

Opinion

Free Press Viewpoint

by Tom (TD) Dreiling
Publisher

Certainly, he isn't the lone exception

He probably didn't know he was pushing the envelope — not necessarily breaking the law — when he sent out 12,800 greeting cards at taxpayers' expense.

But that's exactly what Sen. Larry Salmans, R-Hanston, did. And the bill came to \$2,465. He said that had he known what he was doing was illegal, he wouldn't have done it. And we believe he wouldn't have. The senator has since settled up with the state.

Atty. Gen. Phill Kline has been asked to investigate. Sen. Anthony Hensley, D-Topeka, said "it is clear to me that Senator Salmans has used state postage for his own personal use..."

The legislative budget allows senators \$2,580 for postage each session to conduct state business, an example being to mail newsletters to their constituents. State law prohibits officials from using their postal privilege for personal use, although it does not specifically mention greeting cards.

An attorney general's opinion does, however, according to Harris News Service, pointing to Atty. Gen. Robert Stephan in 1994 who concluded that use of bulk postage to mail holiday greeting cards was "personal use" and violated state law.

So, did Sen. Salmans break the law, or did he not? Does Stephan's opinion nine years ago hold water today? If the senator is found to have been in violation he could be fined anywhere from \$50 to \$500. It is classified as a misdemeanor.

It would be interesting to know if other legislators over the years have also mailed greeting cards at taxpayers' expense, or if Sen. Salmans is the lone exception. Or the target of scorn, heaven forbid.

We haven't had so much as a mini-scandal in Topeka for some time. And if this is that, we're probably scrapping the barrel.

Comments to any opinions expressed on this page are encouraged. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. 5th St., Colby, Kan., 67701. Or e-mail td@nwkansan.com.

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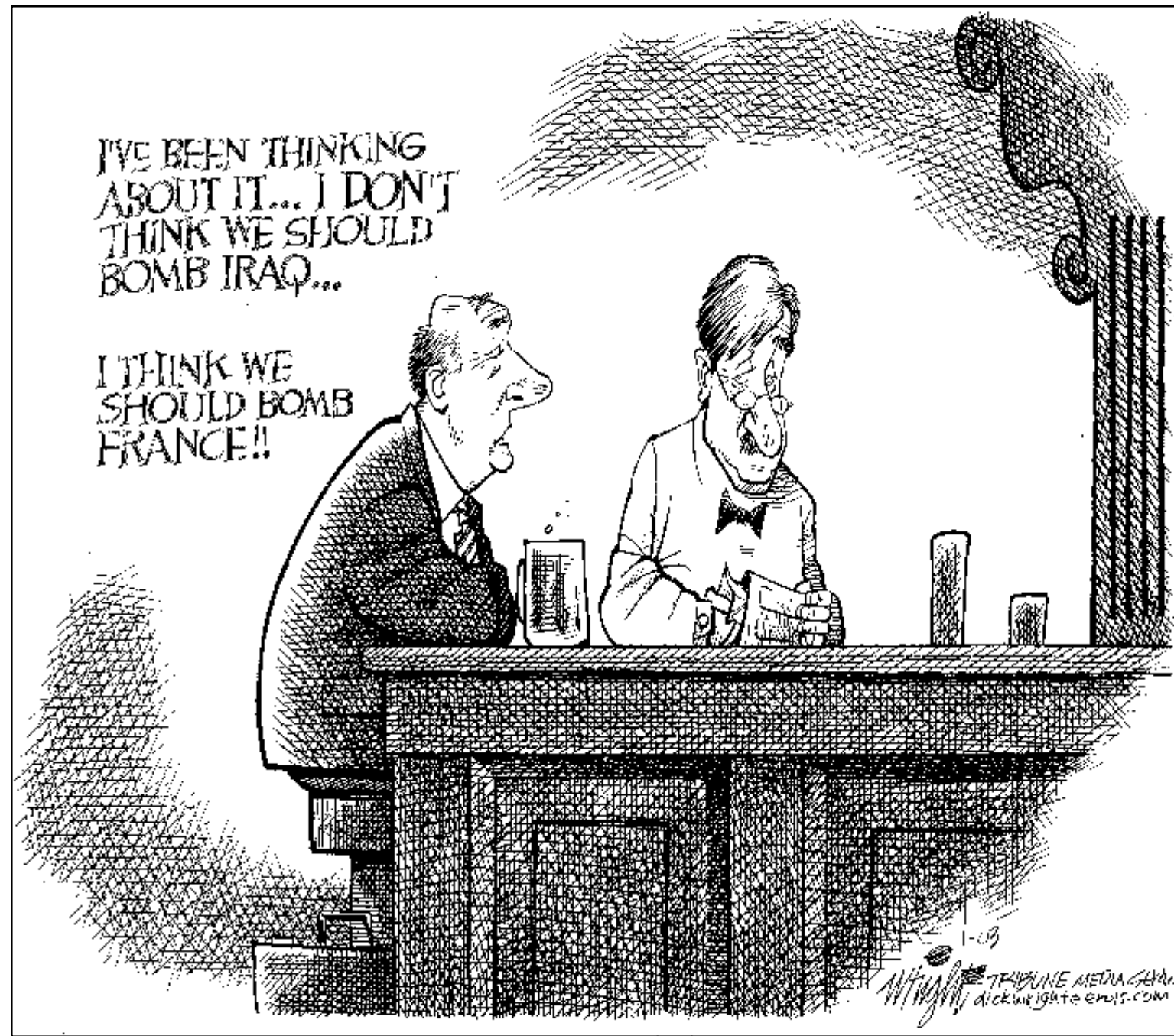
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Touching the Face of God

Following the Columbia disaster, there are those who are already saying humans should not be in space, that either the cost would be better spent elsewhere, or the risk would be better born by unmanned, robot flights.

They are wrong on both counts. First, the cost benefits from medical, environmental, electronic and engineering advances far outweigh the budget that NASA has spent in the last 40 years.

Without NASA as a catalyst, we would be missing many of the advances in computers, EKGs, remote medical telemetry, batteries, weather forecasting, metallurgy, calculators, oil and gas exploration, structural engineering, voting machines, cable TV, cell phones, electric cars, the Internet; all things that make our lives what they are today.

More important, to pull human beings from space, leaving it the province of unmanned exploration, is to deny, to change, what we are.

Imaginative. Curious. Pioneers. Christopher Columbus was not a robot. Lewis and Clark were not robots. The Wright brothers were not robots.

But they all had to struggle against the part of society that said it couldn't, or shouldn't, be done. There is built into us a need to explore. Within ourselves, within our world, within our universe.



Evan Barnum
● On the Other Hand

To reach out and "Touch the face of God." Not by robots, but in person. Ships sailed for the New World and were never heard from again. More ships still sailed.

The pioneers who settled this country died by the hundreds, the thousands. But they came anyway. Looking to the future, not to their present comfort.

Sacrificing — for us. That is our legacy.

Each one of us is here because someone in the past took a risk. Literally putting their life on the line to make things better for their descendants. Not living just for themselves, but for the advancement of humanity.

To say that we should not be in space is to say we should have stayed in the trees and never dared to stand on two feet.

To say that we should not be in space because "it is too dangerous" is to say that the Wright Brothers were wrong to try to fly. Lewis and

Clark were wrong to explore.

Ships are dangerous. But we still sailed after the Titanic sank. Airplanes are dangerous. But we still fly, even after numerous planes have gone down. Cars are dangerous. Tens of thousands die in them each year. But we still drive them every day. Shuttles are dangerous. But we still flew after Challenger. And we must after Columbia.

Just waking up in the morning is dangerous. We may not live to see the night. But we get up anyway, because that is what living is — something more than just existing.

To turn away from space is to start down the long descending road of the dull, the unimaginative; headed toward extinction. A diminishment of ourselves.

We explore as safely as practical, but we do it. Knowing that there is risk. Knowing that we may not survive.

The manned space program must go on. With due diligence to safety, but also the awareness that all exploration involves risk.

To turn away from space is to turn away from who and what we are.

To become less than human. And to tell our ancestors they were wrong.

Evan Barnum is systems administrator for Nor'West Newspapers, and an occasional contributor to this page. Feedback to support@nwkansan.com.

Budget is back on the front burner

This year's state budget must be reduced \$312 million to achieve a constitutionally mandated no deficit balance. We must work with our governor to do all we can to restore fiscal health so I voted for a house bill with reductions she requested. At least 45 other states face similar or more severe fiscal problems. Our house bill diverted idle fees and project funds to prevent deeper cuts in education and social services. The House mandated repayment of the diverted funds beginning in 2005. It is our hope that by then the economy will have improved. So, instead of stealing funds the legislature borrows money from various agencies. All but three Democrats and a majority of Republicans voted for the legislation which now goes to the Senate.

The Senate will be debating a smaller budget bill today which may require a tax increase to provide for legal ending balances. Differences between what they pass and our bill will be reconciled in a conference committee or by other means fairly soon. The house will take up the 2004 budget, also starting today.

As chairman of the House Health and Human Services Committee I am attempting to create greater and more open discussion and participation in legislation regarding your health concerns. It is my goal over the next few years to help healthcare be affordable, available and accessible to all Kansans. The chairman of most every legislative committee is the "dispenser" of informa-



Jim Morrison
● Capitol Review

tion controlling issues before the committee. Control of an issue is exercised not only by what is on the agenda and when it may be discussed but who is involved in the discussion. It is "natural" that committee chair bias tends to color committee discussions and issues.

These difficult times require quicker resolution of health concerns than normal committee procedures often allow. I am attempting to initiate procedures which will encourage greater discussion. This will be accomplished by splitting the committee into "discussion" groups to work out various disagreements and then return to the full committee for resolution. My committee room is large and can easily allow for small groups to gather and help us to resolve differences in points of view regarding the many issues before us.

I'm also asking that testimony and supporting documentation which conferees normally bring with them to the committee hearings be presented to the committee in advance of a hearing

so we will have time to do our homework and study the issue. A mechanism is in place to protect the confidentiality of that communication so opponents will not have access to any testimony in advance of a hearing by proponents and vice-versa. That way we have all the committee time discussing issues rather than using committee time obtaining background information. In other words my committee makes its members do "homework" not normally required of members. I want my committee to know about an issue before hearings begin.

Meetings are available live every day Monday through Thursday from 1:30 p.m. to 2:50 p.m. Tune your Internet browser to <http://172.16.25.98:1089> to hear and see what is going on. The audio and video will improve as leadership sees the benefits of more open meetings. Please let me know what you think. (<<mailto:jmorrison@ink.org>>jmorrison@ink.org).

I have seen many people from the district who take time to visit me when they are in Topeka. Please, contact me if you are going to be here so I can arrange to spend some time with you. Thank you very much for allowing me the honor of representing you in the legislature.

Rep. Jim Morrison, 121st House District, jmorrison@ink.org.

Doonesbury

● Gary Trudeau

