

# OPINION

**THE HUTCHINSON NEWS**

## Editorial Board

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### EDITORIAL

## Help those who help

Right now, First Call should be foremost for those who can give.

With so much turmoil going on in the world, it's easy to get wrapped up in all the crises overseas and forget about the need at home.

Beneath the headlines of tragedies in Europe and overseas, one of Hutchinson's most notable charities needs our help.

First Call for Help was denied a \$19,000 grant and saw another awarded only \$1,500 of \$5,500 requested.

Hutchinson residents should respond to First Call as they did the Christian Soup Ministry. This week, the soup kitchen said it needed a dozen turkeys for its annual Thanksgiving dinner. Within a day, it got more than enough.

For toothpaste and toilet paper, Hutchinson residents can make life a little easier for some of our less fortunate residents.

The need is rising in these dire economic times.

First Call is serving 450 families, including 150 seniors – up from 170 families two years ago. First Call for Help serves smaller communities from Turon to Medora. The agency offers a personal hygiene program for people in emergency situations, along with a medical assistance program and Operation Back to School. It also provides assistance with utilities, prescription drugs and vouchers for gas to travel to out-of-town doctors' appointments.

The greatest needs are supplies for their hygiene packets – paper towels, toilet paper, laundry soap, dish and bath soap, toothpaste and other items necessary to keep clean. First Call also takes cash donations. For \$11, people can supply one bag of products.

First Call is usually the first place people in need turn for help. Now it needs our help.



### COLUMNISTS

## Good citizenship in 1920s Hutchinson

Community columnist



Paul Waggoner

Political liberals in Kansas, if they know their history, have always been impressed by the early strength of socialist ideals in southeast Kansas. Part of this strength was ethnic (many eastern European emigrants), part economic (strong industrial and mining unions), and part ideological, due to E. Haldeman-Julius and his publishing company in Girard.

Haldeman-Julius was the child of Russian-born Jews who emigrated to America before 1900. As a young man he embraced both socialism and religious skepticism. He moved to Kansas in the 1910s and published a variety of popular educational "Little Blue Books" plus more left-wing magazines like The Haldeman-Julius Monthly.

Haldeman-Julius had his followers even in a place like Hutchinson. In fact, one of the few articles about our town ever published in a national magazine was titled "Hutchinson, Kansas" by a Hildegard Smith in the October 1926 issue of The Haldeman-Julius Monthly.

Smith was a Hutchinson resident whose spin on our town was mostly conventional 1920s critiques of the Midwest and small-town life. But still her comments are worth hearing.

She was first of all upset about the "go-getters" in town – "the Rotarians, the Kiwanians and their kind" who focused more on business interests and having a city administration run in the best "Babbitt style."

Then second, the rise of the "Good Citizenship League" in 1925. This group, she lamented, "consists mainly of the 'good people' among the inhabitants" whose sole purpose was "to chronically conduct a strenuous moral crusade."

Even worse, the Good Citizenship League (with the backing of prominent ministers like First Methodist's Dr. H.L. Gleckler) was typically deflected by the business community. The

league had seen success, Smith claimed, in the recent municipal elections, in scuttling a law allowing for Sunday movies, and in pushing for stronger enforcement of existing laws against alcohol and cigarette sales.

This emphasis on laws about public morality ran against Smith's grain. She called the GCL the "Good Snitchership League" for "snitching" on bootleggers and thought it just a city government money-making scheme by passing laws with stiff fines.

Gleefully, however, Smith reported the GCL and its "Ministerial Alliance" colleagues, having become "drunk with their power over dolts," had met their match when they touched "the sacred precincts" of the Hutchinson Country Club.

The newly built country club out on 56th Avenue near Cow Creek was rumored to hold "wild liquor parties" for adults and youth. The GCL complained, but the country club leadership was able to deflect the charges with the promise of sheriff department "supervision" of any type of parties on club grounds. No fines, no arrests here it seemed.

Many socialists have always had an anti-theistic edge to their politics. Early on in her article Smith said that our town "suffers from the administration of theocrats." No definition, of course, is provided.

Bizarrely, she goes on to claim that the month-long October 1925 revival meetings at Convention Hall were mostly a church plot to engender enthusiasm, and

money, for building new churches. By which she meant Trinity Methodist and First Baptist, both completed in 1926. Who knew? Those nefarious Christians and their fund-raising schemes!

Smith's negative view of Hutchinson was particularly surprising given that she apparently was the wife of local florist Harry Smith (the only Hildegard Smith in the City Directory is Mrs. Harry Smith). For a business owner's spouse to lambaste their new hometown is rather surprising.

Plus she wasn't done speaking her liberal mind. In a pointed letter to the editor (The Hutchinson News, July 18, 1933) Smith praises socialism and all New Deal moves in that direction. She even said "a New Deal isn't enough ... what we need is a whole new deck."

The prairie socialism of Smith held on as the website marxists.org makes clear. They show her June 1938 comments praising the Socialist Workers Party magazine The New International. "The February issue is gorgeous ... keep up that record," gushes Smith. She even ordered extra copies to give to others in town.

Her enthusiasm was not widely shared in the county. Eugene Debs, the Socialist Party candidate for president in 1920, gathered only 341 votes (0.2 percent) in Reno County. Haldeman-Julius, of Girard, its candidate for the U.S. Senate from Kansas in 1932, received a mere 124 votes (0.1 percent) here.

Politics in Reno County, over time, has ran the gamut, whether organized as the Good Citizenship League or a lone voice in the wind. We still, regardless of politics, should be thankful for the willingness to be involved exhibited on all sides.

Paul Waggoner is a Hutchinson resident and business owner. He can be reached with comments or questions at waggonerpm@gmail.com.

### WESTERN FRONT

## A Thanksgiving gift

As Thanksgiving approaches, a time of appreciation should also be given our hosts – our farmers who help create the cornucopia of treats that celebrate the season.

Our farmers are big sky people with a vision that reaches far beyond the western Kansas horizon. Their minds, their dreams, live in the future.

They are tomorrow people who, each year, put their faith and resources into a mechanism called WIM, an acronym for: Weather (will production reach goal?) Inputs (cost of fertilizer, herbicide, etc.) Market (price given for product produced).

They pull the handle on this machine, after careful planning and preparation, and hope for the best.

Sometimes the payoff is mind-boggling.

Other times, however, nothing seems to come together and painful decisions have to be made.

To be a farmer involves risk, but the potential gains in faith, in character, in devotion to cause, shape people, shape families.

Fortunately, from our farm families come children, our future citizens, who learn a work ethic, who come to understand that dreams come true with effort, that a tomorrow has promise if you have enough faith to see it through – a Thanksgiving gift our state, our nation, can celebrate.

**DOUG ELLWOOD**  
Little River

## On different tracks

In his Nov. 14 column, Jack Wempe observed the current state of Kansas politics and lamented that Kansas common sense and values have disappeared. But political control and personal values are different things. Currently, they are different by no small margin.

For a number of years, the Docking Institute of Public Affairs at Fort Hays State University has conducted a state-wide public opinion survey. Some of the findings of the April 2015 survey were:

- 66 percent of Kansans think taxes on top-income earners should increase. But those controlling state politics have been doing this for the past five years.
- 75 percent of Kansans opposed allowing concealed carrying

of a firearm without prior training and certification. But those controlling state politics enacted legislation to do just this.

• 83 percent of Kansans do not support reducing public education funding. But those controlling state politics froze public education funding for two years. With an increasing student population, this reduces the dollars per student. With the inflation of expenses, this also reduces the resources that each dollar provides. With a growing state economy, this reduces the proportion of our wealth that we contribute to public education.

Political ruthlessness does not equate to political strength. Even with all his financial angels and political machine, 50 percent of us voted against the governor serving a second term.

And that was before those controlling state politics enacted the largest tax increase in state history.

What generally puts an end to a movement that serves narrow interests at the expense of the whole of society is success. The proponents of ever-decreasing income taxes have had success in making it politically forbidden to make income taxes the third leg of the stool.

We are starting to get a good taste of the unworkability and injustice of low-/no-income-tax funding and will be getting a whole lot more of it in the next year. The success in implementing this low-/no-income-tax movement may well be the beginning of its end.

It is fair to say we do not have the common sense and character of our grandparents and great-grandparents, the aptly called Greatest Generation. But we still have enough of it to change political control at the ballot box.

**JOHN STURN**  
Ellinwood

## Playing 'Games'

I wonder why "The Hunger Games" star Jennifer Lawrence waited until after she made \$52 million before she discovered how much she disliked Christians and Republicans.

Someone at Lions Gate Entertainment Corp. should suggest to Ms. Lawrence that she could always return that portion of the money if she finds it morally objectionable.

**GREGORY H. BONTRAGER**  
Hutchinson

### JOIN THE DISCUSSION

The News encourages readers to share their opinions on this page and offers a number of ways to do so:

(1) Write a letter to the Western Front on any topic. Send it to The News at 300 W. Second Ave., Hutchinson, KS, 67504-0190; fax to (620) 662-4186 or email to westernfront@hutchnews.com.

Letters should be limited to 500 words. Poems, consumer complaints, business testimonials and group-written letters will not be accepted. Letters written in support of candidates and issues during election seasons should be limited to 150 words. Please sign your name and provide your address and a phone number so we may call to verify the letter. We strive to publish letters within one week of verification. There is a 30-day waiting period between submissions.

Western Front letters are subject to editing for space considerations and libel concerns. Letters that cite statistics or assert facts without providing information sources will not be published.

(2) Respond directly to a newspaper editorial by joining our online opinions blog. Go to www.hutchnews.com/editorial-blogs.

## Obama, speaking from the ruins

WASHINGTON An event that invokes widespread fear and confusion, such as the Paris attacks, is also an occasion for leadership. The resulting intense public focus opens a brief window for explanation and inspiration. In moments of crisis or challenge, a leader can figuratively speak from the ruins.

The president I served, George W. Bush, did so literally after 9/11: "The people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon." At the 2005 Gleneagles G-8 meeting, I saw Prime Minister Tony Blair, ashen and subdued, just after receiving news of the London bombings. Returning to London, his public response was steady and unifying.

So what has been President Obama's response to a series of Islamic State terrorist attacks – a Russian plane in Egypt, suicide bombings in Beirut, the Paris massacre – that demonstrate an uncontained global threat? His Nov. 16 press conference in Antalya, Turkey, provides a full picture of Obama's wartime leadership in its seventh year: petulant, divisive and reluctant.

Under close questioning about the effectiveness and urgency of his strategy to fight the Islamic State, Obama quickly pulled out the big guns – against his American critics. They are "talking as if they're tough" and playing "political games," which would betray "a 25-year-old kid who's paralyzed or has lost his limbs."

It is almost beyond belief: A commander in chief, in a time of national testing, deploying limbless soldiers as a rhetorical trump card against his political opponents. In Turkey, Obama expressed more obvious relish for his own partisan battles than for the nation's military goals. America



Michael Gerson

has a president whose wartime leadership is apparently inspired, not by Winston Churchill or Franklin Roosevelt, but by Rachel Maddow. His military strategy in Iraq and Syria may be questionable, but Obama is the Eisenhower of political polarization, the Napoleon of the partisan low blow.

The president would certainly blame Republicans for starting this undignified fight. Which matters not at all to the wartime rhetorical responsibilities of a president.

Another trump card played by Obama in Turkey against his critics was the approval of the U.S. armed forces. "We have the finest military in the world," he said, "and we have the finest military minds in the world, and I've been meeting with them intensively for years now, and it is not just my view but the view of my closest military and civilian advisers that that (an expanded military role) would be a mistake."

How could anyone argue with that? Except that in 2011, Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, sent a classified letter to the White House urging the president to keep 16,000 troops in Iraq, which Mullen called "my best military advice." With his re-election coming up, Obama overruled Mullen in favor of a lower number. And then the Obama administration did not really push to retain any troops at all. In a 2014 New Yorker article by

Dexter Filkins, we learned: "Ben Rhodes, the U.S. deputy national-security adviser, told me that Obama believes a full withdrawal was the right decision." All of which left Iraq less prepared for the emergence of the Islamic State.

Obama has made a habit of this for years now. He bumped up troop levels in Afghanistan in 2010 under pressure from military leaders, but only as part of a strategy of withdrawal on an announced timetable, which is absurd from a military perspective. As civil unrest in Syria turned into civil war, Obama refused to support American proxies in the conflict – against the advice of his secretary of defense, his secretary of state and his CIA director. Obama has often used military advice as a cafeteria offering, picking elements that are consistent with his political promise of "no boots on the ground" and his reputation as the ender of wars.

A president is free, of course, to disregard the advice of military commanders. But he is not then free to claim their blanket blessing on a policy that has resulted in a strategic and humanitarian nightmare.

In truth, President Obama's public leadership in the war against terrorism, now expressed as the war against the Islamic state, has always been sporadic and halfhearted. The leader who took credit for "responsibly ending" America's wars and who argued it was "time to focus on nation-building here at home" is now peeved by criticism of his wartime leadership.

Obama now speaks, sullen and embittered, from the ruins of our national security debate.

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