

## THE HUTCHINSON NEWS

### Editorial Board

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## Good decision

### Commissioners wisely shelve convention plans

County leaders sometimes do something right. And those occasions deserve a public tip of the hat.

Reno County commissioners Frances Garcia and Larry Sharp this week decided to save taxpayers some money by foregoing an unnecessary getaway to a national conference in Virginia.

OK, so Sharp and Garcia didn't totally have taxpayers in mind when they nixed plans to attend the July 13-17 National Association of Counties conference in Richmond, Va. The less-than-accommodating and inconvenient accommodations for the two commissioners and their spouses drove the decision to stay home.

Conference organizers assigned the Reno County entourage to a hotel in nearby Glen Allen, Va. Sharp noted the location was too far – 12 miles, actually – from convention activities. Not even a courtesy

shuttle between the two sites could convince Sharp and Garcia to attend the conference.

And that is for the best. The decision saves taxpayers an \$880 conference registration payment, more than \$1,500 in motel expenses, nearly \$500 for airfare and undetermined food expenses. And really, what would the two commissioners actually have learned during the five-day getaway that would benefit Reno County?

That is the question asked last year when the two commissioners bowed out of a similar excursion to Hawaii after some public criticism. Fellow Commissioner Francis Schoepf was not swayed by the critics and headed to Hawaii, handing taxpayers a bill for more than \$1,500 upon his return.

Schoepf came home with a red Hawaiian shirt that he wore to a commission meeting, where he told Sharp and Garcia he found one of the conference seminars particularly intriguing. The seminar? Changes in county government. Now, that's funny stuff.

## Western Front

### Farm Bill explanation

Discussion recently popped up about changing the structure of the Farm Bill, even eliminating the direct payment. Wheat growers have only received the direct payment over the term of the last Farm Bill, so I would like to explain why wheat growers are actually supporting an increased direct payment.

First, the decoupled direct contract payment is the least market-distorting program in the farm policy arsenal. Because the direct payment avoids market distortion as much as possible, it is also the most World Trade Organization-friendly program in farm policy. As a commodity that exports almost half its domestically produced product, being trade-friendly is extremely important.

Most importantly to wheat growers over the past five years, the direct payment program is the only program that assures a safety net in times of droughts or other complete crop losses. Other than crop insurance, this is all that can carry a grower into the next year if Mother Nature deals an uncontrollable fatal blow.

While wheat growers continue to support the three-legged safety net, the direct payment has been the most beneficial program for us, and we see the merits it has. Now is the time to raise the rate of the Farm Bill's most predictable program, to be equitable among all crops.

Please contact your members of Congress and telling them why this program is so important to you.

**RANDY FRITZEMEIER**  
 Kansas Association of Wheat Growers director  
 Stafford

### Arm school personnel

Can we do something about school massacres? We know in the days ahead there will be another one. Will our kids and teachers be the victims?

The airlines now allow the crew to be armed so they can protect the passengers and crew. We should allow teachers and school administrators to be armed.

A killer will not attack the police or the security guard. The killer will attack those he thinks are defenseless.

**HUBERT FAULKNER**  
 Hutchinson

### Too predictable

While I do agree with your editorial assessment on the trip by the recently-elected Hutchinson school board member, I find it troubling that I instinctively knew you were going to write this editorial, with this specific viewpoint, at the moment I read your front page story. You also should find it troubling that your news stories so clearly give away your personal opinions.

**DON OSENBAUGH**  
 Derby

### Much obliged

Recently several Medicine Lodge FFA members traveled to Hutchinson to take part in the district livestock contest. Before we went home, we visited the Hutchinson Zoo.

As we were watching the otters swim and do flips, we inquired to the zookeeper, Matt Simon, on many of our animal questions. He took the time out of his busy schedule to

answer all of our questions, as well as allowing some of the members (the brave ones) to pet one of the snakes.

We greatly appreciate him taking time to help us better understand animals and his occupation. If you haven't visited the zoo recently, you are missing a very pleasant experience.

**MICHAEL STULL**  
 Medicine Lodge FFA Chapter adviser

### Cover the good, too

I noticed an article ("Message Prompts Lockdown," The News, April 21) and it made me stop and think. The article about Nickerson High school getting locked down because of a text message probably wouldn't have even caught my eye had I not been meeting students from that school less than an hour from the time I saw the paper.

We had been working together for several weeks to plan a national and global youth make-a-difference day project and it was to take place later that morning. We would be showing that youth of all abilities can give back to their communities as students with and without disabilities were involved planting trees in Harsha park.

We had tried to get something about our event in the paper and had even thought they might attend our event, but in the end they chose not to. I realize they have the right to decide what gets coverage in the paper but I wonder what kind of a message we send to our youth when it is easier to get in the newspaper for doing something bad than it is for trying to improve your community.

**ROGER FRISCHENMEYER**  
 Hutchinson

### Bigger raises needed

I am a sergeant at the Hutchinson Correctional Facility. In the four years I have worked there, I have had a fractured leg and suffered permanent knee damage breaking up a fight between inmates.

I have been battered twice. I am subject to daily verbal abuse that is unimaginable to most citizens; and am threatened on an almost weekly basis. I work in an environment where 20 to 30 percent of the inmate population is infected with hepatitis or HIV.

Every day on the job I face the ever-present potential for violent physical assault. We are on the blunt edge of the laws passed by the Kansas legislature.

Doesn't the governor and the Kansas Legislature think the men and women of the Kansas Department of Corrections deserve more the meager pay raise being proposed?

**GREGORY H. BONTRAGER**  
 Hutchinson

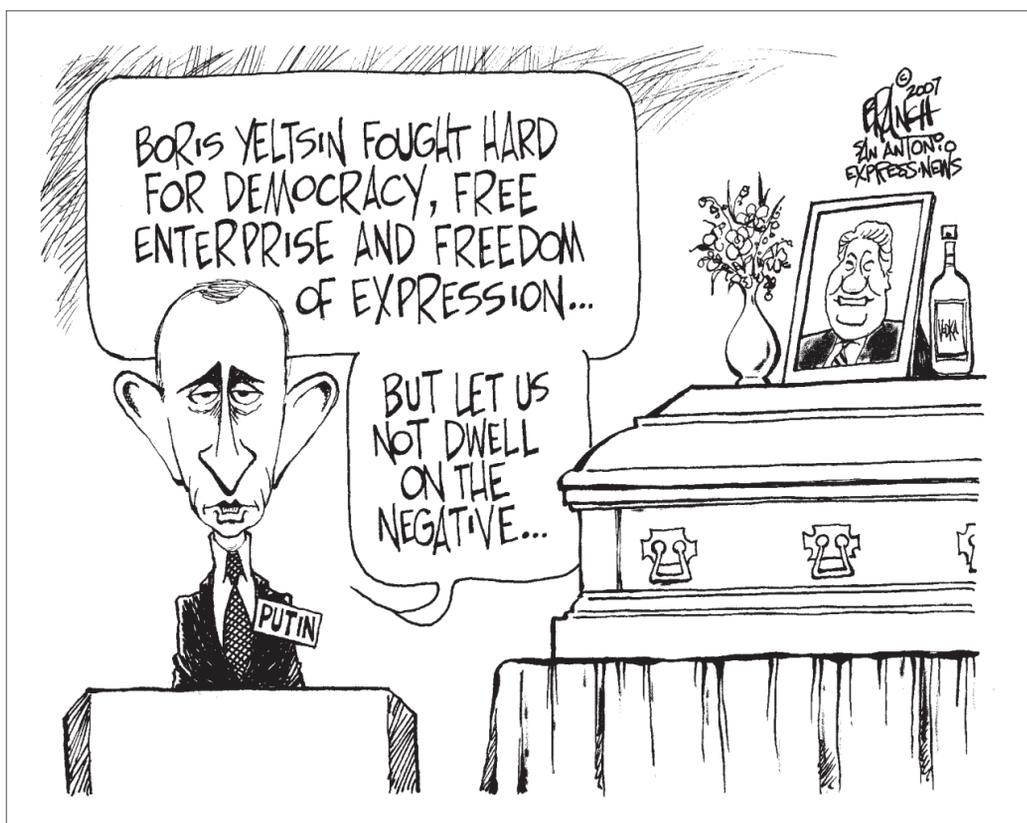
### Western Front policy

The News accepts Western Front letters from readers who want to share an opinion.

Please sign your name and include your phone number and address. We call to verify all letters before publication and strive to publish them within one week of verification.

Please limit letters to 500 words. No poems, consumer complaints, business testimonials or group petitions will be accepted.

All letters are subject to editing for space considerations and libel concerns.



## Dean's world in a sound bite

One can understand why Howard Dean feels that the world would be better off without the press, as he suggested recently to a group of bankers.

Dean, the Democratic National Committee chairman, was responding to a banker's complaint that candidates speak only in sound bites.

His solution: "Have candidates in to meetings like this and bar the press."

Now there's a concept from a man who should know.

Few have benefited less from media exposure than Dean, who will be forever remembered as "The Scream" for his war whoop during his 2004 presidential election bid.

Then again, Dean of all people should also know that citizen journalists are everywhere, even at banking conventions, and that nearly everybody has a video phone and access to YouTube.

"Barring the press," alas, would require human extinction. Another concept for another day. Meanwhile, we know what Dean meant. And, doubtless, many Americans reflexively agree. The media are not beloved by many – at least not until the many consider the alternative. Saddam Hussein didn't like the media either.

But Dean has a point, which is that the omnipresent, omnivorous (not omniscient) media more often distort than reveal the truth. Driven by corporate profit motives, media conglomerates pander to the least noble of man's appetites and become "infotainment," as Dean put it.

We've all bemoaned the shallowness of news coverage that pays lip service to issues while plumbing the depths of paternity when an illegitimate child is born to a money-filching, drug-addicted stripper. Oh sorry. I mean a widowed mother who worked her way up from small-town obscurity to prominence through the visual arts.

Thus, inadvertently, Dean was making a case for the written word. When we speak of media today, after all, we're really talking less about newspapers and magazines than of cameras and video screens. In a world where television, YouTube and the Internet dominate the media field, visual imagery necessarily dominates discourse.

If one were to play the word association game with top



**KATHLEEN PARKER**  
 THE ORLANDO SENTINEL

presidential candidates, saying the first word that a person's name inspires, that word most likely would be visual – or possibly auditory. In either case, both are captured by film and tape, as opposed to words on the printed or virtual page.

Admit it: Say John Edwards, we think hair; Hillary Clinton, pantsuits; Barack Obama, so far, a smile; Mitt Romney, starched shirts and soap; John McCain, forever a POW; Rudy Giuliani, the man from Ground Zero. These are superficial characterizations, but images matter. They register with the unconscious as symbols and evoke a visceral response precisely because they're processed by the brain's right hemisphere where our emotions hang out. Written language, on the other hand, is processed by our left hemisphere – home to reason and logic.

Our right lobe feels; our left lobe thinks. It's no mystery why the Democratic Party, identified as the more-feeling party, is also home to more artists and actors, while the Republican Party tends to attract more business-minded folks.

This is an oversimplification of the workings of brains and politics, clearly. We're all a little bit this and little bit that, and the lobes, though one usually dominates, communicate with each other through 250 million or so nerve fibers. Some of us are even ambidextrous, though we try to keep it quiet.

But the issue Dean raises about honesty vis-a-vis media in the political realm underscores the danger of relying too much on what the camera delivers versus what the mind deduces from reasoning through the written word. What we see is not all of what we get.

We don't want to live by words alone, obviously. Emotions aren't frivolous, but they are another form of information. Visceral responses, otherwise known as "gut feelings" or intuition, are often reliable, if primitive, ways of knowing.

Yet when it comes to understanding issues, television becomes the enemy of thought and YouTube is inherently unfair by the deliberate exclusion of context.

Of course, thinking is harder than feeling, which may explain why reading has fallen in disfavor and candidates scramble to post their own flicks on YouTube. But Americans who want to make informed choices would do well to spend more time reading than watching.

The "boob tube" got its nickname fair and square.

## The mystery of life, death and tragedy

The purpose of our mind is to fit things into a larger meaning – that's the mental feature distinguishing us from animals.

So since we are smarter – though not always gentler – than critters, we can all attempt to answer the question: What's the larger meaning of the Virginia Tech shootings? Who or what is to blame?

One who stepped forward with an explanation was Sen. Joe Biden, D-Del. Last Thursday, The Associated Press reported, Biden ascribed the shootings to the "politics of polarization" as practiced by Republicans: "Since 1994 with the Gingrich revolution, just take a look at Iraq, Venezuela, Katrina, what's gone down at Virginia Tech, Darfur, Imus. ... This didn't happen accidentally, all these things."

And Biden's words didn't come by accident, either. After 35 years of holding forth in the Senate, Biden obviously feels that not enough people are listening to him, that he needs a larger national audience. So he is running for president, spewing blame for domestic bloodshed on half of his countrymen. That's his idea of a larger meaning for Virginia Tech; it's a great opportunity to advance his own personal political ambitions.

Others have dug deeper and found other factors. James Lewis, blogging for the American Thinker Web site, examined some of the course materials being taught at Seung-Hui Cho's school. It's been widely reported that students at Virginia Tech saw such movies as the slasher-horror pic "Friday the 13th" as part of their "curriculum." But Lewis took note of other works being taught, such as "Textual Androgyny, the Rhetoric of the Essay, and the Politics of Identity in Composition (or The Struggle to Be a Girly-Man in a World of Gladiator Pumpitude)." Deadpans Lewis:



**JAMES PINKERTON**  
 NEWSDAY

