

commentary

from other pens...

In the capital, trees are monuments, too

Trees help cities breath, soften the concrete and steel of which they are built and add their stories to the life and history of the city and its people. Old and spreading trees dapple the white marble of Washington's monuments and shade its neighborhoods even as disease, neglect, pollution, dry weather and urban development thin the canopy. The city has lost an estimated 40 percent of the trees it had 30 years ago.

But after more than 200 growing seasons, the nation's capital remains full of tree lore:

Thomas Jefferson planted rows of poplars on either side of Pennsylvania Avenue to add green borders to the dusty drive between the Capitol and the White House. He lamented when trees were cut for firewood.

A magnolia planted by Andrew Jackson under the south wall of the White House still survives, shading the bedroom windows on the residence floor and exploding each June into creamy, saucer-sized blossoms. The elderly tree is supported by a web of steel wires.

On the 18 acres of the White House grounds, the tree collection includes other magnolias, several varieties of oak, dogwood, cedar, lindens, buckeyes, paulownia, beech, pine and Japanese maples.

Many were planted by presidents or their wives. On a list of such trees is No. 12, an American elm, planted by Barbara Bush in 1991 from a sapling sprung from the original planted by John Quincy Adams in 1826.

"The trees are an unsung glory, giving the White House landscape its structure," says historian William Seale.

At Christmas, presidents make the short drive to the Ellipse for the lighting of the living National Christmas Tree, a blue spruce.

A huge elm on the House side of the Capitol survives because Sen. Simon Cameron of Pennsylvania ordered workmen in 1875 to stop efforts to cut it down. The elm stood in the way of a sidewalk called for in the landscaping plan for the Capitol grounds.

Although the tree couldn't move, the senator saw no reason the sidewalk couldn't bend. Agreement was reached, and 127 years later the sidewalk bends and the tree remains. Fittingly, it's called "The Cameron Elm."

Gone but remembered is a massive English elm that threw a long branch over a much-used sidewalk, causing senators to instinctively duck as they walked beneath it. In 1978, the tree fell victim to Dutch elm disease.

"Few, if any, trees were better known or more loved by members of the Senate," Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass., told his fellow lawmakers.

"As we walked to the Capitol we passed under its giant limb, a miracle of nature that stretched out across the sidewalk and over the roadway. Often we would reach up and touch the limb or give a warm slap of recognition."

Because senators appeared to be bowing, President John F. Kennedy, Edward's brother and a former senator, called it "The Humility Tree."

The Capitol lawn is well planted with memorial trees of one kind or another, so there was much lamenting when 67 mature trees were slated for removal to clear way for a new underground visitors' center.

Still, more than 3,000 trees remain on the 155 acres that make up the Capitol grounds. The Cameron elm and two elms on the lawn are said to be older than the Capitol itself.

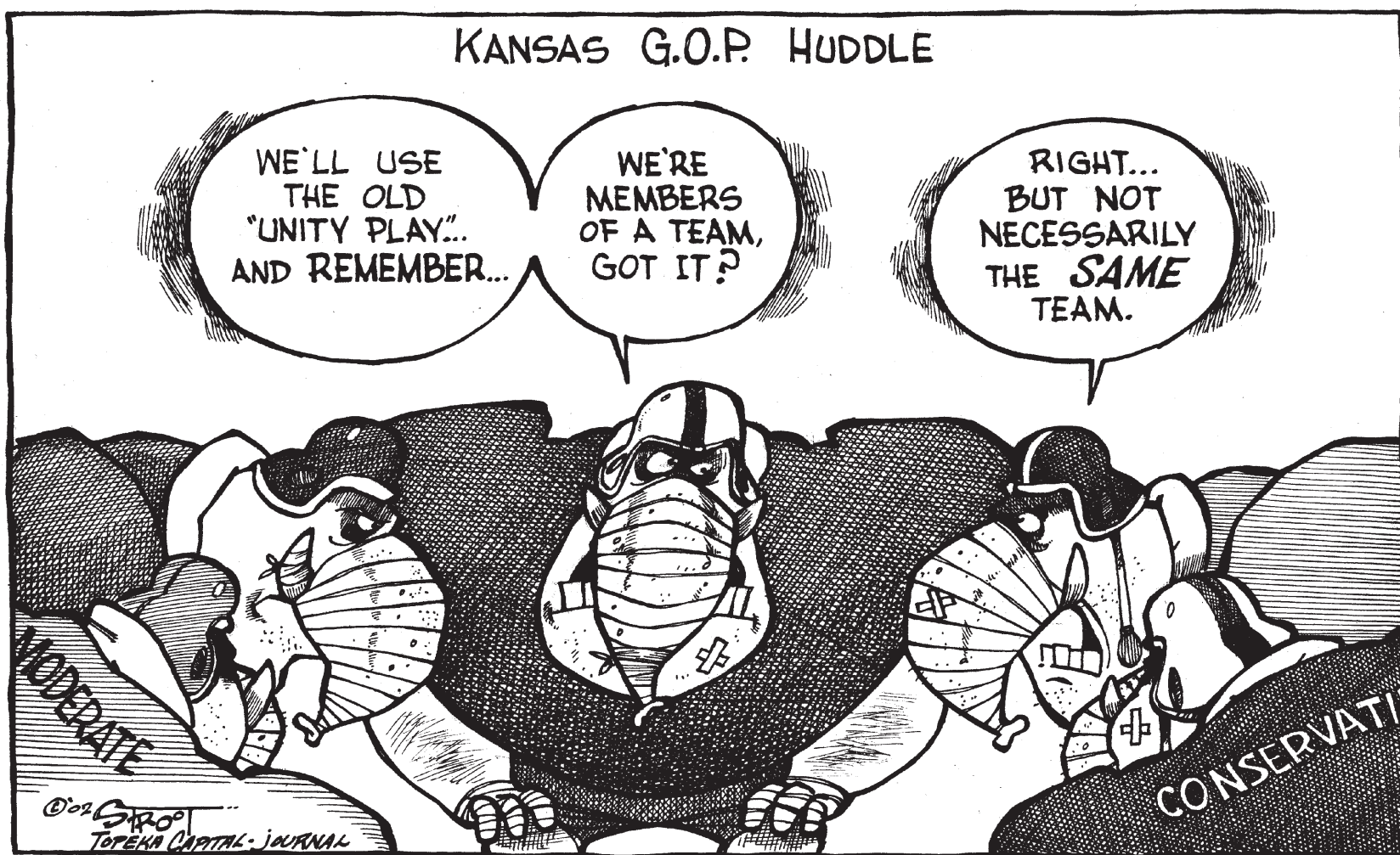
In the early 1870s, an aggressive public works official transformed the city itself, turning it from a city of dust and mud to "the city of trees."

Alexander R. Shepherd, soon dubbed "Boss Shepherd," bulldozed red tape as he paved streets, built water mains and planted 60,000 shade trees in the parks and along the streets and avenues.

The Yoshino cherries, the trees that are Washington springtime emblem, bloom white and pink, encircle the Tidal Basin and form a fluffy halo around the Jefferson Memorial. A gift from Japan, the first flowering cherry trees were planted in 1912 by first lady Helen Taft.

A privately financed tree survey is under way to identify the status of each tree in the city, tree box by tree box. The aim is to give the city an accurate account of the health of each tree, helping it chart ways to better manage the urban forest and replacing trees that have been lost.

EDITOR'S NOTE—Lawrence L. Knutson has reported on Congress, the White House and Washington's history for 34 years.



My journey with malaria

WASHINGTON — Catching a life-threatening disease can be a life-changing experience.

A month ago, I felt bad. That's the best way I can say it. I was at my father's wedding in New Jersey — he's 82 and a very hot ticket! — and something, I wasn't sure what, was wrong with me.

Since it wasn't one of those symptoms — headache, upset stomach — I could spell out, I shrugged it off and went to work that Monday.

Still, something wasn't right. By then, nausea was as good a word as to describe my condition. I took Tylenol and kept plugging along. "Hardball," my TV show, had an expensive new set, Phil Donahue was premiering the hour before me, and I had a job to do: Sparkle!

By Friday, I was doing anything but. I was sweating like a pig and could barely hold my head up. I had to stick around the studio that night to go live with the Samantha Rynn kidnapping-murder case. The police were holding an evening press conference to announce their arrest of a suspect. I spent the awaiting hours on the Green Room couch.

The following weekend, I was delirious. My brain, which I had hoped to employ to finish writing a book and then a speech I had to give the following week, kept cooking on one impenetrable problem after another. Each crazed quandary melted into the next.

My temperature hit 103 — way too high for a guy my age.

Still, I kept thinking — to the extent my brain was working — it was some kind of flu. I could sweat it out.

On Monday, I was heading for work with an extra shirt in my bag. The one I had on was already drenching.



chris matthews

• commentary

Finally, I did something smart and called my doctor. It was clear what I was going through was not going to go away by itself.

Dr. Dennis Cullen agreed that I should come to his office. As he examined me, I told him my urine had turned maroon. He sent me to the emergency room at Sibley Memorial Hospital as I was dangerously dehydrated and needed an intravenous. Just as important, I needed to be tested.

In the emergency room, after blood tests, X-rays and a sonogram, Dr. James Kane, who was a Peace Corps doctor in Africa the same time I was over there, walked in with the diagnosis: "You have malaria."

It was unmistakable from my blood smear, he said. The parasites that had taken over an unhealthy number of my red blood cells were all over it.

I had the species of malaria, falciparum, which is the most aggressive. It kills you either by clogging up the arteries to your brain or by simply killing enough blood cells to cause extreme anemia.

Parasites had taken over 4 to 5 percent of my blood cells. A pathologist at Sibley told my wife Kathleen that he'd never seen so many parasites on one slide.

With all those rioting bugs racing through my brain, no wonder I was delirious.

The bottom line is that I'm a very lucky fellow. I had great doctors. I was given quinine, antibiotics

and that wonderful intravenous that kept running fluid into me. I was in an air-conditioned hospital so nice they call it "Club Sib."

I kept thinking, especially in those early days in intensive care, what it's like getting malaria for the average African. You're lying in some hut. It's 105 degrees. You're running a temperature almost that high. You have no quinine, no drugs whatsoever and no clean water. You just lie there sweating and delirious 'til the lights go out.

Africa accounts for nine out of 10 malaria cases. Children are the most vulnerable, with one dying every 30 seconds.

I suppose Africa, too, is where I was bitten. My family and I were there at Christmastime. Though all the books say you get the bad symptoms within about two weeks, I may have taken enough malaria pills to suppress it all these seven months.

None of the doctors I've spoken to can quite explain how I got it. It may have been something I got visiting the West Bank in May or Vietnam last spring. It may be one of those rare cases of "airport" malaria where the victim gets bit by a mosquito that had just bitten someone who was infected.

The important thing, I think, is how the experience affected me. There is no adequate emotional accounting for the effect of all those flowers, plants, fruit baskets, letters and phone calls. Or for the calm joy of simply having my crazed career engines turned off for a couple of weeks. Or for the love that has flowed from Kathleen and the rest of my world.

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.

The Bible's theme is good news for everyone

In the countdown of the top 10 reasons everyone should read the Bible, I have so far covered reason no. 10, the Bible tells the story of earth's creation; no. 9, the Bible can move hearts; no. 8, it is the only guide to religious truth; no. 7, it is a guidebook for living and teaches lessons about life; no. 6, it chronicles the formation of the Christian congregation; no. 5, its stories of imperfect men and women provide examples for us; and no. 4, Jesus' death in behalf of mankind is a better story than any modern book tells.

This week's topic is the no. 3 reason — the Bible's theme of God's kingdom is good news for everyone.

Matthew 9:35 tells us that Jesus preached about this good news: "And Jesus set out on a tour of all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the good news of the kingdom and curing every sort of disease and every sort of infirmity."

It says Jesus preached "the good news of the kingdom." What kingdom is it? And why is it good news? Matthew 6:10 tells us: "Let your kingdom come. Let your will take place, as in heaven, also upon earth."

Jesus here taught his followers to pray for God's kingdom to come and then His will would be done on earth. We see plenty of evidence that God's will is not being done on earth — terrorism, crime, disease, corporate fraud... the list goes on.

When Jesus preached about this kingdom, he healed many people in the crowds. This shows that it is not God's will for people to be sick and to suffer. If that were God's will, Jesus would have been working against Him. What is God's will?

Isaiah 45:18 says, "For thus saith the Lord that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the Lord; and there is none else."

God formed the earth to be inhabited. This indicates that He does not plan to take all of mankind to heaven or to banish them to hell; He created the earth as our home, and this is where he wants us to be. And, as Jesus taught his followers, God wants His will to be done on earth.

Isaiah 9:6, 7 tells us how this will be accomplished: "For there has been a child born to us, there has been a son given to us; and the princely rule will come to be upon his shoulder. And his name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,



sharon corcoran

• use it or lose it

Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. To the abundance of the princely rule and to peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom in order to establish it firmly and to sustain it by means of justice and by means of righteousness, from now on and to time indefinite."

Jesus was the child born to us, but he is not a child anymore. After his death, he ascended to heaven where Hebrews 10:12, 13 tells us he waited at the right hand of God until his enemies should be placed as a stool for his feet.

The scripture in Isaiah says this kingdom will bring peace and will last forever, to time indefinite. Instead of being passed on to someone else each time there is an election and each time someone dies in office, this kingdom will have the same king forever, one who is the Prince of Peace. What will this kingdom accomplish?

Micah 4:4 says, "But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it."

Everyone will have a secure place to live, no reason to be afraid and plenty of vegetation without having to wonder which days they are allowed to water it.

Isaiah 33:24 says, "No resident will say: 'I am sick.' The people that are dwelling in the land will be those pardoned for their errors."

Isaiah 35:5, 6 says, "At that time the eyes of the blind ones will be opened, and the very ears of the deaf ones will be unstopped. At that time the lame

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one will climb up just as a stag does, and the tongue of the speechless one will cry out in gladness. For in the wilderness waters will have burst out, and torrents in the desert plain."

No one will be sick. No one will be disabled. Everyone will have a secure home. Water will not be scarce. Problems that governments today can't even begin to solve will exist no more under God's kingdom, and this is good news indeed.

John 17:3 says, "This means everlasting life, their taking in knowledge of you, the only true God, and of the one whom you sent forth, Jesus Christ."

By taking in knowledge from the Bible, we can have everlasting life under God's kingdom and see His will done on earth. We can see all of man's problems solved and live in peace.

Revelation 22:17 extends the invitation: "And the spirit and the bride keep on saying: 'Come!' And let anyone hearing say: 'Come!' And let anyone thirsting come; let anyone that wishes take life's water free."

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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.)

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