full legal sanction to same-sex couples.

Hollande was voted into power at the famed Elysee Palace last May with a slender majority of 51.6 percent. It was only the second time an incumbent president has been defeated. Still, under the Fifth Republic's strong presidency, it appeared then that Hollande could get pretty much what he wanted.

Since May, however, the ailing French economy has not improved and voters are restive. Britain's influential *Economist* reports that France's outlook is grim.

"The French economy, according to the Bank of France, is expected to contract in the fourth quarter of this year, and probably did so

### Other Opinions

#### • Robert Morrison Family Research

in the previous three months, following three flat quarters. So further budget cuts are all but inevitable next year."

Resistance to Hollande on marriage is growing. Jovanovic reports 150,000 marched for marriage in Paris, 30,000 in Lyon, 10,000 in Toulouse and 8,000 in Marseilles. Speakers appealed eloquently for each child's right to a "maman et pere." Mother and father are both needed for the proper raising of children, speaker after speaker stressed.

Pierre Jovanovic noted that the opposition to ending true marriage is genuinely ecumenical, with Catholics, evangelicals and even atheists taking up the cry. They even had a young gay speaker argue for true marriage. That's probably something you wouldn't see in America.

The pro-marriage forces in France are pressing for a referendum on marriage. They are seeking support from a broad coalition. France's five million Muslims may have a

role to play in any such referendum. There is usually a degree of unpredictability in Gallic politics, which makes them interesting. The country even saw the opening of its first gay mosque, in Paris. Which way would this growing minority in France vote? Interestingly, Muslim women may well vote for true marriage — if only to avoid bringing polygamy into French society.

In addition to France's ethnic minorities, there is always the split between Paris and the provinces. The *Economist* also notes what is called la France profonde, or deeper France, has always had a real influence on political outcomes.

Like most "prestige" publications, *The Economist* is no friend to marriage. But it's important for us to look around the world for allies in the fight for faith, family and freedom. And France, so influential in intellectual circles around the world, is an excellent place to search for them.

Robert Morrison is senior fellow for policy studies at the Family Research Council. With degrees from the University of Virginia, he has taught high school and college history and political science and served at the U.S. Department of Education. He formerly was executive director of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod Office of Government Information.

### Where to write, call

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774  
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