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First Amendment

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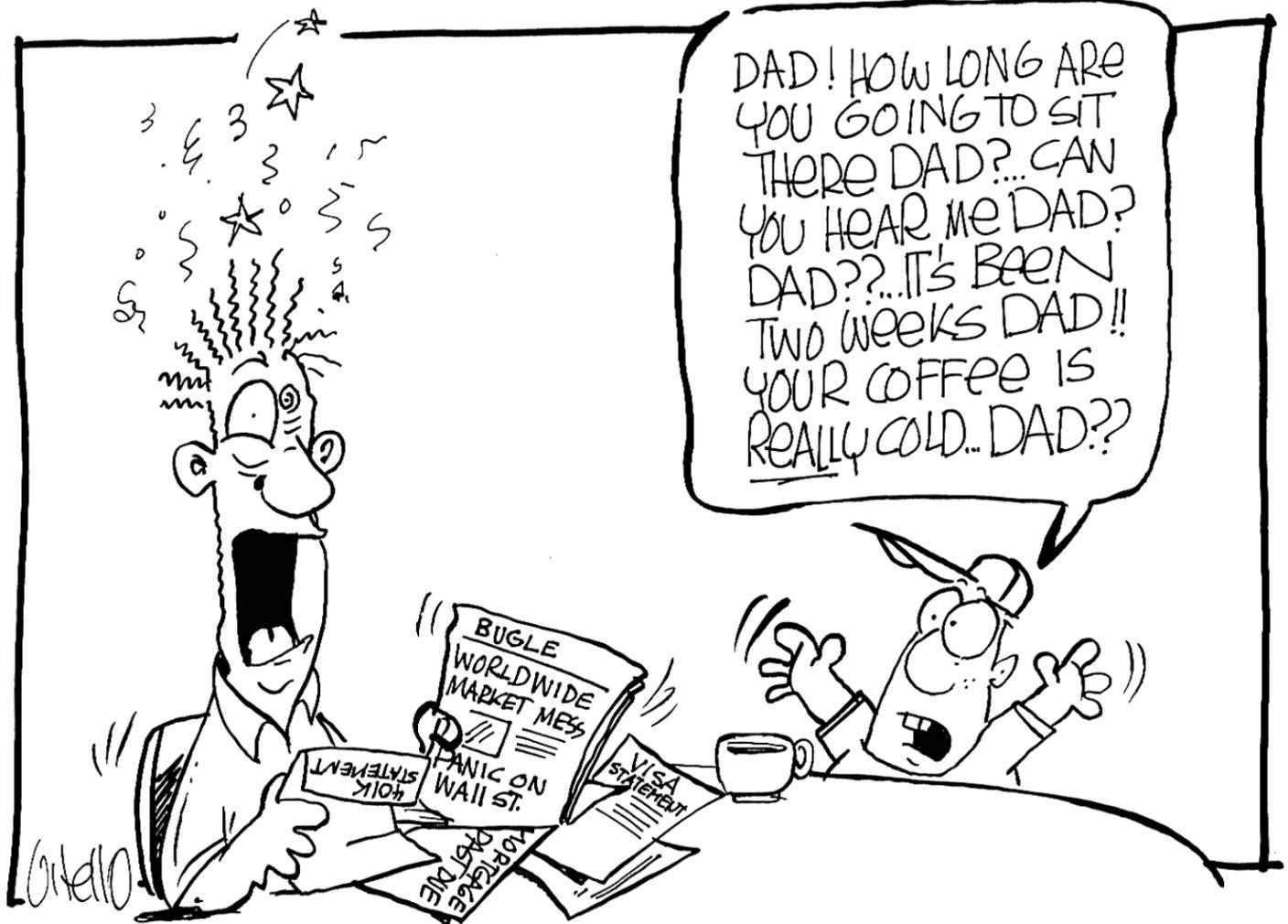
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Opinions



The ostrich in the room

By Jen Reeder

Last Thursday, a nice man greeted me during the Carbon Valley Chamber of Commerce's Business After Hours at Suzi-Cue's in Frederick. He complimented my wings (it was allegedly a costume party), and after we introduced ourselves, he said he enjoyed the Herald and complimented my writing.

Things were going great until he asked if we were getting a lot of support from the community. I said that it has been rewarding to get such positive feedback from readers, but that financial support from potential advertisers has been more of a challenge.

"It's no surprise with the economy," I said with a shrug, and then he stiffened.

"The economy isn't so bad," he told me. "Small businesses are flourishing."

Since I work for a small business that is still finding its financial legs, I begged to differ. I also told him that the reporter position at the Carbon Valley Herald was the first job offer I'd had in a seven-month job hunt that didn't involve changing diapers.

"Well, that's your personal experience and your industry, but that doesn't mean it's the economy's fault," he persisted.

I decided to avoid other personal anecdotes, like my friend who was laid off last week from her market-

ing job, or the mortgage broker who is now working retail for minimum wage. I took the reporter approach, telling him that in just my three months at the Herald, I'd covered numerous business closures. There was Firestone's Quiznos, where the franchise owner told me rising food prices (from the high gas prices) from vendors, coupled with corporate mandates to sell \$5 subs to compete for cash-strapped customers, had forced him to close, and Gerards, a bakery that had successfully sold bread and employed hundreds of people – not only in Firestone but also California and North Carolina – until abruptly laying off all employees last July. We've covered waitresses having trouble making ends meet because customer numbers and tips are down, closures of the UPS Store, Saddleback Grapes and Grains ...

"How many of those people had good business plans?" he demanded. "And it was probably high rents. It's not the economy's fault. You hear all these emotional stories of doom and gloom but it's not the economy. Do you know the statistics on unemployment? It's down."

We were interrupted before I could launch into a tirade or mention that the stock market had plunged 777 points that Monday, the \$700 billion Wall Street bailout package the Bush administration brought to Congress and the fact that John McCain suspended his presidential campaign to

deal with the economic crisis might be indicators that the economy is not good. The next day, the Labor Department announced that employers slashed 159,000 jobs in September, the largest cut in five years (and one that brought the total of lost jobs this year up to 760,000).

But no – the only problem is bad business plans and whiners. The economy is fine.

To claim that the economy isn't in serious trouble is staggeringly obtuse. Ignoring the problem or pretending it doesn't exist is like the ostrich that sees a charging predator and sticks its head in the sand – if I can't see you, you don't exist.

I don't know if I'll ever be able to convince men like the one at the chamber event that the economy is, in fact, terrible. What I do know is that the Nov. 4 election is very, very important, and that we need to elect representatives who not only acknowledge the problem, but have concrete solutions for it.

I also know that it is vitally important to support local businesses. Eat in town instead of driving to Longmont; shop at the mom-and-pops. And consider buying an ad in the Herald if you want it to be around for awhile. I hope you do, because I'll be honest: the prospect of re-entering the job market in this economy scares the heck out of me.