



Free Press
Viewpoint

Judge appointment
needed promotion

While we will wait for history to judge Gov. Sam Brownback’s plan to appoint Kansas judges, with approval from the state Senate, the governor could and should have done a better job of setting up and selling his plan.

Kansas once elected Supreme Court judges, as some districts still do their trial-court judges. We gave that up for a supposedly better plan, where appellate judges were nominated by a panel made up mostly of lawyers, who supposedly knew a good judge when they saw one.

The governor got to chose from among a panel of three nominees to fill each post, but the process actually left the state’s chief executive with little real power in the matter. Left completely out of the process were voters, who get only to approve “retention” of judges at the end of their terms.

This year’s Legislature changed the process, at least for judges of the state Court of Appeals, whose selection is governed by state law. (Supreme Court judges are chosen by the same process, but under a section of the state Constitution, which cannot be so easily changed.)

First of all, after promising openness, the governor made this selection almost completely behind closed doors, revealing only the name of his ultimate nominee. Despite calls to disclose the names of other applicants, the governor refused.

While the way he went about the nomination is the same as governors have used to fill most state jobs for many years, the secrecy looked bad when compared to the open nature of the old application process for judges. It just didn’t look good, and there was no reason not to keep an open list of applicants.

Then, the governor chose one of his closest associates to fill the first post. While there was nothing “wrong” with that, nothing illegal or unethical, and while the new judge, Caleb Stegall, seems well qualified, the appointment left both open to charges of cronyism. Stegall was the governor’s office attorney and a close adviser.

Better that the governor had chosen someone with more academic or judicial experience and fewer ties to him personally.

While Sam Brownback is a good enough politician to have gotten elected to most everything he’s run for, including the U.S. Senate twice, at the Statehouse, he’s shown some ineptitude. His series of closed-door meetings with legislators last year, in possible violation of the state Open Meetings Act, showed that. While there was much argument about the possible violation, both he and the Legislature should have avoided even the appearance of impropriety.

Same with the judicial appointment. It just muddled the water for his change in the selection process. And government just runs better without this sort of thing. — *Steve Haynes*

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

Send news to: colby.editor @ nwkansas.com

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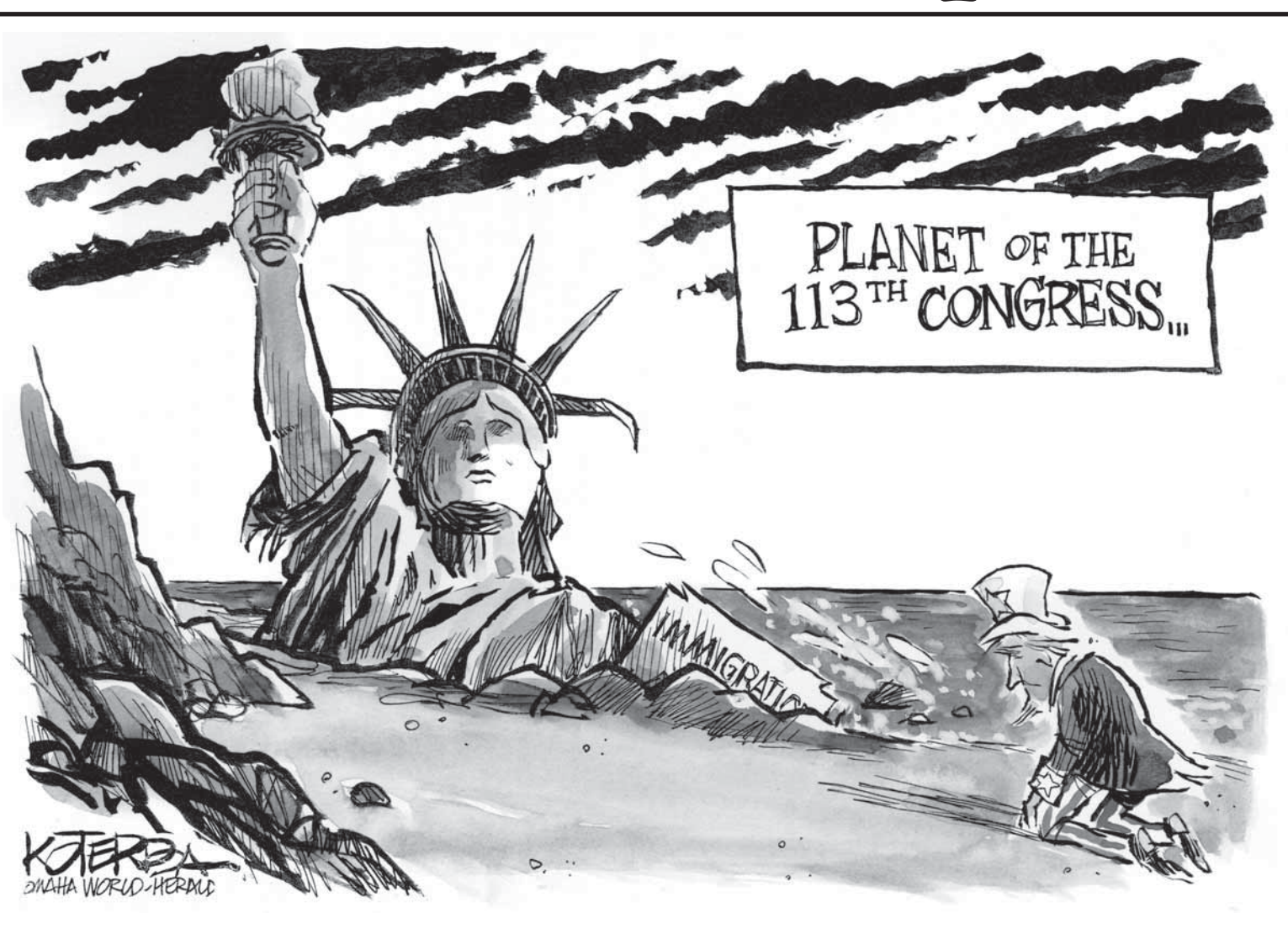
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THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the days observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Nor'West Newspaper, 155 W.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



New pet gets mixed reviews

Steve has a new pet, and Marilyn doesn’t like him much at all.

Marilyn helps me around the house, which saves my sanity and Steve’s life.

Luckily for us, she is great at cleaning but not compulsive about it. She’s a farm girl and can live and let live when she needs to.

So, while she cast a disapproving eye at Wilbur, Steve’s new pet, she doesn’t bother him.

Wilbur is a spider, a fairly large wolf spider which took up residence in a couple of small potted plants near the kitchen sink. He has spun a web all around the aloe vera he started out in and has taken over a second pot with a baby spider plant the cats pulled off the mother that Steve is trying to keep alive.

The whole area around those two small pots near the window by the kitchen sink looks like an early Halloween decoration. It’s one big webby mess, and the webs make it hard to water the plants.

Still, Steve is happy with all of it. He carefully waters his baby plants around the edges



Cynthia Haynes

- Open Season

of the web and looks into the cottony interior to see what Wilbur is up to that day. Mostly, Wilbur is sitting there somewhere acting like a cat. That is, he’s doing absolutely nothing.

Now, I have a live-and-let live attitude to spiders, but I don’t like things that bite me because they think I’m lunch, like mosquitos or ticks, and I can’t abide flies because they are a dirty, nasty insect and I know where they’ve been.

So the other day, after chasing a couple of flies around with a fly swatter off and on for an hour or so, I noticed that Wilbur had caught them in his web. I cheered.

I’m still on Marilyn’s side of the spiders-taking-over-the-kitchen debate, but I have to admit, I’ll take Wilbur over the fly any day of the week.

And speaking of spiders, they’ve had a great time during this dry summer making webs all over the yard. It’s gotten so bad that I’m afraid to walk through the side yard at night because I blunder into so many orb-spinner webs.

I figure that I don’t want to go back into the house with spiderweb in my hair or on my feet or clothes any more than the spider wants a day’s hard work destroyed by a single huge monster blundering around in the dark.

So I’ve made a deal with them. I keep to the sidewalk and they keep to the grass.

It seems to be working so far.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor’West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes @ nwkansas.com

Classmate bond lasts a lifetime

Being a college classmate may not be a “big deal” in America. But it comes close to “BFF” (best friends forever) in China.

School ends in early July for college seniors. Across campus, on the steps of each department, students assemble in their academic regalia for final pictures. Their group identity has seen them through four years of study and sacrifice. They worked together as a unit to survive. Their four years together will make them classmates (“tong xue”) for life.

When they arrive at college as freshmen, Chinese students serve a brief three to four weeks in quasi-military training, somewhat like our ROTC on campus, but very brief. They don uniforms, carry packs, march and drill. Our U.S. military calculates all of these students as a huge potential pool for call-up, but these are not a two-year trained, hardened Israeli student militia. These kids are more giggles than guns. They leave this behind for the rest of their four years of college; they are like college kids anywhere.

During this short drill experience, they selected group leaders from among those who volunteered. After a few weeks working under those leaders, they have seen them in action and are ready to vote for their more long term class monitors or “ban zhang.”

This position is loaded with responsibility.

These student groups are pursuing the same major and will attend the same classes, much as our middle school students travel class-to-class as a group. When teachers note a student’s absence, the monitor is called in and told to get the student back in class. When a classroom projector breaks down and it will take a few days to replace it, the building manager notifies the monitor who tells the class to go to an alternate room. It is faculty who show up to an empty room and have to hunt down



John Richard Schrock

- Education Frontlines

our classes!

Class schedules in China can change at a moment’s notice. The provincial government waited until the last moment to announce the holidays off for spring grave-sweeping festival: they told us Friday that Monday was a vacation day. To make up for this missed Monday class, we needed to meet the following Saturday, and in a different room.

“How will they know were to go?” I asked a colleague.

“No problem,” was the reply. And sure enough, every student was in the right room on Saturday. The class monitor got them there. Unlike American students who work and often have a spouse and children, Chinese college students only have one duty in life. They cannot get married until they are older, so they do not have children to care for. And they do not hold down part time jobs. Studying is “Job One.” Class met on Saturday.

Most come from far away to attend university. So their classmates become their family. They help each other by sharing notes and studying together. They provide the academic support that American faculty provide our students. They are ever present to encourage a classmate who might be “down.”

For Western teachers who assign graded homework to Chinese students in the U.S., this can be a problem when they all turn in identical papers. China invented “cooperative learn-

ing” long before Western education schools did. Students help classmates. But their graded work is on individual tests in China. Western teachers have to work hard to get Chinese students to do their own outside work stateside.

Working together in the group, to help the group, is how the Chinese make it through life in society. Your identity is your identity in the group. With family at home. With classmates at school.

There may be a student or two absent from that graduating group taking pictures in their regalia. I know not to discuss them in public. Privately you can learn that one dropped out and went home – or elsewhere. A few commit suicide. Classmates stoically move on.

These classmates graduate to disperse across the country and even the world. But they will always be “classmates.” If they come to live in the same city, they will share their special classmate status by trading discounts in whatever businesses they run. “Guanxi” which is often translated as “who you know” is pervasive in the fabric of Chinese society. Being classmates is an important guanxi relationship. And when classmates come together in formal or informal reunions, what they think of you really matters because of your four-year journey together.

In the U.S. we often tell our graduating students to “write home” to us, for they are “family now.” But our graduates go off in individual directions. They attended different classes in our independent culture. Only our fraternities and sororities offer a distant comparison.

Here, “staying connected” goes unsaid. They are classmates forever.

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.

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