



Free Press Viewpoint

After the fireworks, it's still worthwhile

The fireworks are over, the picnic eaten, the boat put away. America back to work today.

Our country is another year older, marking its 235th year on Monday.

Back at the office, the field, the highway, the Legislature, we face the same old problems: not enough money, too many needs, too many demands, too much poverty, schools that do only part of what we want them to do, roads with too many potholes and not enough lanes.

The list is endless.

Are we right to celebrate our country?

It was, and is, a grand experiment. When the Founding Fathers wrote the Declaration of Independence, no nation on the face of the Earth held out the ideals of democracy and self-government, of freedom and liberty, they proclaimed.

Men were ruled by kings and despots. Brief flirtations with self-rule by Greeks and Romans were but footnotes to history.

Yet, English noblemen and European thinkers had begun to articulate a higher standard. The English, still subject to the will of the king, had won certain rights. Philosophers talked about the "natural" rights of man.

But our forbears, led by the pen of Thomas Jefferson, took this a step or two further. They declared the "inalienable" rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" granted to men by "Nature and Nature's God."

Having declared Independence from the English king, and fought for and won it, they set about creating a nation founded on those principles. It was not easy, nor did it come quickly.

Even the Constitutional Convention, which gave us a framework for government, did not address our rights as humans. That was left to a group of Virginians concerned that the new government would become so strong it would oppress us, even as the king had.

They gave us the example of a Bill of Rights, later adopted into the federal Constitution. The Bill guaranteed our liberty, from the right to bear arms to the right to a speedy trial when accused by the government.

The First Amendment alone is a marvel of spare and efficient language. In just 45 words, it gave us the rights to free speech, a free press, worship, assembly and protest, and to petition our government.

And so we began our grand experiment under a system like no other.

Perfect? Far from it.

The Declaration, with its high ideals of freedom, came from the pen of Jefferson, who owned slaves. The Constitution, as the Founders understood it, granted rights only to free white men.

We'd have to fight a Civil War to settle the issues of slavery and secession. It'd be another century before we began to address the second-class status of blacks and other minority groups, of women and others.

We've come a long ways since then. We're a better country now than 50 years ago, but still not perfect. So many problems to solve; so many things not even our government can fix.

And yet, our ideals remain so much higher. If you made the argument we have the best system on Earth, who would disagree. We just need to keep making it better.

Happy Birthday, America. - Steve Haynes

We encourage comments on opinions expressed on this page. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

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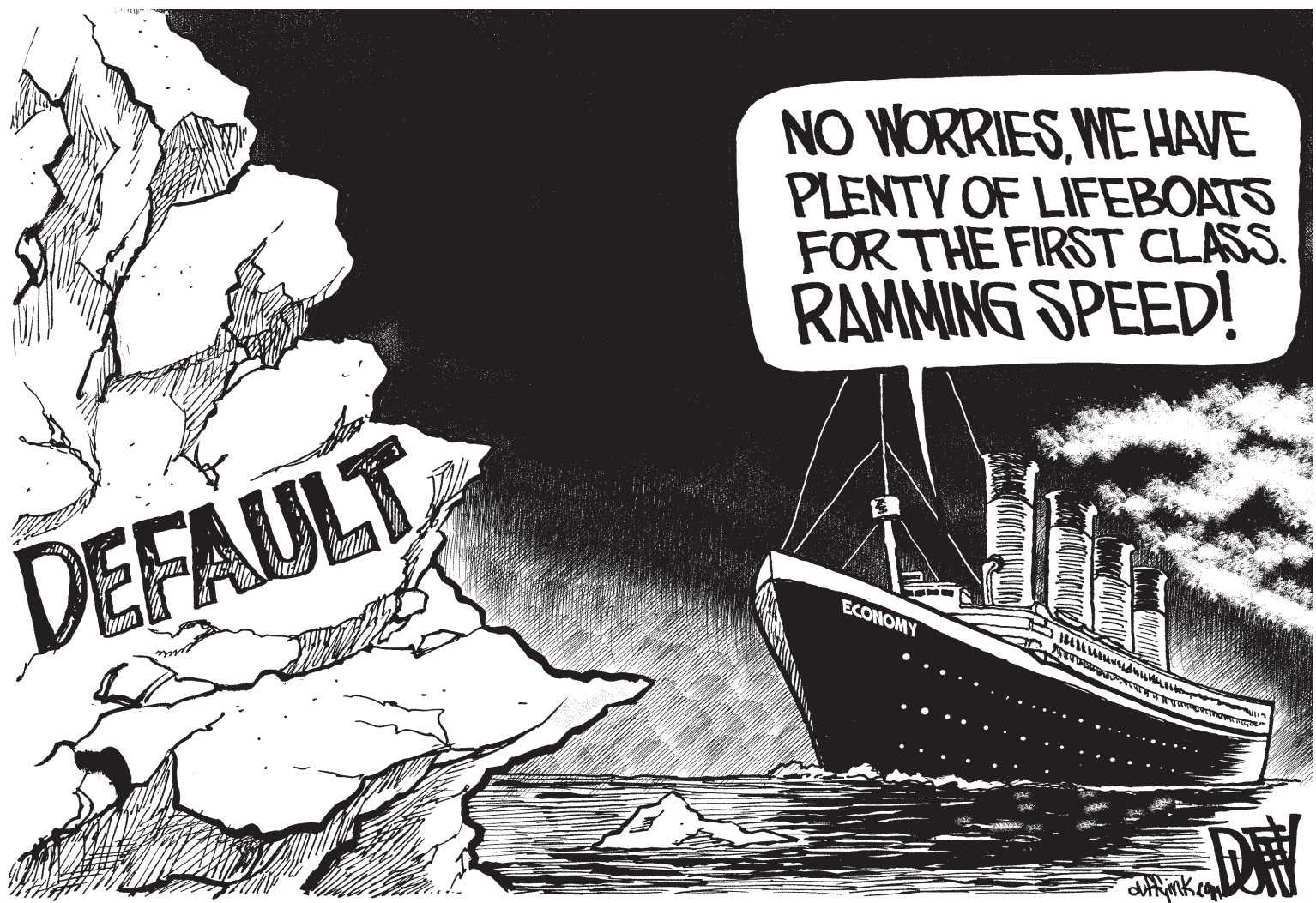
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Baseball addiction painful to watch

Addiction is a terrible thing. It drives men to madness. Makes them do things they would not normally think of doing. Causes disruption of homes, families and work.

The problem is, most addicts don't believe they have a problem. The common theme is that they can stop any time.

Steve is addicted to baseball.

It's an insidious addiction which causes him to cheer for a team so hapless at times that listening to the games can be a painful experience.

When we lived in Kansas City, he was a Royals fan.

Back in those days, the team was awful. They started to get better, and I was dragged to a couple of playoff games in the late '70s, where we froze our tails off and watched future Hall of Famer George Brett boot several easy grounders.

We moved, and the Royals got better but then we were living in a town without radio. Literally, we couldn't get a radio signal due to the mountains.

Steve had his sister tape a couple of games and send them to us. We listened to those two games about 50 times.

Then the Rockies came to Denver, and we



Cynthia Haynes

Open Season

moved to a town with radio. We got a set and started listening to the games. We even got to go to a few.

After moving to Kansas, Steve would meet our oldest daughter, who by then lived in Wyoming, in Denver for games.

Over the years, we've collected about six portable radios for listening to games. We have the outside radio, the upstairs radio, the kitchen radio, the radio to take to the lake and the one to take on evening walks around town.

We are signed up for satellite radio in case we are out of range of the Denver and Goodland stations, and can get the games on the Internet if we miss one and need to get a replay.

We have a large-screen television to watch the good plays on Sports Center late at night. We seldom watch the games because the Rockies aren't usually good enough to be the game of the day - that honor usually goes to the Yan-

kees, Red Socks or Braves.

When there's a game on, the radio or computer is on at home, in the office, in the car, on the dock, in the back yard or under the stars as we walk the dog.

In the winter, he goes into a depression and starts to calculate the number of days before the pitchers and catchers report for spring training - always sometime in February.

It's always a long, bleak, baseballless winter for him.

Now, Steve will tell you he can stop any time. He doesn't really listen to all the games. He's not really hooked on the national pastime.

Don't believe him. He's hooked, line and sinker.

But, then I shouldn't complain. It's a reasonably cheap addiction, and it could be worse. He could be addicted to football. There never seems to be an off season for football.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor'West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes @ nwkansas.com

Boots stand sentinel at Boot Hill ranch

I'm on vacation this week so I decided to dust off a story I wrote in May of '95. I was on my way to a Rattlesnake Roundup outside of Sharon Springs and while taking the back roads where I grew up, I happened upon the inspiration for the following story. While Mr. Smith is dead and gone, the hardy souls and stories like his are worth revisiting and remembering. After all, these folks are part of our roots, our heritage and in some small way part of who we are today.



John Schlageck

Insights

Kansas Farm Bureau

boots made by the same company that had fitted the famous outlaw. "I got married in mine back in '51."

After Smith put the first pair of boots on his fencerow, it seemed only natural to add more. Before long, friends and neighbors were helping him stock the line. They'd throw worn out pairs in the back of his pickup at auctions and cattle sales. Some dumped the boots next to the fence.

Smith never turned down a pair of boots and it didn't matter what condition they were in. At one time, he figured there were close to 700 boots on the fence. He'd been known to wear a pair that may have still had a little life left in them.

"Boots keep the water off and the fence posts last longer," Smith told me. "The boots shelter the post top so the moisture can't get into the post and expand it and break it up."

Yep, thanks to Smith, each post has its own leather garage. But not all the boots have stayed on the posts.

A few years back the Logan County rancher lost a pair of women's boots that laced up the front.

"I guess they were old and somewhat of a collectible," Smith said.

After this incident, he never fitted a pair of boots next to one another on the posts. Instead he'd put one boot in the corner of his land and stick the other in some random spot down the line.

To hear Smith talk about his fence and why he added boots to the post tops, it all goes back

to western folklore.

"Cowboys that wear boots have a special attachment to them," he said. "That way when a cowboy died they'd bury him and put his boots upside down on a stick by his grave. People knew each other by the boots they wore, and it was only natural to put a cowboy's boots near his grave so those that happened by would know who was buried there."

And there will be no doubt whose fence is capped with boots on the highway a couple miles north of Russell Springs. Tumbleweeds will continue to roll up next to the wire, stay for a while and keep the old leather boots company. Prairie dogs will peek out of their mound towns and scan the horizon and see the familiar landmark.

Oh, in case you're wondering, I took a hard look at all the boots on John Smith's fence, but I didn't rob any off the posts. I did see a couple pairs that would have made a fine addition to my boot collection and could have been worn for a Saturday night of dancing.

Nope, I wouldn't dare touch 'em. It wouldn't have been right. Those boots were located just where they belonged, on top of the fence posts - silent sentinels on the great High Plains.

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm near Seguin, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

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