

### Now, how do you make dirt?

God is sitting in Heaven when a scientist says to Him, "Lord, we don't need You anymore. Science has finally figured out a way to create life out of nothing. In other words, we can now do what You did in the 'beginning.'"

"Oh, is that so? Tell me..." replies God.

"Well," says the scientist, "we can take dirt and form it into the likeness of You and breathe life into it, thus creating man."

"Well that's interesting. Show me."

So the scientist bends down to the earth and starts to mold the soil.

"Oh, no, no, no," interrupts God. "Get your own dirt."

-td-

I watched some congresswoman on television the other night that was so far out of touch with the average American that it made me sick. It was one of those "I feel your pain" kind of conversations. Sure. The rank-and-file members of Congress receive \$169,300 annually (Google.com search), greatly outdistancing the average citizen. She understands our pain at the gas pump, she said, and how the cost of food impacts our wallets, and our runaway health care costs, etc. It sounded, sadly, like she was auditioning for Comedy Central.

House and Senate members both currently receive \$169,300. Incidentally, President Bush's salary is \$400,000 annually, including a \$50,000 expense allowance. Vice President Cheney's salary is \$221,100.

Is it just me or is there something wrong with this picture. We've been told that those people work for us, and if that is the case why is it we pay them so much, while we settle for crumbs that fall on the floor. That is where the problem comes in. After they are once elected and then re-elected their piggy bank expands and expands and pop — they're millionaires. A congressman need only serve six years (three terms) to surpass the million \$ mark. Where are you after six years on the job? President Bush will have earned \$3,200,000 by the time he vacates the place.

I often wonder how dizzy our founding fathers get rolling over in their graves at what we've done with the plan they put in place to guide us along the way. I don't think they envisioned people serving 25 years, a half century, or more, and enjoy the life of the rich and famous. I think they wanted as many of us as possible to have the opportunity to serve this land and to not make it a career, as is the case today. Serve a couple of terms, then get out of the way so someone else can do the same. There would be less temptation to drift off the path, it wouldn't take millions of dollars to get elected. But as it stands, we've let this thing overwhelm us.

I certainly tip my hat to Sen. Sam Brownback who, 12 years ago, said he would serve only two terms (Senate term is six years). The good senator is doing it the way, I believe, our founding fathers intended.

OK, I've rambled enough. But it just gets to me when I hear these people, supposedly guiding our ship of state, tell me they feel "our pain." The longer they serve, the less they remember how painful it is.

-td-

Voter turnout here on Tuesday wasn't very good. Brandy has a story on the election results and also a story listing the percentage of voters for each place where ballots were cast. Someone remarked that "there just wasn't anything on the ballot to bring out a big vote." How sad. We've lost the very meaning of why we vote. Then again, maybe it's because there are no contested offices. There was only one countywide contested race and that was for sheriff, and involved only those who are Republican. But I think the November general election will erase the memories of the poor showing in August. Get ready!

-td-

Have a good evening! And let's see if we can beat the election numbers at the church of our choice this weekend.

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## THE NORTON TELEGRAM

ISSN 1063-701X

215 S. Kansas Ave., Norton, KS 67654

Published each Tuesday and Friday by Haynes Publishing Co., 215 S. Kansas Ave., Norton, Kan. 67654. Periodicals mail postage paid at Norton, Kan. 67654.

Postmaster: Send address changes to Norton Telegram, 215 S. Kansas, Norton, Kan. 67654

Official newspaper of Norton and Norton County. Member of the Kansas Press Association, National Newspaper Association, and the Nebraska Press Association

### Nor'West Newspapers

Dick and Mary Beth Boyd  
Publishers, 1970-2002

Incorporating the Norton County Champion  
Marion R. Krehbiel, editor



### Maybe it's time to cut the apron strings

As our country faces a record deficit, a recently published report states the Iraqi government will end this year with a "cumulative budget surplus of \$79 billion". The irony of this is a large percentage of this surplus money is deposited in a bank in New York and we are paying the Iraqi government \$435.6 million in interest (as of the end of 2007).

This money is from their oil interests and with the cost of a barrel of oil significantly higher than last year there won't be a shortage of funds this year.

To be sure there are financial advantages to this arrangement for U.S., however this surplus was to have gone to the reconstruction of Iraq. Some has been accomplished, however some economists

### Phase II

Mary Kay  
Woodyard



face in the U.S. In our desire to achieve world democracy and freedom, we have tunnel vision and often don't take into account the cultures, traditions or even just everyday actions of other groups.

We have invested money in Iraq with the idea they will reform their country as we see fit, not even what is necessarily in their best interest. The United States was founded on individuality and independence. We assume all countries want to achieve their objectives through hard work and determination. It is an admirable quality or theory, but not always a shared goal. Sometimes parents have to cut the apron strings and this may be the time to find another way to promote independence in our recently adopted child...Iraq.

wonder if the U.S. desire to help has kept the Iraqi government from investing in their own future.

According to one report the U.S. has spent "\$23.2 billion in the critical areas of security, oil, electricity and water since the 2003 invasion... But from 2005 through April 2008, Iraq has spent just \$3.9 billion on similar services."

This comes back to a problem we often

### Three myths about so-called 'staycations'

With the summer travel season nearing an end, but no end in sight for high gas prices, more and more Americans have opted to vacation close to home. With this trend expected to continue, the term, "staycation" was born. Chamber of Commerce in cities across the land now market local activities and destinations to their own citizens. Many pundits are predicting that the Great American Roadtrip is coming to the end of the road. In these economic times, it surely is difficult for many families to travel. But, for those who can afford to get away, are staycations truly as beneficial as stationary vacations?

Here are three myths about the staycation:

1) Staycations are easier than "real" vacations.

When most of us dream about getting away from it all, we actually mean we want to get away from it — all of it — even for just a few days. We can't completely relax or recharge with all the distractions and responsibilities embedded into our usual surroundings. That's why many people who could work at home choose not to: They know they don't have enough discipline to stay on task. When the task becomes something that's supposed to be fun — like vacationing at home — most of us find it very difficult to say "no" to things like checking email, paying bills, answering the phone, doing errands, etc. and what should be a week or even just a weekend off, turns into a few hours, at best. We may even revert to our usual paths of least resistance, ie our familiar and not really optimal ways of unwinding — like vegging in front of the TV. Thus, taking ourselves out of our usual routines when we remain in our usual surroundings is actually more difficult. And, if you tend to be super-disciplined, it can

### Guest

Commentary  
Doreen Orion

become even harder to "staycate" — and the temptation to just "check in" at work gets to be too great.

2) Staycations provide the same benefits as "real" vacations.

Part of the joy of traveling is meeting other people who are also away from their usual lives and being able to share experiences with them. That won't happen if most of us start taking staycations. Going elsewhere on vacation is a wonderful way to keep ourselves stimulated by new challenges and exposure to new surroundings and ideas. Getting away from home and from what's familiar, removing ourselves from our comfort zones is a necessary part of growth. Sharing new, foreign experiences and adventures also binds us as families and as a national culture. We can read about diversity, and try to teach our kids about it, but unless we go out and experience it, we'll never truly understand different peoples and cultures. And, what a shame if we don't get a chance to come back to our homes and share what we've seen and experienced with friends, neighbors and co-workers who have themselves, traveled to other places.

3) It's environmentally irresponsible to drive somewhere just for a vacation. It's interesting that this issue is only coming up because the price of gas has increased — it's not like the effect on the environment of burning fuel suddenly became a bad thing. But now that we are all suffering along with our planet, people are taking a righteous stand whenever

someone "wastes" energy. It's important to remember that on vacation, each spouse is not commuting to work daily in separate cars — let alone even more mileage used if the kids drive vehicles of their own. If gas prices worry you, consider going somewhere that has good public transportation. Or, if traveling by car, rent an energy efficient one, or bicycles for the entire family to use once you get to your destination. What about taking the train? The solution to the energy crisis shouldn't be to do away with our mobility, it should be to develop the technology and the means to stay mobile, and use whatever best alternatives are available to us now. The more demands we make on our current modes of energy efficient transportation, the better and more widely available they will become.

So, when contemplating whether to staycate or vacate, remember that remaining at home for recreation may not be as easy as it seems. Even if you are able to ignore the usual demands and responsibilities, just feeling their pull and mustering the energy to resist them can be draining in and of itself. Even worse is the temptation to stick with what's familiar, rather than challenge and stimulate yourself and your family with new experiences. While it may be difficult to get past the price of gas when considering what to do on your time off, just consider what the true price of the staycation might be.

(Doreen Orion is a psychiatrist who traveled for a year with her psychiatrist husband around the U.S. in a converted bus. She is the author of "Queen of the Road: The True Tale of 47 States, 22,000 Miles, 200 Shoes, 2 Cats, 1 Poodle, a Husband, and a Bus With a Will of Its Own" (Broadway Books). For more, visit www.QueenOfTheRoadTheBook.com.)

### Thumbs Up

To... our hospital on the wonderful upgrades. A good facility getting even better. (e-mail)

To... all who took time to read to the children at the library. (called in)

To... the newspaper's columnist Liza Deines, for a great story in Tuesday's paper. (called in)

To... all those involved in the park project downtown; it's really looking super! (e-mail)

(To submit a name, or names, please e-mail tom.d@nwkansas.com, call either 877-3361 or 877-6908, fax 877-3732, mail to 215 S. Kansas Ave. 67654 or drop by the office. Thanks for your continuing input. -td)