

OPINION

THE HUTCHINSON NEWS

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EDITORIAL

Faces of food stamps

Compassion should define debate about recipients

For I was hungry, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

Matthew 25: 35-40

The faces of food stamps are many.

Sometimes those faces are of a working family struggling to stay afloat in an increasingly difficult economy. Sometimes, those faces are of the disabled, who because of misfortune or misjudgment are not able to provide for themselves. Sometimes it's the face of a child, and sometimes it's the face of a widowed grandmother.

And, yes, sometimes, the faces of food stamps are those of the afflicted and addicted, who have learned through the years to treat a compassionate social safety net as a game and a way of life.

But every one is the face of a person, the least of these of which Jesus spoke.

The fortunate among us – whose lives have fallen neatly in place, who have held on to our health and our hopes for the future – cannot control the actions, desires or outcomes of another; even if we think it just. We can't make another's choices, nor can we hold as ransom another's life if they don't conform to our ideals.

We can choose, however, to view those faces of food stamps with compassion or contempt.

With compassion, we offer help without judgment and assistance without the expectation of favor. We offer a path to a better life, with the hope that another will accept it freely.

With contempt, we offer neglect, shame and judgment. We refuse to lay out a road to hope and prosperity, but instead outline what we will require in order to win our love and approval.

Will a compassionate heart toward the hungry, the thirsty and the sick lead some to exploit our kindness? Almost certainly, but it is better than the caustic effect of a view tainted with hatred, ownership and disdain of our country's weakest people.

Last weekend, The News explored the issue of food stamps, as well as the people who rely on the food program to meet their basic needs. The stories shined a light on both the

merits and faults of the program, and on the people for whom food stamps is a daily fact of life.

Some argue the food stamp program is broken, that too many people game the system and in the process lose their motivation to work. Others argue the program is perfectly effective and should continue in its current form. Neither view is completely right, and the solution – if there's one at all – won't be simple or easy.

But maybe the discussion can begin with recognition that the debate over food stamps isn't a debate about policy, nor should it be a debate about whether the weak should comply with demands of the strong.

The issue of food stamps is a debate about faces and the people behind them.

It's about people who suffer misfortune, who lack the capacity to work, who aren't as strong, fit, intelligent, educated, charismatic or as mindful as most of us.

It's about people who have grown up poor and know no other way to survive. It's about people who have experienced trauma or who have made bad decisions for which they've spent their whole lives paying.

It's about people born with severe illnesses or people in debilitating car accidents. It's about people born to broken and tormented families or in a part of the country that suffers from chronic poverty.

And it's about people who see welfare as a better hope than work.

If we remove judgment, however, and view the issue of food stamps through the lens of people, maybe we begin to examine the underlying problem we originally set out to solve, which is how 47 million people in the richest country on earth can be so grossly excluded from the nation's prosperity that they must rely on the public's mercy for food.

So long as the debate is founded in judgment of another's decisions or lifestyle, the food stamp program never will fully serve as a tool to help the poor attain self-sufficiency. Instead of finding ways to help more people find a way to a better life, we'll continue to piously shake our heads in shame and disapproval at the faces of those whose lives don't mirror our own.

A conversation that begins with compassion, however, compels us to ask how we can best help and serve the less fortunate. A compassionate view moves us away from inflammatory language that reduces our brethren to something less than human and instead starts with the biblical idea that we should freely offer an open hand to the poor in our land.

The faces of food stamps are many, yet it's worth pausing long enough to consider that one of those faces could be ours, our children, our friends or our families.

Then we can rejoice for what we have and let compassion guide our decisions about how best to help the least of these.



'The same could've been said about the Emancipation Proclamation.'

COLUMNISTS

The Winter Games and tow-truck stuck

With the 2014 Olympic Winter Games and all that fanfare upon on us, I'm struck with a question: The Winter Olympics have just started?

I don't think so. I'm afraid I've been stuck in them for the past two months. You know them: It's snow and ice! We've already had too many snow events this year. We're talking about winter-weather travel. These are the real Winter Olympics. You know that.

We have dealt, and are still dealing, with yet another Classic Kansas Winter Storm. For crying out loud, 12 inches of snow. Really? I mean, that taxes us all. Some of you don't know me as well as others because my column has been on The News' Outdoors page for the last two years.

So, you might not know that I live in the middle of nowhere, about 11 miles east of Hutch in the middle of the sandhills. As I told the boss from the beginning, I will do whatever I can to make it to work from there, no matter what, but if there is a foot of snow, I'm not making it.

There was a foot of snow Tuesday. I didn't make it. She understood, one of the best bosses I've ever had. She understands the outdoors. She understands that at least 360 days out of the year, I'm OK. She understands that day I was not. I simply told her that I'm not going anywhere until the trac-



Jeff Myrick

tor guy comes along to dig me out. She knows; she understands.

I've been here for three years. I have seen these kinds of snow events about three times. Maybe four. Maybe more. But these are events. These are the Winter Olympics. I would like to explain them, but maybe I can't. I have been going down these roads for decades because of my insane belief that life is better in the country than in town.

In years past, I've had plenty of experiences. I remember distinctly a Christmas Eve blizzard in eastern Kansas where I was snow-bound for days. It doesn't just happen here. And, yes, it took a tractor with a blade on the back to get me out of that mess. It thawed, froze, thawed again, refroze again. Always an interesting ride in and out of that place during the winter. That's when I started referring to them as the Winter Games.

You town folks can't quite understand as well, but I do believe you understand on the periphery. It's like a downhill bobsled thing

with your vehicle. You have to be careful with your surroundings. My son Brett was here from Chicago at Christmas, another time we had a snow event. He had a rental car and had to be pulled out by a tow truck, but I didn't. I got out of there the next day, thanks to the tractor dude.

It happened again this past week, the next round of our Winter Olympics. I can tell more stories. Really. I won't. Let's just say that. But I can tell you about the many toboggan trips down my roads. You really want to go down my roads? Really? I don't think so. There's skill involved to know when to slow down, how to brake, when to gun it, etc., but mostly you need some luck, too, while trying to avoid getting tow-truck stuck.

Ah, the Winter Games. There are going to be many days of them to come. The current batch of snow isn't going anywhere anytime soon. It's frigid on top of everything else, and there's always a chance of more on the way.

I don't often quote from the Classics, but I will. It's a Frank Sinatra song and it fits me well as I head down the inevitable road of snow- and ice-filled nights. "Luck Be A Lady Tonight."

Well said, Frank. Well said. Jeff Myrick is a copy/design editor at The News. Email: jmyrick@hutchnews.com.

For sale, the MLK legacy

"I won't have any money to leave behind. I won't have the fine and luxurious things of life to leave behind. But I just want to leave a committed life behind."

– Martin Luther King Jr., Feb. 4, 1968



Leonard Pitts

Maybe we should take up an offering.

Obviously, the heirs of Martin Luther King Jr. are hard up for money. That must be why they keep selling off pieces of his legacy.

Have you heard the latest? King's youngest child, Bernice, issued a statement last week after her brothers, Dexter and Martin III, filed suit to force her to turn over their father's Nobel Peace Prize and his traveling Bible. She says they want to sell them to a private owner.

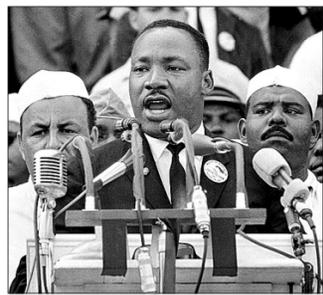
According to the suit, King's heirs agreed in 1995 to turn their inheritance over to a corporate entity, The Estate of Martin Luther King Jr. Inc., where Martin is chairman of the board. The complaint says Bernice has "repeatedly acknowledged and conceded the validity" of the agreement, but still refuses to surrender the items. The suit makes no mention of a sale. I called the King brothers' lawyer for comment. He didn't return the call.

In her statement, Bernice writes, "While I love my brothers dearly, this latest decision by them is extremely troubling." She says she is "appalled," "ashamed" and "disappointed" by their behavior. "It reveals a desperation beyond comprehension." Their father, she adds, "MUST be turning in his grave."

Turning? Martin Luther King must be spinning like a record album.

Not just because of this, but because over the years his family has

missed no opportunity to pimp his legacy. That verb is used advisedly. I am mindful of its racial freight, but frankly, no other word adequately describes the behavior of this family with regard to its most celebrated member. Every year, they remind us to respect his legacy, but it seems increasingly apparent they don't respect – or even fully understand it – themselves.



Associated Press

Martin Luther King Jr. addresses marchers during his "I Have a Dream" speech at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington on Aug. 28, 1963.

If they did, they could not have licensed his image for a commercial with Homer Simpson. Or put his personal papers on sale for \$20 million. Or demanded money to allow his likeness to grace a memorial on the Washington Mall.

What would King think of them fighting Harry Belafonte for the return of papers King gave him as a gift – especially since Belafonte

helped finance King's movement and the upbringing of these self-same kids?

What would King think of the fact that these bickering, tiresome children of his are forever in litigation and public squabbles with one another and that money always seems to be at the root? Especially since he famously disdained "shallow things" like personal gain?

So yes, let's pass the hat. How much do you think it would take to induce these people to grow up, shut up, and stop using their daddy like an ATM?

I admit to being selective in my vexation. If Woodrow Wilson's heirs sold his Nobel Prize, or Booker T. Washington's his Bible, I doubt I would even notice.

The difference, I think, is that King is nearer to us in time and of a magnitude of greatness those men, great though they were, do not approach. He resides on a pantheon of American heroes occupied by the Founders, Abraham Lincoln and no one else. Moreover with him there is, especially for African-Americans but really for all believers in human dignity, a sense of communal ownership and collective investment – a sense that he is ours and his memory, sacred. His children are the caretakers of that memory on behalf of us all. To trade on it for the love of money is starkly appalling and profoundly offensive.

The fact that they either don't understand this or don't care speaks volumes. King's kids may be legally entitled to sell his legacy to the highest bidder. But the fact that a thing is legal to do does not make it right to do.

Considering who their father was, you'd think that's something they'd know.

Email Leonard Pitts at lpitts@miamiherald.com.

Farm bill opposition

Five of six Kansas congressional members vote against measure

Kansans should ask themselves why five of six members of the Kansas congressional delegation voted against the farm bill that easily passed in the U.S. House and Senate.

Kansas is a farm state, and agencies across the state supported the measure. Only Sen. Jerry Moran voted for the bill. The rest – Sen. Pat Roberts, Reps. Kevin Yoder, Lynn Jenkins, Tim Huel-skamp and Mike Pompeo – inexplicably voted "no."

Well, almost inexplicably in Roberts' case. His vote was not surprising; he had made his opposition known for months in advance of a two-year debate over the measure.

Everyone admits the law isn't perfect – few are – but this farm bill would have served the needs of Kansas farmers. Moran saw that, unlike the others.

Kansas House members cherry-picked issues within the farm bill and used weak arguments on which to base their "no" votes.

Pompeo and Jenkins chose the country-of-origin labeling. Huel-skamp argued that the food stamp cuts weren't deep enough.

Roberts, like Huelskamp, said the 1 percent cut to food stamps

wasn't deep enough. But Roberts was able to see a few bright spots in the farm bill while articulating that the cons outweighed the pros.

Spoken like true conservatives all.

And conservatism might shine more educational light on farm bill opposition than the Kansas delegation itself.

Nothing wrong with being a conservative, but a little variety would give Kansans a more well-rounded congressional delegation.

One needs only to give a superficial look at Roberts' Senate campaign where the senator's opponent, Milton Wolf, has pushed Roberts into tea party mode. He should have the backbone to stand his ground no matter the opponent, but a nearly unrecognizable Roberts has emerged with increasingly conservative statements and votes. Is it any wonder why Roberts voted against a farm bill that had the support of Kansas ag producers?

Kansas long has been a conservative state. But when that conservatism pushes five of six of the state's members of Congress to vote against a farm bill that gives farmers some assurances in this farm belt state, one has to wonder if these congressional members voted for their constituents or their next election win.

Every year, they remind us to respect his legacy, but it seems increasingly apparent they don't respect – or even fully understand it – themselves.

If they did, they could not have licensed his image for a commercial with Homer Simpson. Or demanded money to allow his likeness to grace a memorial on the Washington Mall.