

Opinion

A Kansas Viewpoint

It's a pity to solve the case now

From The Emporia Gazette

Jimmy Hoffa is now more than 30 years late for his next appointment, but the FBI hasn't given up hope that he will be turned up.

The latest candidate for the last resting place of the Teamsters Union leader who disappeared in 1975 is a horse farm in Michigan. The Associated Press reported that mobsters used the farm for meetings, but the meetings ceased after Hoffa disappeared.

So FBI agents loosened their ties, put down their pistols and grabbed their shovels and went to work.

It is strange to see a sudden burst of activity in the case, but the Hoffa disappearance has always had a hold on the official, as well as the public, imagination. It may be that, while roasting marshmallows around the campfire at the FBI Academy in Quantico, Va., young agents in training are initiated into the case through an arcane ritual that includes stories of Hoffa's ghost drifting through the Michigan woods, looking for revenge.

Hoffa is, in fact, the great white whale of the FBI and the bureau will not rest until it has found his corpse and decided who killed him and why.

For decades, the Hoffa case has been shrouded in fog. In the past few years, two men have reportedly confessed on their deathbeds that they killed Hoffa, but not together.

Apparently, confessing to having killed Jimmy Hoffa is becoming aging hitmen's favored way of ensuring some fame beyond the grave.

But whoever ordered Hoffa's death is probably long since dead himself. So, probably, is whoever pulled the trigger, shoved in the knife or yanked the garrote. After 30 years, justice is not likely to be possible.

In a way, it would be a pity to solve the case now. Jimmy Hoffa's enduring place in the national memory is not as a crooked union leader, but as the man who disappeared. If he is found, the mystery will be over.

Maybe we need that mystery more than we need one more corpse to prove that bad things can happen to bad people, too.

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Where to write, call

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202/224-4774

U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202/224-6521

U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 2443 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. 202/225-2715 or Fax 202/225-5124

State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building, 303 SW 10th St. Rm. 171-W, Topeka 66612. 785/296-7676 e mail: jmorrison@ink.org web: www.ink.org/public/legislators/jmorrison

State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol, 300 SW 10th St., Rm. 128-S., Topeka, Kan. 66612, 785/296-7399 ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

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John Van Nostrand - Publisher

jvannostrand@nwks.com

NEWS

Patty Decker - Editor

pdecker@nwks.com

Tisha Cox - General Assignment

tcx@nwks.com

Jan Katz Ackerman, Area Reporter

ackermanjk@ruraltel.net

ADVERTISING

Crystal Rucker - Advertising Sales/Director

crystalr@nwks.com

Jasmine Crotinger - Advertising Sales

jasminec@nwks.com

John Altman - Advertising Sales

jaltman@nwks.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Lea Bandy - Circulation Manager

lea@nwks.com

Jeanette Applegate - Bookkeeping & Ad Building

japplegate@nwks.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator

support@nwks.com

NOR'WEST PRESS

Jim Bowker - General Manager

Richard Westfahl, Lana Westfahl, Ron VanLoenen, Judy McKnight

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Alien invasion

Tisha Cox

• Off The Beaten Path



Illegal human immigration is grabbing all the attention in the headlines lately. However, I know of another kind of illegal immigration that is causing just as many problems, only not so obvious. 'Aliens' are invading, and they're not human.

People smuggle in undocumented plants and animals each year. Or they release into the wild exotic animals they no longer want or can care for.

Plants, animals, insects and microbes have all made their way into the wild from foreign places.

A graphic example last year was the Florida python that burst after trying to eat an alligator. What's the problem, one might ask. Pythons are a non-native species in North America, and they're just one species people are turning out into the wild because they either tire of them, or can no longer care for them.

According to the National Invasive Species Information Center, "Invasive species impact nearly half of the species currently listed as Threatened or Endangered under the U.S. Federal Endangered Species Act."

A report on the Web site states more than \$97 billion in damages from 79 exotic species during the period from 1906 to 1991.

A local impact would be species such as feral cats, which cause an estimated \$17 billion a year in damages, like killing native bird species.

Invasive species compete with native species for resources, like food and water and territory. Or they push them out and fill in their niche.

Over the weekend, I saw the latest example of an alien species causing problems. An article on National Geographic's Web site stated how black spinytail iguanas from Mexico were allegedly released on a Florida island back in the 1970s, and their population has increased exponentially since.

No natural predators or disease, and the ability to lay 80 eggs at a time two to three times a year spell trouble. The article states the population has gone from roughly 2,000 to six times that over the past several years.

I read about the spinytail iguana and it sounds like they're nasty critters. They burrow, and are a general nuisance because of their tendencies in general.

That is a sharp contrast to the green iguana, which I'm well acquainted with. They're sweet animals, and make decent pets if one is willing to go the distance to learn what it takes to take care of them. The two I worked with when I volunteered at the Morrison Natural History Museum in Morrison, Colo., ended up where

they were because their owners could no longer take care of them.

So, they came home to the museum which has many examples of reptilian species on display.

I love lizards — I have no affinity for snakes, but respect them. I learned a lot during my time at the museum. I enjoy lizards, but after seeing what it takes to care for them, I won't have one. It would be disrespectful to the species, and irresponsible to take on something that requires so much care.

I can't imagine why anyone would actually go through with bringing in a species that isn't native, when it's hard enough to care for what's already here.

I can understand — after all, as an animal lover, and of all things wild (both plant and animal), the desire.

Critters can be cute, and we as a species seem to have a weakness for cute things. But cute things can often grow up to be not so cute and difficult to care for.

Same goes for plants. It might look pretty, but it can be vicious.

It sounds silly, but it is a problem that won't go away any time soon. Illegal immigration is rampant, and the Border Patrol and other federal agencies can't keep up. Same goes for the Customs department.

Maybe with Congress addressing illegal immigration, they'll take a harder look at the penalties for bringing in non-native species.

Culture of corruption

Chris Shubert

• Guest Commentary

Everyone who has been expecting revelations of high-profile corruption in the Democratic party may now go to the head of the class.

Much noise has been made in the media lately about high-profile corruption among Republican lawmakers. Allegations have been made, indictments handed down, criminal charges pursued, and even some convictions acquired against Republican congressman and senators, and the lobbyists who made a career out of schmoozing them. So much hay had been made out of a handful of cases that liberals were recently heard making loud noises about a "culture of corruption" in the Republican party.

Unfortunately, many Americans probably bought into this biased judgment.

Wiser, more seasoned citizens held their tongues, waiting for the other shoe to drop. And drop it did. Representative William Jefferson (D-La.) is now under investigation for bribery charges, and the charges look serious. Several of Jefferson's associates have pled guilty to bribery charges, and have fingered Jefferson in the probe. Recently, \$90,000 of bribe money was confiscated out of Jefferson's freezer by the FBI. Senator Jefferson was videotaped receiving that money as a bribe for a Nigerian official.

Nor is this an isolated scandal. In another story, it was reported high-ranking Democrats have received nearly \$3 million in contributions from Milberg Weiss Bershad and Schulman LLP, a law firm which has been indicted on fraud charges for paying plaintiffs to wage lucrative class-action suits against large corporations. Recipients of the dirty money include Senators Hillary Rodham Clinton and Charles Schumer (D-NY) and Senator John Kerry (D-Ma.), as well as the Democratic National Committee and Democratic candidate for governor of New York Eliot Spitzer (who currently serves as New York's Attorney General). To his credit, Mr. Spitzer has returned his share of the money.

Democratic reaction to these facts has, not surprisingly, been limited and quiet.

And I don't expect that the current round of allegations, investigations, and indictments are

the end of the matter. Over the course of the next few months — or years — I expect more corruption scandals to come out — involving more members of both the Republican and Democratic parties.

Is there a "culture of corruption" in Washington? I don't doubt it for a moment. Americans have for years looked with suspicion on what goes on "inside the beltway" — in the halls of power in Washington DC. But only the most naive of people could imagine that culture of corruption was limited to one party. And only the most dishonest of politicians would pretend that only the other party was guilty. We ought to carefully note which of our representatives were making these one-sided claims, and make every effort to be rid of them the next time their names come up on the ballot.

And we ought to expect better out of our politicians. As a "values voter", I am deeply dismayed to see members of the party I favor involved in these scandals. I did not vote Republican in order to send crooks to Congress. I voted values because I believe that America needs a high moral standard, and I am very unhappy to be let down like this. I think that a thorough housecleaning is called for — on both sides of the aisle.

But I am also not going to jump ship and support the Democrats. To be frank, the Republican party is the only party which has the ability to disappoint me. I would not find corruption among Democrats to be a huge letdown. This is not because I am anti-Democrat, or because I believe that Democrats are more crooked than Republicans, but rather because the only party which is currently making any claims of ethical ideals is the Republican party.

The Republican party claims to represent a high moral standard. That's what attracts me to them. The Democratic party seems to take the moral position that, "Everybody does it, so what's the big deal?" That's the distinction which explained the 2004 election results — and which baffled the mostly-Liberal media. The Democratic party stands for a laissez-faire America; the Republicans claim to represent those Americans who believe in a high standard of public morality. The ideal Democrat is Bill Clinton, the archetypal pragmatist who did whatever felt good and wound up President. The ideal Republican is... well... Abraham Lincoln, maybe: a man of firm conviction, who set a standard and lived up to it in every area of his life, despite enormous pressure and personal cost.

So to me, it doesn't damage the Democrats' reputation if they end up in a serious scandal. Frankly, I'm used to it. But it does damage my estimation of the Republican party if they end up in scandals. They claim to stand for something, and I expect them to make good on that claim. Is this a double standard? No; I just expect people to mean what they say. When Democrats say, "We don't think that we need to make moral questions a national issue," that sets a certain standard: If you aim at nothing, you're likely to hit it. When Republicans say, "We believe that moral issues are national issues," I expect them to rise up to that standard as well.

So, where is the values voter to go? Well, I expect I will continue to vote as I have. But I want some pretty serious action out of the Republican party — and if a few members of Congress have to step down, I expect them to do the honorable thing and step down. And I expect the people I helped elect to work hard to make good on the promises they made to values voters like me.

And anyway, I'm glad that we can finally get rid of the stereotype that the Republican party stands alone in the "culture of corruption."

Chris Shubert is the minister at Mingo Bible Church and occasionally contributes to the Colby Free Press.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

