

Speak up if you want to protect freedom

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for redress of grievances."

The first amendment to the Constitution, along with the rest of the Bill of Rights, was ratified Dec. 15, 1791 — 212 years ago — and people have been trying to figure it out ever since.

Northwest Kansas and Norton are no exception.

The folks here have been trying to balance our Midwestern Bible-belt traditions against the expectations and needs of others.

Probably 95 percent of the population of Northwest Kansas are Christians of one variety or another. There are undoubtedly a sprinkling of agnostics, a few atheists, some Jews and probably a few people who follow Mohammed, Buddha, Confucius or one of the other Eastern religions.

How much does the majority have to give up to not offend the minority?

If we lived in Saudi Arabia, where the state religion is Islam, we would keep a low profile.

In the United Kingdom, where our government if not most of our people, takes its heritage, the Church of England as the official religion. Folks with other religions are tolerated, but not encouraged.

When the Founding Fathers were drafting the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, these important, controversial and demanding documents, they fought a lot. They argued and bickered. They complained and rewrote. They had a hard time. Everyone wanted it his way, so they tried to put together a set of rules that gave the maximum freedom to everyone, even though they were highly suspicious of the Catholics and Jews and didn't even recognize that there were such things as non-Judeo-Christian religions.

Back in northwest Kansas 212 years later, we are fighting the same battles that raged in Philadelphia.

Is it right to have the children in a public school sing religious carols? Does the beauty and history of the music outweigh any religious scruple?

Should we quit calling the school holiday Christmas vacation and start calling it winter break?

What about nativity scenes in public parks and on city and courthouse lawns? Are they examples of the establishment of religion or just symbols of the holiday season?

There's probably no right answer to any of these questions. We, like our forefathers, will be cussing and discussing the problem for the next 212 years.

At least we hope so, because that's what it's all about — this freedom of religion. The Buddhists, Islamics and atheists have the right to complain, to raise a fuss and to upset the comfortable Christian majority. And the majority has the right to point out that tradition and expectations are on their side.

And thanks to all those folks out there who are complaining about what happens in the schools or the way that city, county and state governments handle everyday religious issues. They keep the dialogue going.

And as long as we keep talking and arguing, we'll be a free people, not having to bow to Mecca or report to Rome or read the Bible or meditate or even pray. Freedom is never quiet.

— Cynthia Haynes

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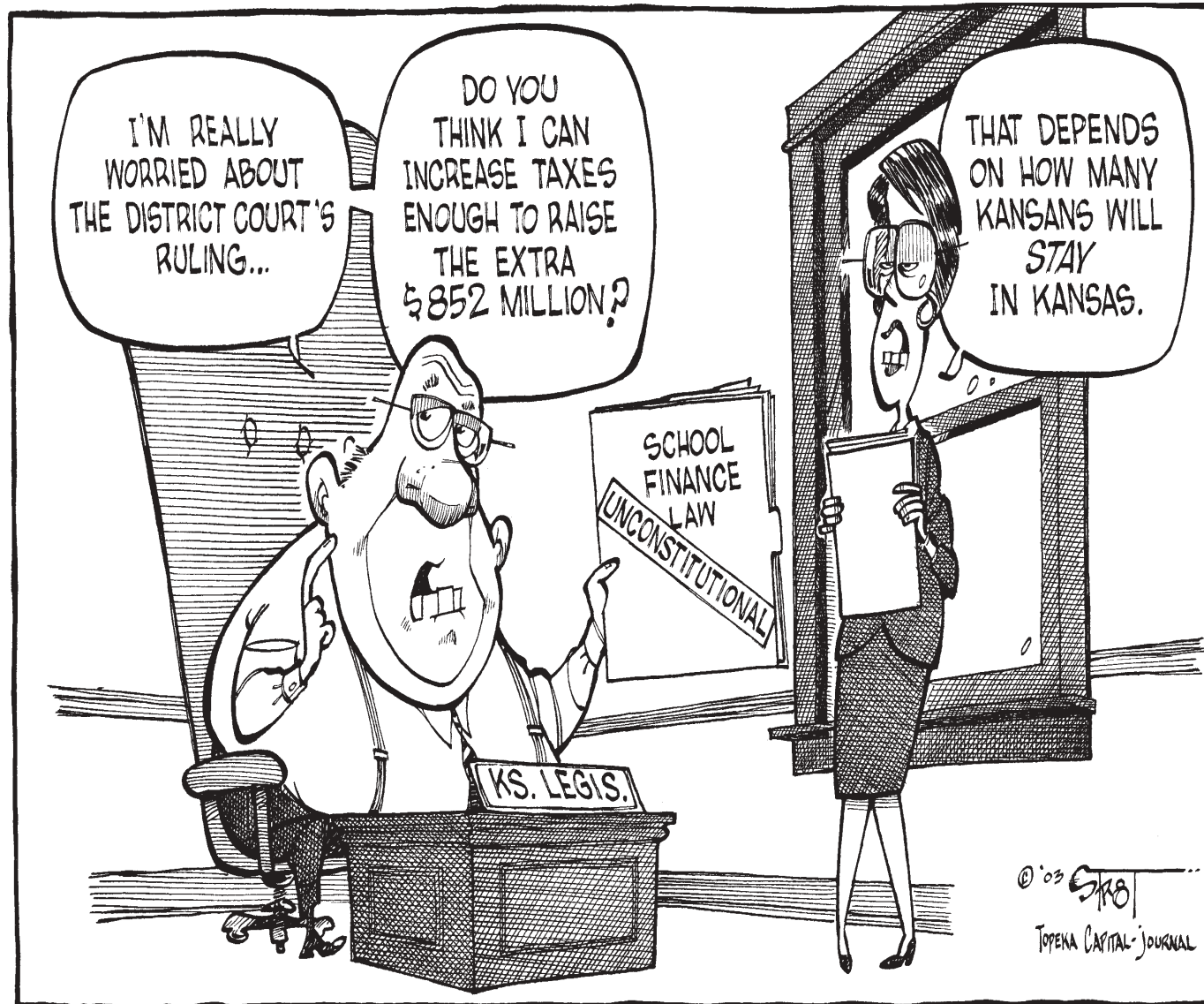
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Nor'West Newspapers

Dick and Mary Beth Boyd
Publishers, 1970-2002
Incorporating the Norton County Champion
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She enjoys those Christmas letters

Yes, yes, I know, Ann Landers doesn't think Christmas letters are socially correct. But I love receiving these newsy chronicles. I enjoy hearing about my friends' grandchildren and their husband's latest operation.

I am fascinated by others' hobbies and interests, and want to learn of important events in the lives of my acquaintances. It probably wasn't funny at the time, but I laughed out loud when I read my friend Theo's e-letter. She told of how this year started off with a bang. Following last year's holidays, her husband had gone out to burn the trash at their rural home. The fire jumped the barrel and set the wind-break ablaze, and the rural fire department had to put it out. Now that was funny. My sister-in-law Mary always sends a nice letter with the highlights of their year. She and her husband Roger are horse people, so her news is centered around horse sales and baby colts. I love it. It's a slice of their life.

This year, Jim and I talked about putting together a letter, but we didn't get any farther than just talking about it. I don't even get Christmas cards sent. Why would I think I could ever get it together enough to write a newsletter? Maybe next year.

—ob—

We dodged the rain/snow bullet this weekend, but looking at the extended

Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



forecast, we could still have a white Christmas, a prediction I anticipate with trepidation. You see, we are driving to Mexico two days after Christmas. Sure, once we drop into northern Texas we probably won't hit any snow, but there's a lot of road between here and there.

The ministry group we've worked with before, Casas por Cristo, called a couple of weeks ago asking for help. A large group of Mennonites are coming the week after Christmas to build a house for a family in Juarez, and they needed another advisor. Jim had made it clear that all they had to do was ask and he'd be there. So, here we go again. I really don't serve much purpose on the job site except for moral support and as cheerleader. I shouldn't say that. I can hang chicken wire with the best of 'em, and I stucco like a pro.

—ob—

Kara called me right after she and her sister had been to the White House Christmas Party and she was impressed as I had

been. "Oh, Mom," she said, "When we were standing there having our picture taken, I pushed so hard on the President's back because I could hardly believe he was real. I was actually touching the President of the United States!"

I asked her if she said anything to him. "I don't know for sure. I think I said, 'I'm really proud you're my president,' or something dumb like that," she said. After they left the room where the president and Mrs. Bush were having their pictures taken, Kara said she almost cried, it had been such an awe-inspiring experience.

Honey, I can honestly say, "I know what you mean. I felt the same way."

—ob—

Taylor is only 4, but she thinks far beyond her years. Kara had to call and share this gem.

She and Taylor were riding in the car when Taylor pipes up.

"Mom," she began, "When you get old, like Grandma, I'll drive you around and you can have the best seat, OK?"

I want to remind Kara that the day Taylor starts driving is only 12 years away, and it will be here in a snap. I'll only be 68, but she will be 43!

—ob—

Have a Merry Christmas everyone! Or, as they say in Old Mexico, Feliz Navidad!

Christmas items on antique list

Antique

Talk

Liza

Deines

Technically, to qualify as an antique, an item should be more than 100-years old. In recent years, however, the term has become loosely used to describe any nostalgic item from one's childhood. I'll use "antique" that way.

Technically, also, a writer should have some qualifications to write about a given subject; I have none except a love for auctions, antique shops, and books on glassware. That said, feel free to take exception to any opinions expressed.

Nothing takes us back home for the holidays like those decorations that we hung on the tree or the precious ornament that always graced the dining room table from our earliest memory. One of the fortunate things about collecting holiday memorabilia is that it has often endured the years better than many items because it was used for a limited time and then packed away.

Unfortunately, many of the older ornaments were extremely fragile and easily damaged when the baby knocked over the tree or the cats romped through the boughs. My brother's family had a whole box of plastic ornaments that were hung on the lower branches so their Siamese cats could have a Merry Christmas while the family admired the blown glass German baubles that adorned the top of the tree.

True treasures to be cherished are the old papier mache Santas in sleighs pulled by reindeer with impossibly tiny legs. They are very difficult to find in good condition, as are Father Santas, especially

the old ones with cotton wool beards and fabric costumes.

Blown glass ornaments from the 1800s are only found by the most fortunate of collectors. From the 1930-'40 era the most sought-after items are original strings of bubble lights that are still operational.

Strings of lights that had figured bulbs were manufactured for a just a few years and many people couldn't bear to throw the bulbs away even after they blew out, choosing instead to hang them on their trees with ribbons. The glass bulb-shaped Santas, elves, and candy canes add a vintage touch to many a modern tree. It's a rare auction that doesn't offer a large box of Christmas "stuff" and it's a wise collector that gambles a few bucks hoping for

a jewel in the bottom of the box.

Remember the shiny aluminum Christmas trees with the revolving color wheel that were all the rage in the 1950s?

They're back! And finding one in good condition with the color wheel operating is not an easy task.

A bit easier to locate are advertising items featuring Santas that were produced in the 1940-'50s. Of course the classic Coca Cola trays picturing Santa kicking back with an ice cold bottle of Coke after a hard night in the sleigh are so rare as to be impossible to find at any price, but the cardboard posters that were distributed to soda fountains as free holiday decorations do turn up occasionally.

Several commercial products featured the Santa with the apple cheeks and the twinkling eyes and a group of such items makes a charming holiday exhibit.

Are you thinking I overlooked angels and nativity scenes? Yes, but we must save something for another day.

Advice from the old Antique —

Blessed is she, who surrounded by undone Christmas tasks, sits down on the floor and shares the "save for company" cookies with a child, for she shall taste a tiny bit of Heaven.

WRITE:

The Norton Telegram encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of public interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the

author.

We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise.