



Other Viewpoints

Hazing response should be public

The alleged hazing in the Hutchinson High School football program is disturbing, and the many unknowns – at least to the public – have led to much speculation. While law enforcement likely won’t share more details pending a continuing investigation, the school district could be more forthcoming with the public about what it knows and what it is doing in response.

Three Hutchinson seniors are charged with battery, and two of the three – charged as adults – also face a misdemeanor count of hazing for their role in a reported locker-room branding of four 14- and 15-year-old students. The branding, using manually heated wire clothes hangers, took place last week when some freshmen moved up to the varsity squad.

The big question is whether this was an isolated example of hijinks crossing the line or some tradition of hazing that has been going on for a while. Also unknown is the sequence of events – namely whether school officials first learned of it and turned it over to law enforcement or whether it was reported to law enforcement before the school took any action.

Public statements on the matter are coming through the school’s Public Information Officer Ray Hemman. He has not confirmed whether a coach or teacher was present in the locker room at the time as required or whether the students have been suspended or expelled from school.

As for the sequence of events, Hemman said in his initial statement that head football Coach Randy Dreiling learned of an alleged hazing incident and turned the matter over to administrators and Hutchinson police after an initial investigation. Hutchinson Police Sgt. Tyson Meyers, however, said the alleged branding first was reported by parents of the victims.

School administrators no doubt will say that legal policy precludes them from releasing more information, but time and again we have seen that when something negative happens, the instinct of school administrators – and leaders of other public institutions – is to clamp down and keep quiet. This approach, however, leads to speculation and assuming the worst.

In this case, many will assume – despite the district’s claim that Dreiling made an announcement to the team that hazing would not be tolerated – that the culture of the Salthawk football program breeds such behavior. It is no stretch to believe that just by watching the profane rants of the coach – no secret tape recordings necessary – on the sideline of any game.

Or, absent any reassurance, people may be led to believe that the cultural problem goes even higher, to the athletic director, school principal and even school district superintendents who have condoned this coaching style and not enforced higher standards for faculty and student conduct at the high school.

Hiding in the bunker only breeds rumors and distrust. The school district and the football program would be better served by being forthright and forthcoming with all the information it can provide. And even if that information might still be incomplete, a strong statement that such conduct is inexcusable and that the school district itself is taking it seriously, investigating it fully – it’s not enough just to delegate it solely to the police – and will hold anyone responsible fully accountable, would instill more public confidence in the school district, school athletics program and administrators.

– The Hutchinson News, via the Associated Press

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Another Insurance Cancellation Due To Obamacare

Autumn in Colby rivals any area

I wonder how many people who live here in Colby actually have taken time this fall to look around and notice what a beautiful town we live in?

I know, I promised to talk about the history of the court house, but I'll do that next time. This time I want to talk about our beautiful town. Everyone has heard about the lovely red and orange trees in the northeast U.S. and the aspens in the Rockies, but I think our golden cottonwoods, maples, ash and the golden locust are just as beautiful. Some people in Colby actually grow orange sugar maples and the flame bushes have outdone themselves this year with their bright red color.

Some autumns are more colorful than others. I don't know why for sure, but I imagine it has something to do with how much moisture we received during the year or maybe when we had our first freeze. Some years it takes longer for the trees to turn. It took a long time this year, but when they finally did turn, they were gorgeous.

One sunny fall day when I was still working as a nurse at Citizens Medical Center, I was driving home from work heading north on Franklin when I looked out across that big field on the east side of the street. There was a beautiful golden tree shining in the sun, and it was so bright that it was actually sparking. The buffalo grass in the field was still green and the creek that runs through the middle of the field was lined with various colors of weeds.



Marj Brown

• Marj's Snippets

Of course there was no water in the creek. It only has water just after a rain.

When I looked up higher, there was the Thomas County Court House towering above that tree and the Co-Op elevator was shining white above the court house. It was quite a scene. I hurried home, got my camera and came back and parked on East Plum Street just south of the field. I walked down to the bridge that crosses over Franklin and took several pictures from different angles. It took me a couple of years to finally paint a watercolor of that scene, but I finally finished it.

Last month I entered it in the High Plains Art Club's art show and was lucky enough to win first place in watercolor. Now, all of you reading this column may have a chance to own that picture.

It so happens that the art club chose to allow high school and college art students to enter their show this year, but didn't charge the students an entry fee like the adults pay. However, they did give the student winners money prizes. Therefore, art club is running low on

money for their next year's show, so they are selling chances on that painting and will draw the name of the winner at this year's Art Walk on April 18.

Anyone who wishes to see the painting, may go to the Sunflower Bank where it is now on display. The names of Colby art club members and their phone numbers are displayed with the picture. Just call any one of them and they will see that you get a chance to buy a ticket.

I was so impressed with the quality of the student work in the show this year, and Colby High School did quite well. Winners were: Karly Shull, first in watercolor and second in oil; Michelle Kirby, merit award in pottery; Abby Friesen, second in watercolor and second in mixed media; Haileigh Shull, first in sculpture, first in oil and merit award in watercolor; Madison Tubbs, merit award in pencil and in pastel; Kelly Sloan, merit award in mixed media and Olivia Wetter, first in mixed media.

From Colby Community College: Sarah Krehbiel, merit award in charcoal; Nicole Connell, merit award in colored pencil and Stephen Cornett, merit award in mixed media.

I promise I'll write about the court house next time. Please look for it.

Marj Brown has lived in Colby for 62 years and has spent a good deal of that time writing about people and places here. She says it's one of her favorite things to do.

Where is the farm bill?

To say the farm bill has moved like molasses through Congress the past three years is a gross understatement. This branch of our federal government continues to be mired in the mud of partisan politics.

Congress seems hell-bent on infighting while this nation's business is left undone. Kansans and other farm-state lawmakers are urging their colleagues to look back to more bipartisan times and do something Congress hasn't done much of lately – pass a major piece of legislation.

Remember the old axiom: politics is the art of compromise?

Farm country needs a farm bill and we could have used it yesterday. Much of the fall corn, beans and milo are out of the fields and farmers are ready to look toward 2014 and next year's crops.

Kansas farmers and ranchers need the certainty of a completed farm bill in order to make business decisions for next year, says Kansas Farm Bureau President Steve Baccus, an Ottawa County farmer.

A strong, affordable crop insurance safety net will help producers develop individual risk management plans, he adds. Reauthorizing livestock disaster programs will protect Kansas ranchers from catastrophic losses such as those suffered by South Dakota ranchers after the recent blizzard.

Baccus urged Congress to fund all titles in the new farm bill to avoid abandoning important conservation, research and trade programs to the mercy of the appropriations process. He also called on lawmakers to preserve traditional rural-urban cooperation on nutrition issues.

"A farm bill without a meaningful nutrition title will make it difficult, if not impossible, for the House and Senate to reach agreement on a



John Schlageck

• Insights
Kansas Farm Bureau

bill that can be signed by the President," Baccus said. "Congress must pass a unified farm bill that continues the partnership between the nutrition and farm communities and their constituents."

Seems the main challenge in arriving at a new farm bill is the differences on food stamps, officially called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

The House has passed legislation to slash approximately \$40 billion annually, or about 5 percent including changes in eligibility and work requirements. The Senate wants to cut a much smaller \$4 billion.

SNAP funding has more than doubled during the past five years as the nation's economy struggled. Democrats contend it is working as intended, providing food to those in need when times are tough. Republicans believe it should be focused on the neediest people.

When most Americans think of a farm bill they think of farm subsidies. Few think of all the other things that are covered in this nearly \$1 trillion program.

Few Americans know that 75 percent of the farm bill is actually helping feed folks who need nutrition assistance. Let me repeat, 75 percent of this bill goes to feed hungry people.

Most of the current law's ag provisions expired in September. Direct payments would have been eliminated and our lawmakers

could have taken some of that money applied it to deficit reduction as well as an affordable crop insurance program.

If we don't have a farm bill by 2014 and Congress allows dairy supports to expire, 1930s and 1940s-era farm law would kick in. Some estimates conclude the government will then pay up to four times more for dairy products. If that scenario plays out, many farmers would sell to the government instead of commercial markets, decreasing the commercial supply while raising prices for shoppers at the supermarket.

So the question remains – can the House and Senate pass a farm bill?

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm near Seguin, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

