

# commentary

from other pens...

## Arab-Americans want U.S. to stay neutral

For years, James Zogby couldn't get some U.S. politicians to even meet with him. Some refused donations, others endorsements. Over time Zogby made headway, gaining political influence for Arab-Americans and the causes they care about.

Then came the Sept. 11 attacks on the United States by Islamic extremists from Arab countries, and a backlash. After that, it was Palestinian suicide bombings, Israeli military reprisals and a renewed and deadly conflict in the Middle East.

Now, as both sides' efforts to gain public support in the Mideast conflict reach a fever pitch, Arab-Americans are once again trying to ensure their opinions are heard by the lawmakers who represent them.

This week, Zogby's Arab American Institute brought about 200 people from 22 states across the country to lobby their congressmen on Capitol Hill. They met with 45 members of Congress, he estimated Tuesday, with a message that the United States should remain a neutral broker in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

"It's informing these members (of Congress) that they've got people in their districts who care about fairness on this issue, who want them to treat Palestinians like the humans they are," Zogby said.

Yet the effort was a far cry from the tens of thousands who gathered in mid-April at the steps of the Capitol in what organizers called the biggest pro-Israel rally ever in the United States.

That gathering drew big-name supporters like New York Gov. George Pataki, former New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel and House Democratic leader Dick Gephardt of Missouri. It was accompanied by a widespread lobbying and advertising campaign by American Jewish groups.

Three weeks later, Congress passed resolutions of support for Israel, blessing its military offensive as an effort to dismantle the Palestinians' "terrorist infrastructure" and equating Israel's fight with the U.S. war on terrorism. The House vote was 352-21; the Senate vote 94-2.

Zogby is philosophical about such overwhelming condemnation of the Palestinian cause by Congress.

"When we do focus groups, Americans say, 'I know who the Israelis are, I don't know who Palestinians are,'" Zogby said. "And they sympathize and identify with the one they know."

But Zogby contends Americans do support a Palestinian state and they support President Bush's efforts to work with both the Palestinians and Israelis — and moderate Arab nations — to try to end violence and reach a land-for-peace deal.

"More than anything, they really want the country and the president to be balanced," Zogby said of Americans.

Nearly 70 percent of Americans say they want Bush to not take sides in the Palestinian-Israeli fight, according to a joint poll this month by CNN, USA Today and Gallup that echoed many past polls. A majority in another poll, however, thought the country was siding with Israel.

Many supporters of Israel have expressed fears in recent weeks that, despite the overwhelming vote in Congress, American support for Israel could flag unless strong pro-Israeli lobbying efforts continue.

Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi, who heads one campaign that includes television ads, warns that Israel's very survival could be endangered if American support lags. "We can't let America go the way of Europe," she tells supporters; in Europe, public opinion favors the Palestinians.

Mizrahi and others note the Palestinian cause also gets a boost from a multimillion-dollar Saudi ad campaign to both improve its image and support the Saudi peace initiative in the Mideast.

Occasionally, the effort to influence hearts and minds has degenerated into name-calling and racial politics. Zogby said his group and others still must fight accusations that because they support Palestinians politically, they must be anti-Israel or soft on terrorism.

"We try to say we're lobbying for peace," he said.

**EDITOR'S NOTE** — Sally Buzbee covers foreign affairs for The Associated Press in Washington.



## The computer reality

They say to err is human, but to really foul things up takes a computer. And yet, we've let them take over our lives. Once microchips got a foothold in our homes, there was nothing to stop them taking control of our cars, our workplace, even our power tools. Computers just kept making things smarter, safer and more efficient despite our best efforts. Then groups of them started linking up to form the World Wide Web, and it was all over. It's turned an entire generation into Cyber Zombies. When I was young, it was "Tune in, turn on, drop out." Now it's "Boot up, log on, zone out." Over the last few decades, computers have slowly but surely taken over every aspect of human life, and there are those of us who have resisted them every step of the way from punch cards to PCs. I salute the effort but I'm here to tell you the battle is over — we lost. Badly. The Palm Pilots have landed. Lay down your arms and get Carpal Tunnel Syndrome like everyone else. The enemy's at the gates. The enemy may even be named Gates.



**red green**

• north of forty

the size of, you guessed it, grapes. Fine, I suppose if you want to make a salad that you have to eat with a pair of tweezers. Then I look over next to them, and there are these "organic" tomatoes, grown without using any chemicals. And it shows: They're greener and lumpier than a 40-year-old mattress. And right there in front of them is this guy wearing open-toed sandals and a T-shirt with "100percent HEMP" written on it. He sees me looking at the Franken-tomatoes and says, "Those little things are totally unnatural. They'll totally mess with your system." So I tell him that happens every time I eat a bratwurst.

And he gets this look on his face like I just told him that granola was a four-letter word and says, "Oh, you eat meat." And I say, "Well, it's a whole lot better than the other way around." Then he goes off in a huff, and I'm left wondering what just happened there. All I wanted was a BLT, but some hippie and I end up comparing the size of our tomatoes. Now I'm not saying that the dude in the smokable T-shirt was wrong or the scientists are right. All I'm saying is the next time you go to buy a beefsteak tomato, you'd better think twice.

### ENGINEERED FOOD

If you're like me, you've been hearing a lot about these genetically modified organisms lately. Where scientists are making these new kinds of foods by taking the genes from a zucchini, mixing them with the genes from a sheep's bladder and getting a woolly cucumber that's potty trained. The other day, I was at the grocery store looking for the ingredients to make a BLT, and on the shelf I see these things called "grape tomatoes" — tomatoes

### MALE COMMUNICATION

- Things men never say to other men:
- Do I look fat?
  - I love what you've done with your hair.
  - Excuse me.
  - You have lipstick on your teeth.
  - Where am I?
  - Could you please help me fix this?

### GOOD BY COMPARISON

I think it's a good idea to surround yourself with things that are the same age as you are. Not just friends and loved ones, but houses and cars and almost anything really. You may think you're in rough shape, but not compared to that baby carriage that was bought on the day you were born. Or the TV. Or the lawnmower. If you want to feel better about yourself, go to an old guy's yard sale, and pick up a few banged up rusty items that are the same age as you. You'll look so good beside them. But stay away from anything that's been restored. Things your age that look good will only give your wife dangerous ideas.

Quote of the Day: "What could possibly go wrong?" — Red Green

Red Green is the star of "The Red Green Show," a television series seen in the U.S. on PBS and in Canada on the CBC Network, and the author of "The Red Green Book" and "Red Green Talks Cars: A Love Story." Watch for the feature film Red Green's "Duct Tape Forever" at a theater near you.

## Wrap-up session proves it is not an average year

I'm not sure when we will get out of here but as of Tuesday this is where we are.

I write to you on this, the 14th day of the 2002 legislative wrap-up session. While the average wrap-up session has lasted 7.5 days over the past decade, this is not an average year. Our country is at war and our Kansas economy has been hit by the aviation and telecommunication layoffs. In addition, our number one industry, agriculture, continues to struggle economically.

One of the biggest issues of the legislative wrap-up session continues to be appropriations for the state budget and taxes needed to fund the budget. Last week, the House spent about 10 hours debating an omnibus appropriations bill. Representatives considered 47 amendments to the House bill, which is needed to reconcile appropriations for this year and next year, in order to send the legislature home.

However, only half of the amendments offered were approved by the chamber. After working the bill on the floor, Representatives added expenditures of \$127,954. This amount sets the revenue needed to balance the state budget at \$227.2 million, with a five percent ending balance.

On the 10th day of the wrap-up session, the House approved their version of the omnibus appropriations bill by a vote of 73-51 (I voted for it). The Senate and House must now negotiate differences between their respective omnibus appropriations bills in order for the Legislature to adjourn.

Meanwhile, the two chambers continue the debate of which state agency budgets to cut further and which taxes to pass in order to balance the state budget. As a citizen of Kansas you will see cuts in current state government services as well as an increase in some of the taxes you pay. I have voted for some cuts and for some taxes. The Senate's packages included increases in sales tax, cigarette tax, Class C inheritance tax and other revenue enhancements.

The redistricting process has also impacted the wrap-up session. Prior to returning on May 1st, the legislature had passed redistricting maps for the 125 House seats, 40 Senate seats and the State Board of Education. The congressional reapportionment map, which redraws the four congressional districts in Kansas, is the only remaining piece of the redistricting process. The House and Senate passed respective versions of the congressional map earlier in the session.

When the legislature returned for the wrap-up session, a conference committee was appointed in order for the House and Senate to resolve the differences between the two maps. However, negotiators can not agree on a congressional redistricting map. If the legislature is unable to pass a con-



**jim morrison**

• capitol review

gressional map, the new district lines will be drawn by the courts.

In addition to balancing the budget and redistricting, the House is completing its work on other issues important to the state. The House passed a bill that would adjust current fees within the Kansas Department of Agriculture to provide additional funding for the agency. The bill was introduced at the request of the Secretary of Agriculture as one of the package of four designed to address financial needs within the Department of Agriculture. The Secretary of Agriculture indicated that the bill was necessary to carry out existing statutory program requirements.

The legislation as amended by the House would require that existing fees for the Pesticide and Fertilizer, Dairy Inspection, Water Appropriations, and Weights and Measures Programs be increased. Many of these fees have not been increased since the 1980s. The bill would raise approximately \$820,000 in fee funds for the Department of Agriculture next year. Provisions in the legislation require fees to be returned to their current levels on July 1, 2005. The Agriculture fee bill was sent to a conference committee for Senate and House members to negotiate differences between the two versions.

The House also adopted a conference committee report on a bill that amends the Higher Education Coordination Act, which was passed last year. The senate bill amends the Act to allow the State Board of Regents to develop and implement a comprehensive plan for coordinating all program offerings by postsecondary institutions.

The bill directs the board to develop a unified budget for state funding of postsecondary educational institutions and receive and allocate the state funds in accordance with legislative directives, except for allocations based on institutional performance. In addition, the senate bill would require the board to plan, develop and implement a performance agreement with each postsecondary educational institution, and beginning July 1, 2005 each institution's receipt of new state funds (those funds that are an increase over what it received in the previous fiscal year) is contingent on achieving compliance with its performance agreement. The legislation removes the separate commissions within the Board for universities, community colleges, and vocational/technical schools.

## The Goodland Daily News

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

Member: Kansas Press Association  
The Associated Press

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National Newspaper Association

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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](mailto:daily@nwkansas.com). Advertising questions can be sent to: [gdnadv@nwkansas.com](mailto:gdnadv@nwkansas.com)

The Goodland Daily News assumes no liability for mistakes or omissions in advertising or failure to publish beyond the actual cost of the ad.

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:

The Sherman County Herald  
Founded by Thomas McCants  
1935-1989

THE SHERMAN COUNTY STAR  
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