

## Open court protects the justice system

The area won't have a murder trial this week, so we'll be spared the usual defense whining that the accused can't get a fair trial because of "prejudicial pre-trial publicity."

If you listen to a defense attorney, any pretrial publicity is prejudicial.

That's especially true if it gives the defendant's name, say, or relationship to the deceased — or any obvious facts of the case.

There probably is such a thing as "prejudicial" publicity. In a culture where murder is rare, people take great interest in this ultimate crime. In a region where we count murders by the decade, rather than by the year, a single homicide is a major event.

People want to know about the crime. They'll talk about it, over the paper or at the coffee shop.

And, of course, they'll talk about whether the defendant is guilty. They usually are. Most murders are no mystery.

The defense of the guilty — and occasionally the innocent as well — being what it is, though, lawyers will make whatever motions and whatever arguments serve their cause. The plea of "prejudicial pretrial publicity" and an accompanying motion to move the trial to another part of the state have become a standard part of the defense arsenal.

If a judge feels the motion is valid, he should grant it. Moving the trial now and then, is a small price to pay for a free and open court system. In most cases, a defendant can get an unbiased jury at home, or at worst, in the next county over.

What we cannot afford is to give in to the temptation to close up these cases and keep the details secret.

Some will argue that people don't need to know what happened. In a very narrow sense, that might be true. If their interest is only prurient, they can go buy a cheap detective novel. There is some of that in any murder case.

But in a democracy, it's vital that the public as a whole knows how major cases are handled. They need to know if a defendant is being treated fairly by the system. They need to know if the poor are oppressed or the rich treated lightly by the courts.

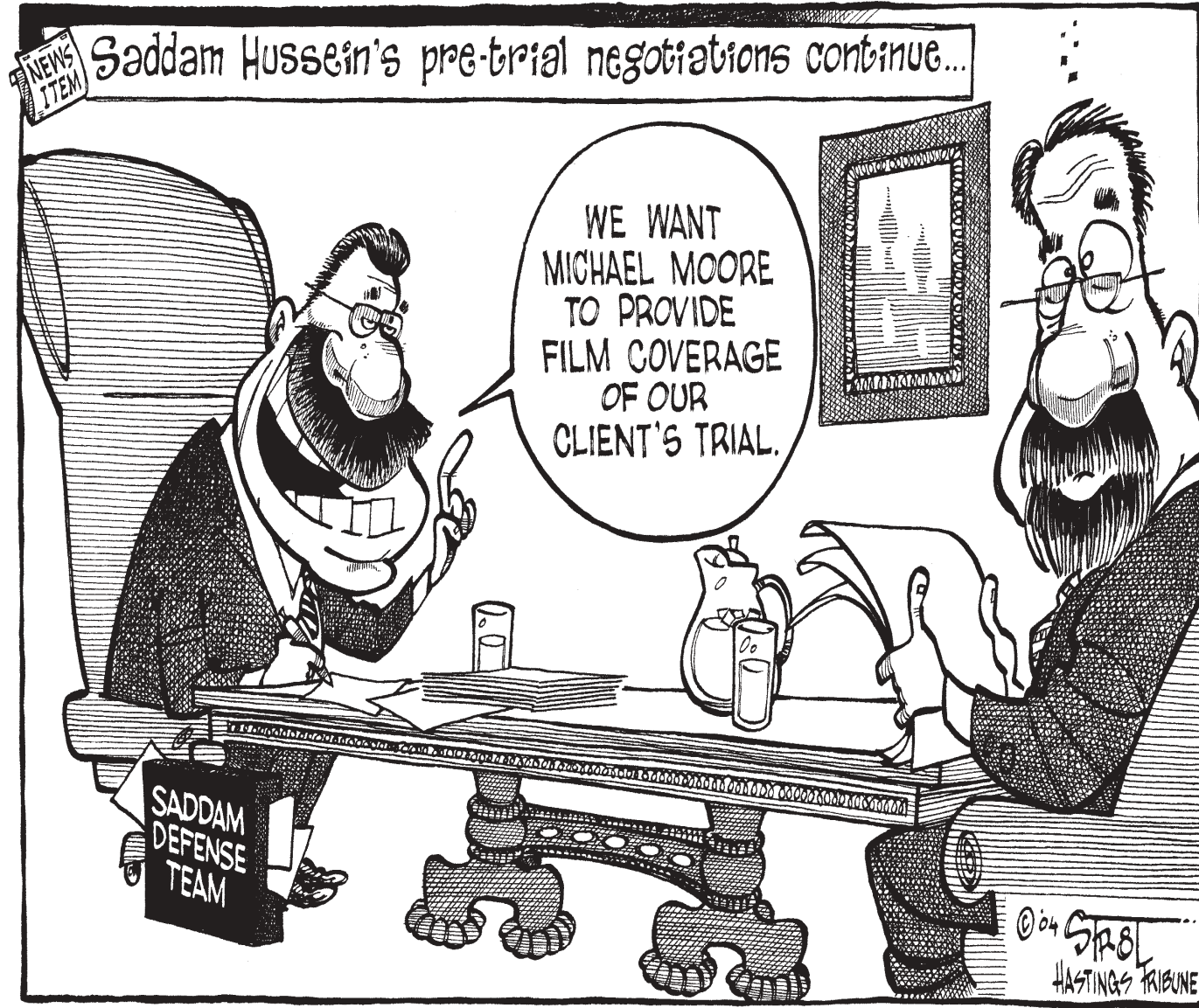
And they won't know if trials are closed or so much of the evidence is kept from them that they cannot form a reasonable opinion. That's why our courts traditionally are open and our courthouse files can be inspected by any citizen. The Founding Fathers had seen the abuse possible when courts did not answer to the people.

Defense attorneys will continue to file motions. That's their job. Newspapers will continue to report on murder cases and the rest of the court system. That's our job.

Sometimes, a trial must be moved to give a defendant a better shot at an unbiased jury, but that's not often necessary. When it happens, it's part of the price we pay for our freedom, for a system that not only offers rights to the accused, but actually cares about them.

In a closed system, those very rights would not exist.

— Steve Haynes



## A chick is worth more than a gold egg

Ten-year-old Chantelle is, to say the least, exuberant. Remember, she is the one we used to call "The Texas Tornado."

During the drive to our house, she was full of questions: do we have sheep this year, can she drive the little yard tractor, can she make a birdhouse for the fair, do we still have chickens?

The answer was affirmative to all of the above, except the sheep. Jim said, "No more sheep."

Anyway, while we were talking about the chickens, Jim told her that a raccoon had killed all our hens except one and that we had bought some new chickens; five hens and a rooster. He went on to tell her that they are bantam chickens and not very big.

In her most innocent city-kid manner she asked, "Does that make them chick-ettes?" We laughed 'til we cried.

The chickens have always held a fascination for Chantelle and she was curious about how you got baby chickens. With-

### Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



out going into too much detail, her PaPa explained that a hen has to set on eggs for about three weeks to hatch baby chicks.

"Could we have some baby chickens, Papa? Could we please, please, please? I'll take care of them. I promise. Please, Papa. Please."

Well, what could we do? We borrowed an incubator from a friend (who threw in a dozen fertile eggs) and after Chantelle was fully briefed, we now have eggs incubating in the front room. The waiting has begun.

She is taking this very seriously. I think she has named every egg and considers

herself their "mother." When she left Sunday for her week at church camp, we had to swear an oath of allegiance to faithfully take care of her eggs.

"I'm trusting you guys with my babies," were her last words to us.

It's an awesome responsibility. One we better not mess up.

"Please, God. Let at least one or two chicks hatch."

—ob—

A friend sent us an "e-toon", and it probably fits Jim and me.

A couple was sitting on stools at a cafe counter. The husband turned to his wife and said, "You know, Dear, in about 10 years we'll look like that couple down at the end of the counter."

His wife gave him a deadpan look and asked, "You do know that's a mirror, don't you?"

That's us, we can hardly believe we're getting older. But sure enough, now that I have a granddaughter taller than I am, I am forced to admit time is flying by.

## More rules may not fix the problem

I listened to the newscast the other night as they reported the shooting at the ConAgra Plant in Kansas City. It was reported the shooter had been teased and bullied ever since he'd come to work.

"He was a loner and not very friendly," one person said.

"Signs are posted stating firearms are not allowed, but that isn't enough," said one worker.

And so now the talk is of how to protect ConAgra workers. Some are complaining there isn't enough security. If the dialogue sounds familiar, it is.

Basically the same thoughts follow each such incident.

I really wonder if a person determined to do harm stops to read the sign and obey the law. It may work for the person who forgets his/her concealed weapon from the Saturday night bar trip. But for the other gun-toting individual I don't think it matters.

### Phase II

Mary Kay Woodyard



But my point is this.

We react by wanting more rules, laws and regulations instead of determining the cause of the situation and seeking to correct the problem. We react by blaming the individual, the system, even the gun manufacturer, but do we turn our sights inward and see what we might have done?

The key in this situation is the statement describing his social interactions and personality traits.

Studies have shown that frequent bullying can elicit later criminal behavior.

We like to think bullying behavior ends in childhood and maybe it does, perhaps it is certain people's childhoods, which never ends.

Teasing is basically a coward's way of communicating. It gives the perpetrator a sense of control over another individual.

Anytime we set ourselves apart from someone else we are creating division and hostility.

Children subjected to bullying separate from society and become angry. Adults who are subjected to this treatment may end up depressed and violent and then we are left with the questions now facing law enforcement and ConAgra victims' families.

From our childhood the verse from the Bible, "Love your neighbor as yourself," rings loudly from the lips of those professing the faith, but lip service is easy to perform, actions, do truly, speak louder than words.

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR:

### Oberlin man doesn't like Norton candidate

Dear Editor,  
Republicans and Common Sense.

First, I see no reason why any Republican would want to vote John Faber out of office. He has done a great job and is in a leadership position to help Western Kansas in the future.

However, if Republicans think that John Faber must go, then it makes more sense to elect the Democrat challenger than Doug Sebelius. We taxpayers already have a hard time with one Sebelius in Topeka raising our taxes. Why send another one who not only would work against us, but who would no doubt drag

along three of four other Republicans?

Doug Sebelius said that his sister-in-law is a Democrat but he is a Republican. Of course, that did not stop Doug from taking an important governor appointment with the wildlife and parks department.

Should Doug Sebelius go to Topeka?

I say it will only take the governor three months to "break him to lead". And I am real sure that Doug is going to want another governor appointment so badly that his new name will be Pinocchio.

Arthur Loyd Shelton  
Oberlin

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR:

### Norton woman thinks people should check out pound

Dear Editor,

I wonder how many folks have been out to visit the new pound for cats and dogs?

I went out there Monday afternoon to see what they had and found Sherry Hickman and staff busy cleaning the kennels, feeding the animals and answering phone calls. There were three adult cats and several kittens of different sizes and colors running around playing.

There were a variety of dogs — a young Irish setter, a black lab and other dogs of various sizes, ages and colors. They had three 7-week old puppies that had just arrived the day before and, of course, like all puppies and kittens were cute and playful.

Go see for yourself.

Go down KQNK road about three-quarters of a mile and turn left (north) on a paved country road. This will take you to the newly built, cream-colored building that houses the office and kennels. Just give Sherry a call at (785) 874-

4294. She'll be glad to tell you how to get there and show you around. Could be you'll find a new friend to take home.

Sincerely,  
June Prout  
Norton

### Couple thinks student writings were great

Dear Editor,

Thank you and Mr. Zimmerman for sharing with us the "Pledges of Allegiance to Country" that the eighth-grade students wrote.

Also the art that was with the article. What thoughtful young people we have. What a fine class of eighth graders.

Congratulations to you all. Norton is blessed with outstanding young people and also teachers. Again, Thank You.

Sincerely,  
Jean and Warren White  
Norton