

commentary

from other pens...

Teddy Roosevelt's Virginia knotty retreat

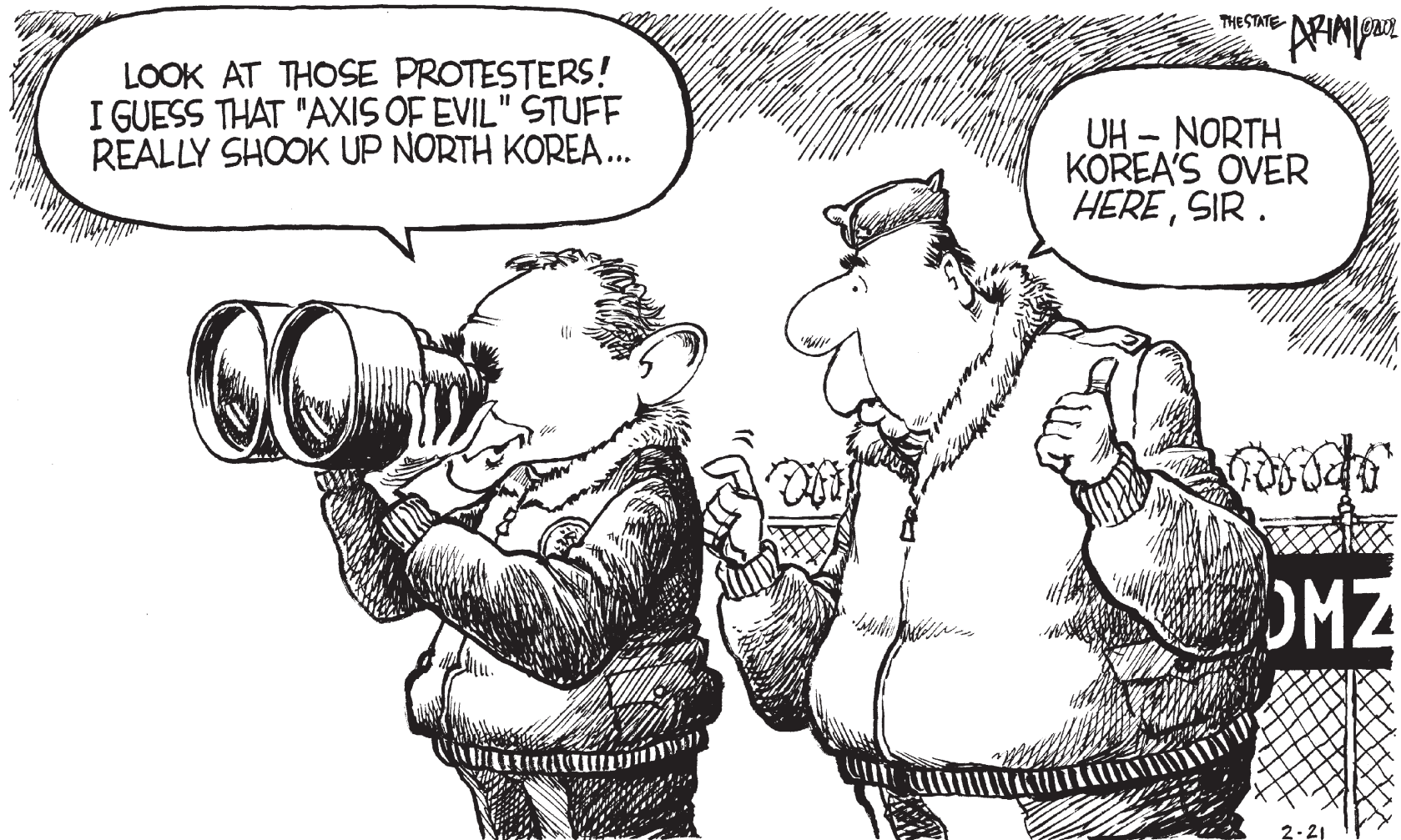
For a presidential retreat the house was as plain as a knot in a pine board, which is what it was named for. The place had no running water, electricity or telephone. Theodore Roosevelt took to it like a bird to a tree. There were birds in profusion at Pine Knot, Roosevelt's Virginia cottage about 100 miles and a four-hour rail journey southwest of the capital. Over three spring days in 1908 the bird-watching president and John Burroughs, the great naturalist, counted 75 individual species. But one of the chief attractions was what the place lacked. There were simply no government officials, reporters or unexpected guests, all of whom laid claim to the president's time at the White House. First lady Edith Roosevelt bought, remodeled and named Pine Knot in 1905, not long after her husband — who became president after the assassination of William McKinley — was elected to a full term. By 1905 Edith Roosevelt had seen the White House through a redecoration that gave it the airy elegance it retains nearly a century later. Pine Knot and its 15 acres of pine and oak and wildflowers required no such fuss. The first lady bought it from local landowners for \$195 and spent \$85 on remodeling. She was, her husband said, "a great deal more pleased with it than any child with a toy I ever saw."

So was the president, who visited eight times during his remaining four years in office. "It really is a perfectly delightful little spot," he said. The house, about 17 miles south of Charlottesville near Keene, was two stories of unornamented clapboard, painted light yellow with olive green shutters. There were two rooms upstairs, reachable by an open plank staircase. The large room occupying all the downstairs was flanked on each end by a large stone fireplace. There was a broad front porch supported by cedar posts on which the Roosevelts often sat and talked by starlight as the night birds sang.

"Edith Roosevelt wanted a place that met his needs for hiking, bird watching and hunting and all the things he loved to do," said William Harbaugh, professor of history emeritus at the University of Virginia. Immediately before the president's first visit in June 1905, word reached the White House that the czar of Russia had agreed to accept Roosevelt as a mediator in Russia's disastrous war with Japan. At Pine Knot his concerns were quite different. "In the morning I fried bacon and eggs, while Mother boiled the kettle for tea and laid the table," he wrote his son Kermit. "Breakfast was most successful, and then Mother washed the dishes and did most of the work." The first lady had hoped Pine Knot would prove a place of "rest and repair" away from the pressures of her husband's job. By late Sunday afternoon of that first visit, writes biographer Sylvia Jukes Morris, she "noticed that the lines had smoothed out of Theodore's face..." It was at Pine Knot Roosevelt, outdoorsman and naturalist, had an encounter that may have given him a unique and ironic place in natural history. He may have been the last American to see a flock of now-extinct passenger pigeons in the wild.

There were no passenger pigeons in view when Burroughs visited in May 1908. He and the president climbed out of the wagon before they got to the house, "as there were a good number of warblers in the trees..." One evening, as Burroughs and Roosevelt read by the kerosene lamps and the first lady was busy with her needlework the president's hand "came down on the table with such a bang as made us both jump." "He had killed a mosquito with a blow that would almost have demolished an African lion," Burroughs said.

Pine Knot offered solitude but no visible security. Burroughs asked the president if he were concerned to be alone in such an out-of-the-way spot. Roosevelt clapped his hand on his rear pocket. "I go armed and they would have to be mighty quick to get the drop on me," he said. Burroughs said Mrs. Roosevelt told him two Secret Service men were staying at a nearby farmhouse and patrolled near the cottage at night. The president had not been told, she said, "because it would irritate him." **EDITOR'S NOTE:** Lawrence L. Knutson has reported on Congress, the White House and Washington's history for 34 years.



Suicide means never having to say you're sorry

WASHINGTON — For decades, the Israeli Defense Force guarded its security with a rough, yet effective, rule of engagement: Kill an Israeli and 10 Arabs die.

But what happens when the enemy wants to die? How does the IDF protect even the corner pizzeria if the enemy has the deliberate purpose of dying along with his victims?

This is the conundrum facing those defending Israel from the Prime Minister to the young Israeli doing his duty. How do you guard Jewish life when the suicidal Palestinian you're protecting your people from expects his name to be glorified in death?

What kind of deterrence can you enforce when the killer knows that his surviving family will be honored and rewarded with comfort he could never provide in life?

Put even more bluntly, what do you do when, to paraphrase an old movie line, your enemy's suicide means never having to say you're sorry?

This is the horrid game Israel finds itself losing. Since Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount in September 2000, a site in East Jerusalem sacred to both Jew and Muslim, nearly 1,200 lives have been lost.

While a Vietnam-like "body count" shows three-fourths of the dead were Palestinian, this provides little solace to the politicians and citizens of Israel.

For one thing, there are lots more Arabs than there are Israelis. Demographically, the Jewish state is an island in an Arabian sea. Even if the



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enemy casualty ratio remains at 3 to 1, Israel will require a heroic will to suffer it for much longer. Israel is, after all, a very small country. If someone does not know a casualty personally, they surely know someone who does.

The irony is that a "get tough" appearance that's reflected in a higher Israeli murder ratio would trigger even greater dangers. Were the IDF to return to the old 10-to-1 standard, that could easily ignite an even greater fire in the Islamic world than the one burning today. It would jeopardize Israel's "cold peace" with Egypt and its peaceful relations with moderate Jordan.

The option of escalation is also closed to Israel. Even if the United States moves on Iraq, Saddam Hussein's first target will be Israel. What would Hussein have to lose by luring the Arab world's most hated enemy into a fight? Whatever retaliation comes from Israel would be offset by the elevated position Hussein would assume in the huge land of Islam.

The man confronting this vacuity of options is Ariel Sharon. Having just turned 74, this soldier-

politician is able to look back on a life of wars and elections in which his get-tough policy has certainly held its own.

But what can Sharon look forward to? Elected to stand guard over Israel, he spends his days playing prison guard to his nemesis, Yasser Arafat. The tighter a watch he keeps, the more abuse he dumps on the Palestinian Authority leader, the further his poll numbers drop and Arafat's rise.

Sharon's problem is not a loss of nerve but of vision. There's a reason why the old hard-liner is looking with "interest" at the Saudi plan for Arab recognition of Israel in exchange for Israel's withdrawal from the territories captured in the 1967 war. When what you've done for a half century doesn't work anymore, you've got to try something else.

Consider again this gruesome factor of suicide. When a young Palestinian girds himself with dynamite and heads to one of Jerusalem's busiest street corners, he carries a rich life insurance policy. He knows his family will receive benefits. He imagines in his mind the afterglow of celebrity that will settle on his name.

The question is, how do you "get tough" with an enemy who asks only that you let him die?

Chris Matthews, author of "Now, Let Me Tell You What I Really Think" (Free Press, 2001) and "Hardball" (Touchstone Books, 1999), is a nationally syndicated columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle and the host of "Hardball" on CNBC and MSNBC cable channels.

Sebelius sounds GOP themes as Dems candidate

TOPEKA — Some Democrats have considered Insurance Commissioner Kathleen Sebelius their likely nominee for governor for a year, but she started her campaign by invoking traditionally Republican themes.

She suggested last week that significant waste still exists in government. She said in her first campaign speech she will be a governor who understands that private industry — not government — creates jobs.

She even said public schools ought to have "character education" classes to teach basic values of honesty and citizenship.

And she echoed State Treasurer Tim Shallenburger, who is seeking the Republican nomination, in declaring that the debate about solving the state's budget problems should start with cuts in spending.

Sebelius is a Democrat in a state where Republicans historically dominate politics, and to win the Nov. 5 general election she needs support from GOP voters and independents who lean Republican. She has the luxury of being able to woo Republicans early.

"The whole goal of a campaign is putting together 50-plus percent of the electorate," said U.S. Rep. Dennis Moore, a Democrat who represents Kansas' Republican-leaning 3rd Congressional District. During the 1998 campaign, many Johnson County yards in the district sprouted signs for both Moore and the moderate Republican Gov. Bill Graves.

Sebelius opened her campaign last week with rallies in eight cities, after months of being treated by fellow Democrats as though she had already won the nomination. Democrats do not expect her to face a serious challenge in the Aug. 6 primary.

At 53, she is serving her second term as insurance commissioner, having ousted Republican incumbent Ron Todd in 1994. She won with 59 percent of the vote then — and again in 1998 — and started this year with about \$550,000 in her gubernatorial campaign fund, more than any other candidate.

But she is a Democrat, running to replace a retiring Republican governor. While Democrats have sometimes defeated unpopular GOP incumbents, no Kansas Democrat has followed a retiring Republican governor since Walter Huxman was elected in 1936 to succeed Alf Landon.

"It's tough for any Democrat to run and win a statewide office, let alone governor," said Senate Minority Leader Anthony Hensley, D-Topeka.

Democrats start with a handicap in Kansas politics. With 721,000 registered voters affiliating themselves with the GOP, Republicans outnumber Democrats by about 282,000.



john hanna

• ap news analysis

So perhaps it's not surprising that much of Sebelius' early message sounds like the rhetoric coming from the GOP candidates — Shallenburger, Attorney General Carla Stovall and Wichita Mayor Bob Knight.

Because of the state's budget problems, reporters have asked all of them if they support tax increases.

Stovall said she'd support only Graves' proposed 65-cents-a-pack increase in the cigarette tax, but more as a public health measure than a revenue-raiser.

Knight has said strengthening the state's economy will take care of the problem.

Shallenburger is touring the state throughout March to spread the message that he won't support any tax increase statewide.

And Sebelius? She told reporters that when she became commissioner, she discovered the Insurance Department had three employees who guarded a vault full of paper, but nothing worth stealing. She said she stopped the practice and has cut her department's operating expenditures.

She did not talk, as Democratic legislators are talking now, of protecting education and social services and then finding the funding — even if it requires taxes increases.

Nor did she mention her 1992 vote as a Kansas House member for a school finance law that increased sales and income taxes to lower local prop-

erty taxes and raise additional money for education.

"I'm fighting to rein in government spending, reduce regulations and lower the cost of doing business here in Kansas, to get our economy moving and growing," she said last week. "As governor, I'll root out inefficiencies, wasteful spending and unnecessary regulations across state government."

Moore said Sebelius must find themes that cut across party lines to win, as he must in the 3rd District. That means talking about financial responsibility, he said.

Invoking a Republican president's memory, Hensley said: "That's what you have to do, appeal to — what was the term Richard Nixon used? — the silent majority."

Without a primary opponent, Sebelius doesn't have to worry about placating Democrats to advance to the general election.

"It's a good strategy," said Rep. Doug Mays, R-Topeka. "Without a primary, she has the luxury of running to the right."

Voters can expect Sebelius to sound a lot like a Republican for a while.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Correspondent John Hanna has covered Kansas government and politics since 1987.

The Goodland Daily News

(USPS No. 222-460. ISSN 0893-0562)

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Published daily except Saturday and Sunday and the day observed for New Year's Day, Memorial Day, Fourth of July, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day, at 1205 Main St., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

Periodicals postage paid at Goodland, Kan. 67735; entered at the Goodland, Kan., Post Office under the Act of Congress of March 8, 1878.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Goodland Daily News, 1205 Main St., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

TELEPHONE: (785) 899-2338. Editorial e-mail: daily@nwkansas.com. Advertising questions can be sent to: gdnadv@nwkansas.com

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SUBSCRIPTIONS: In Sherman County and adjacent counties: three months, \$25; six months, \$42; 12 months, \$79. Out of area, weekly mailing of five issues: three months, \$30; six months, \$45; 12 months, \$80. By mail daily in Kansas, Colorado: 12 months, \$115. (All tax included.)

Incorporating:

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