

# OPINION

THE HUTCHINSON  
**NEWS**

## Editorial Board

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## EDITORIAL

### Serving a purpose

Small-town newspapers fill void and deserve more secure future

In an era of conglomerate media that is increasingly distrusted by the public, small-town newspapers like the Protection Press are chugging away in the service of their communities.

These newspapers serve as a reminder of all that is genuine about the art of journalism.

At newspapers such as the Protection Press, no story is too small to tell and local news and interests are the cornerstone of the paper, not sensational headlines. Getting residents' names in the paper is one of the goals of Protection publisher Bob Greer, who has been working in the trade for more than 50 years.

Small-town papers are also a testament to the fact that not all members of the media are looking for opportunities to "spin" the news, as is often portrayed on television stations. In these rural areas, the goal is much simpler: Be the heart of the community.

But as the Protection publisher slows down because of health reasons, the paper's future is uncertain. Finding a buyer for such a

newspaper is not always easy.

In many ways, the Protection Press represents journalism's past, with more in common with the newspapers of yesterday than today's glitzy national publications.

But it and papers like it can also be our future, should we recognize their value and carry them forward into the next generation.

Increasingly, the Internet and TV cover world news 24 hours a day, and mid-sized and metropolitan newspapers are struggling to compete while developing their own Web products.

But small-town papers have a niche that cannot be matched by national and entertainment news available through other media.

Who else will cover the local school board, or write about the honor student's accomplishments?

Not CNN or Fox News or even the many news blogs on the Web.

But Protection will, as will many of the other newspapers present in Kansas, including The Hutchinson News.

But we must be wise enough to carry these papers onward. Without the interest of the next generation, they, too, might falter.

## WESTERN FRONT

### We need new faces

Isn't it time for a shake-up in the political landscape of Reno County? Not speaking as a Republican or Democrat, but a citizen who feels the judges, sheriff, district attorney, senator and representatives have held office too long, and as someone who is tired of seeing unopposed candidates on the ballot election after election.

When are we going to wake up and remove this arterial buildup from the leadership of our community? We need new faces on the political scene instead of this same crew that in my opinion has led us down an ineffectual and at times twisted path.

We keep placing the same marginal people in office, many of whom are probably incapable of holding a job if we didn't keep electing them.

I suggest a write-in rather than voting for someone who is running unopposed; let them know the office they hold is a privilege, not a birthright.

Can we alter the political landscape of Reno County? Absolutely! Are we going to do so? Probably not. We have become a docile, easily led community.

**GREGORY H. BONTRAGER**  
Hutchinson

### Where's the sense?

I'm confused by the letter from Kelly Seifert in the Aug. 21 Hutchinson News. Seifert wrote, "Increased drilling won't solve the problem but it will increase oil industry profits. It would take at least a decade to bring any oil online."

I believe it costs several million dollars to drill one well offshore. If the above statements are correct, the millions invested wouldn't bring the oil companies any return for 10 years. So how are they getting rich if they have to wait 10 years for a return on their investments? Most businesses wouldn't survive waiting 10 years for a return on an investment.

As I stated in a previous letter, whatever happened to common sense and critical thinking?

**PAT HABERER**  
Russell

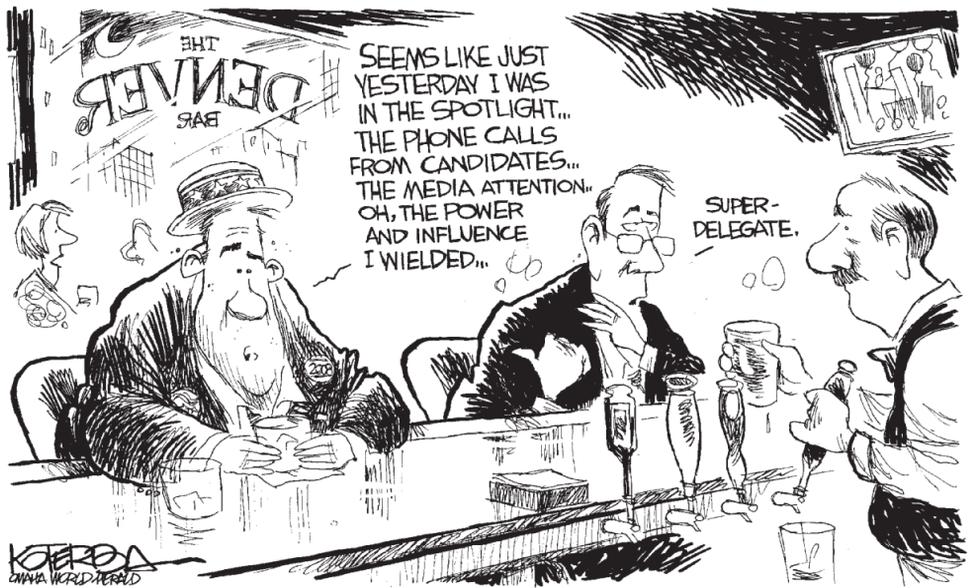
### Clearing up some facts

In response to the letter from Alvin Schmidt published Aug. 11, I must write to correct statements made in error: I too have written to Sen. Pat Roberts on several issues by e-mail or post over the years. I have also made numerous phone calls to him to voice opinions and concerns. To each of these contacts, Roberts has always responded promptly by return mail. There was

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.

**DORIS BLEW**  
Stafford



## COLUMNISTS

### Don't be misled when buying eco-friendly

As my friend and I are walking into the gym, she turns to me and says, "Why are you using a plastic water bottle?"

Um ... well, I mumbled some pathetic excuse. I know better, but yet I haven't totally kicked plastic water bottles out of my life. Is it good enough to say I make sure to recycle them? Probably not.

Looking around the gym, I was even further humiliated by my plastic water bottle. While there were a few other offenders, many were using the reusable water bottles – also made of plastic, but not the disposable, single use kind that are rapidly filling our landfills (an estimated 38 billion were tossed in the trash last year).

Among my list of to-do's over the three-day weekend, I have added purchasing a reusable water bottle. Easy enough, right? I'm sure there's an aisle at Target that will have what we need.

However, if past experiences are any indication, making Earth-friendly product choices isn't as easy as finding the product that has the recycling symbol on the bottom or says organic and all natural.

You can easily get taken advantage of if you don't know what you're looking for and you just use the company's marketing materials to guide your buying choices. The industry calls this "greenwashing" – in which products are misleadingly marketed as lacking dangerous chemicals or as being made with higher-quality natural ingredients.

I've been a victim of greenwashing ... more than once. I chalk it up to part of the learning process. There are mountains of information to weed through and who has the time to learn what the ingredients on the back of your lotion bottle mean and from where they're derived?

In an attempt to make the process a

Community columnist



Jessica Miller

little easier for you, I have learned a few tips along the way.

First off, on the reusable water bottle issue, it seems the best choice is a stainless steel or aluminum bottle. Plastic can leach chemicals and perhaps harbor more bacteria. I haven't shopped yet, but I'm sure the plastic kind is cheaper.

If the chemicals are a concern for you, you'll want to know that items with a No. 3, 6 or 7 on the bottom are considered plastics to avoid. The No. 3 (found in the triangle) means it's a PVC product; this is the stuff cling wraps are made from. Styrofoam is defined as a No. 6 and is also known to leach chemicals, as is a 7 – polycarbonate (commonly used in baby bottles). None of these products are recyclable.

When it comes to reading food labels, words like fresh, natural, hormone-free, antibiotic-free and free-range are not reliable because there are no uniform standards for applying the label. If the chicken owner has a grass plot outside the coop, he can call his chicken free-range, even though his chickens may never touch the grass. But with free-range labeling, he can charge more for his poultry. The consumer pays more for a low-quality product.

If you want greater assurance about the quality of your food, it's best that you look for items labeled with the USDA organic seal or other labels such as Certified Humane Raised and Han-

dled or Food Alliance. These are verified by a third party. Another option are products labeled rBGH-free, grass-fed or pastured, wild-caught or raised on small farms. While these aren't verified, they are known to be more reliable than the aforementioned terms.

Labeling in the non-food industry makes it easy to be greenwashed. These common terms are used without verification – organic (minus the USDA seal), hypoallergenic, cruelty-free, non-comodogenic and biodegradable. Look instead for products with LEED certification, PVC-free, PCR (post-consumer recycled), low and no-VOC (volatile organic compounds) and scientific certification systems certified biodegradable.

Overwhelmed? I am!

There's no way I can totally avoid parabens, sodium laurel sulfate, high fructose corn syrup, mineral oil or Styrofoam. But I try.

A friend introduced me to thegreenguide.com, which is probably my favorite resource. As far as shopping goes, Target has the best selection of more organic personal care products. Burt's Bees is a particular line I love. Smith's Market sells grass-fed beef, some eco-friendly cleaning products and USDA organic items. Braum's has delicious rBGH-free milk.

Whether your motivation is for personal health, preserving the Earth's natural resources or something in between, good luck! While I've conquered recycling, I have a lot of room for improving in the areas of reducing and reusing.

For now, I have to go buy a new water bottle.

Jessica Miller is a Hutchinson transplant and a marketing communications strategist for Catalyst Creative Services. E-mail: jessica@ccsAdAgency.com.

### The Olympics, through jaundiced eyes

Whatever happened to Michael Phelps? He was all but ubiquitous just a week or so ago – he and that nice Dara Torres (with the curious first name of "41-year-old" – and now they're nowhere to be found.

Sic Transit Gloria, I guess. (My high school teachers always told me Latin would come in handy, and now it has.)

Like many people, I watched the Olympics. And watched it and watched it. Don't ask me why.

I really don't care that much about swimming; I've always thought it could be improved by putting an alligator in the pool. And while I enjoy watching women's beach volleyball, what's the ball for? But I am passionately devoted to those events compared to synchronized diving. (I'll admit it's hard to do, but what's the point?)

As a matter of fact, I hate all sports that are judged – diving, figure skating, gymnastics, all of them. They're inherently unfair, if not outright crooked.

Women's gymnastics, for example, seems to exist solely for the purpose of cheating the American girls of medals they've rightfully won. In the recent competition, every time an American would wobble a bit on a landing, the judges would knock three points off her score. Every time a pre-pubescent Chinese kid would land on her caboose, the judges would say: "Wasn't that cute? See how gracefully she falls."

It was a sham and a mockery. Phelps' feat of winning eight gold medals (they called it "historic," but then again what isn't?) stirred debate



Donald Kaul

over whether he was the greatest Olympic athlete of all time. Some said he was, some favored others.

I favored others. Eight gold medals is a lot, but don't forget he was lucky in two of the races. He won one gold in a relay because a teammate swam an incredible anchor leg, and he was all but beaten in the 100-meter butterfly until the leader missed the wall by a fingernail.

How does that performance compare with Jesse Owens at the 1936 Berlin Games or Carl Lewis in the 1984 Los Angeles Games, both of whom won 100-meter, 200, 400-meter relay and long jump medals?

But my favorite all-time Olympian by far is the Czech distance runner, Emil Zatopek. Already a gold medal winner in 1948 (in the 5000-meter run), he won both the 5,000- and 10,000-meter races at the 1952 Helsinki Olympics. (That's roughly nine miles of winning right there.) Then, almost on a whim he decided to enter the marathon, a 26-mile race that he'd never run before.

One of the great marathoners of the day was Jim Peters of England. He de-

cidated to set a fast pace at the start of the race to sucker the inexperienced marathoner Zatopek into overextending himself.

After a few miles, Zatopek drew abreast of Peters and said:

"Peters, I've never run one of these before. Is this a proper pace? It seems slow."

Peters assured him it was a proper pace and immediately felt a stitch in his side. Later in the race, he dropped out.

Zatopek cruised into Olympic stadium alone and had crossed the finish line before the second-place finisher had entered.

Zatopek went home as a national hero, but in 1968, during the ill-fated insurrection against Soviet rule known as "the Prague spring," he sided with the rebels, was arrested and sentenced to work in a Uranium mine for the next nine years. Eventually, regime-change came to the Czechoslovakia and he was rehabilitated.

But that was a great Olympian. Actually, my hero of this year's games was not Phelps but Usain Bolt, the insouciant Jamaican sprinter. His victories in the 100- and 200-meter dashes were among the most remarkable athletic feats I've ever seen. Sprints are won by lunges at the tape, not by guys who look as though they're running alone.

And the best part about it was: no judges.

Donald Kaul is a retired Washington columnist for the Des Moines Register.

Doonesbury



## 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