

from our viewpoint...

People switch roles in prairie dog fight

A rancher in Logan County has the national spotlight focused on him with a plan to reintroduce the endangered black-footed ferret to eat prairie dogs.

Logan County commissioners would rather for the rancher to poison the prairie dogs rather than give his idea a chance.

The battle creates a real switch of positions between those who traditionally don't want government interference and those who want to tell a man what can live on his land.

Friday Logan County will seek an injunction in District Court in Oakley to stop four Logan County ranchers from keeping cattle on their land so the county can enter the land and proceed to poison prairie dogs against the ranchers will.

Conservative farmers and ranchers, who usually are not fans of the state telling people what to do with their property, are demanding the county invade private property against the owner's wishes.

The hammer being used against Larry Haverfield, who has 6,000 acres of land teeming with prairie dogs south of Russell Springs, comes from a 106-year-old Kansas law giving county commissioners the right to go onto private land when there are complaints about prairie dog infestations. The antiquated law says the landowner will pay for the privilege of having the county invade his land and spread the poison. Estimates to poison the Haverfield land come to about \$200,000. Haverfield spent nearly \$10,000 on prairie dog poison last year and agreed to poison any prairie dogs found in the 19 miles of border barrier he created around his land.

Haverfield's effort to reintroduce the endangered black-footed ferret on his land has fueled the pressure to kill his prairie dogs. The black-footed ferret has been fighting its way back from extinction over the past 25 years, and has a good chance to be removed from the endangered list if the numbers continue to grow and places are found where they can be reintroduced. Haverfield believes his land is perfect for the little nocturnal hunter, which feeds almost entirely on prairie dogs. He filed a plan with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and they agreed it is an ideal location.

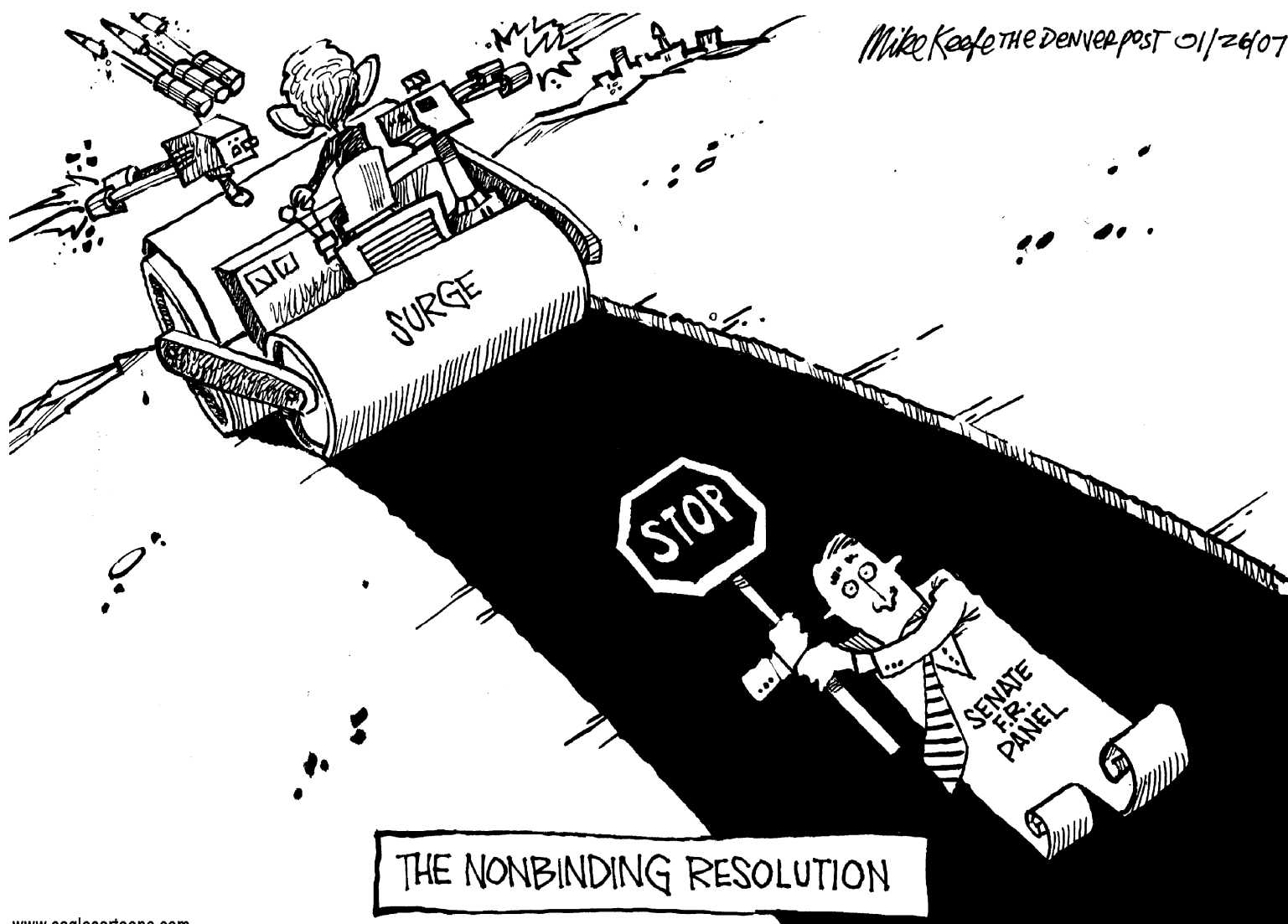
Endangered species exist in Logan and neighboring counties: among them the swift fox, burrowing owls, several kinds of eagles and protected hawks. These animals feed on prairie dogs and other small rodents found on the High Plains.

Logan County's injunction says the landowners refused to take "adequate" action against the prairie dogs. Haverfield said the county refused to consider his prairie dog control plan presented in early November. Part of his plan said he would poison prairie dogs in a 220-yard border around his land, and keep his cattle from grazing in that area. Haverfield believes the wet winter will help the grass grow taller in the borders and discourage prairie dogs from spreading to his neighbors.

Haverfield was on top of the list to poison prairie dogs in October, and told the county he wants to be on the top of the list if and when the snow clears before the March 15 poison deadline.

Though not as widely publicized Sherman County taxpayers have been paying about \$50,000 a year to assist ranchers and farmers in this county to "control" their prairie dogs. In some cases neighbors have gathered to spread the poison on the towns identified by the prairie dog committee.

President George Bush is asking Americans to give his latest "surge" of 21,000 more troops a chance to work in Iraq. Can't Haverfield have a chance to allow his prairie dog and black-footed ferret plans to work? — *Tom Betz*



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My addiction to trans fats

This is hard for me to admit publicly: I'm addicted to trans fats.

My addiction started innocently enough. I loved butter. I used it generously on toast and in recipes of every kind. I loved lard, too, and smattered my skillet with it every time I made eggs or pancakes.

But the experts got to me.

They said animal-based fats were bad for me — that they'd clog my arteries and send me to an early grave. What's worse, they said, is that innocent animals were being slaughtered to feed my vile habit.

They told me to eat margarine instead, a butter substitute often made from vegetable oil. It wasn't easy at first — the older butter substitutes didn't taste very good. But over time, margarine improved. I came to love it better than the real thing.

Now the experts are telling me not to eat margarine.

As it goes, many margarines are made from partially hydrogenated vegetable oil. Hydrogenation adds hydrogen atoms to the oil. The process makes the oil harder and less rancid and dramatically increases its shelf life.

But hydrogenation also causes a portion of the converted oil to become trans fatty acids — nasty little molecules that have an uncanny ability to stick to artery walls. A number of respectable studies found a correlation between trans fat consumption and heart disease.

Some advocacy groups jumped on the news. They filed lawsuits demanding that fast food



tom
purcell

• commentary

joints cut trans fats from their recipes. They pressured government bodies to ban their use.

The advocacy groups have been successful. Kentucky Fried Chicken, Wendy's and Starbucks vowed to reduce trans fats. New York City banned their use in restaurants within all five boroughs.

These actions have fueled my addiction to the latest forbidden fruit to be vilified across the airwaves.

I wake nights in a cold sweat. In my slippers and pajamas, I walk to the car. I drive to the convenience store. I stand for hours near the heated rollers in the back of the room. I watch the hot dogs and mini tacos roll round and round.

And then I binge. I eat everything sitting on those hot rollers, then move to the chip aisle, where I devour Pringles, Doritos, Cheetos and a variety of deep-fried delicacies.

I saunter over to the baked-goods aisle, the finest aisle in the store. I devour Twinkies and Ding Dongs and Dolly Madison pies. I gorge myself until a trans-fatty sugar rush causes me to black out. I wake in a damp alley, candy wrappers spread about the pavement, the sun just coming up.

I need help, I know. But I'm not alone. The whole world's gone insane. Sure, trans fats ARE bad for us. A sane man would consume them in moderation or avoid them altogether — a sane man would try out a variety of alternative products.

In a sane world, food providers would be required to fully disclose what is in their products. Consumers should have full knowledge of what they are about to put into their bodies. Advocacy groups would help inform us about what is good and bad. Then consumers would freely choose whatever they want to eat.

That is how we'd go about it in a society that is truly free and open. Instead, we're yielding to a small group of people who want to decide what the rest of us should eat — who want to use the courts and the government to force their will on the rest of us for our own good.

These are the people who fuel my addiction. The truth be told, my illness began when the same people ran Olestra out of town. Olestra was an engineered fat that the human body was unable to absorb. Sure, some people had digestive tract problems when they ate it, but most of us could eat as much as we wanted and not gain a pound.

What a free and spirited country America was then. Jay Leno summed it up well. Only a country like that would try to invent fake fat.

Tom Purcell is a syndicated humor columnist syndicated. For comments to Tom, please email him at TomPurcell@aol.com.

Iraq: Getting down and dirty

Just as predicted, President Bush has decided to send an additional 20,000 troops to Iraq in a "surge" specifically designed to put an end to the killing and carnage in the Baghdad area.

Although I want to win the war in Iraq every bit as much as George W. Bush wants to win it, I have not been in favor of a surge in troop levels and I'm still opposed to one unless the troops are to be used for just one thing: to win.

And winning this nasty back-alley conflict, against an enemy that hides among the people in crowded urban neighborhoods, means being just as hard-nosed and determined as the insurgents have proven to be.

Our failure to get down and dirty in this war is the reason why we have reached this sorry state. We have been fighting with the hands of our troops tied behind their backs by both our own government and the government of Iraq. We are shackled by rules of engagement that the insurgents ignore. With them, anything goes.

That's because we have labored long and hard to satisfy the "elite media" and "left-of-center" politicians singled out by Newt Gingrich the other night as embracing a "level of routine cowardice" that he said works to embolden America's enemies.

He advised following the example of my father, President Reagan, who he recalled steered America out of the "malaise" of the late 1970s and toward victory in the Cold War.



michael
reagan

• making sense

My dad understood that there is no substitute for victory in war, as General Douglas MacArthur pointed out.

We can win this war if we take the restrictions off and untie the hands of the military. If we are not going to allow our armed forces to go in and do what they do best — break things and kill people — then we might just as well give up and go home.

In war as in sports, the late Brooklyn Dodger's manager Leo Durocher's motto rules: "nice guys finish last."

President Bush bought himself a little time by advocating a new war policy in Iraq. He has just six months to prove that it will work. If it hasn't provided results by then the Democrats will de-fund the war, America will withdraw, and all hell will break loose.

One test of the President's resolve, and the ability of Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki and his government to dig in their heels and do what must be done, will be how they attack the problem of Muqtada al-Sadr and his Mahdi army in their redoubt in the slums of Sadr City.

Muqtada al-Sadr, a Shiite cleric, is nothing less than an instrument of the Shiite regime in Iran, and his army represents an advance guard of the Iranian regime's armed forces, just as Hezbollah is their advance guard in Lebanon.

It has to be one of the combined U.S. and Iraqi armed forces' first goals to eliminate al-Sadr and his 10,000-man army of well-armed thugs. We should have dealt with al-Sadr a long time ago before he became as powerful and as popular as he is today among Iraq's Shiite majority.

Up until now, Maliki has been unable to face up to the al-Sadr problem. If he continues to resist getting rid of him and his army, we might just as well fold our tents and depart. Muqtada al-Sadr must go — preferably following in the footsteps of Saddam Hussein. And soon. Very soon.

As retired army Lt. Col. Ralph Peters wrote in the New York Post Thursday, "Ultimately, it's the Iraqis, not the additional American soldiers and Marines, who'll decide Iraq's future. And the acid test will be their government's handling of Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army."

Col. Peters warned that "If we and the Iraqis try to avoid Sadr City's challenges, you'll know the entire effort's a hollow sham."

Mike Reagan, the eldest son of the late President Ronald Reagan, is heard on talk radio stations nationally. Email comments to mereagan@hotmail.com.

The Goodland Star-News

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

Member: Kansas Press Association

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e-mail: star-news@nwkans.com

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nwkans.com

N.T. Betz, Director of Internet Services

(ntbetz@nwkans.com)

Evan Barnum, Systems Admin.(support@nwkans.com)

Published every Tuesday and Friday except the days observed for New Year's Day and Christmas Day, at 1205 Main Ave., 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 Star-News, 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

TELEPHONE: (785) 899-2338. Editorial e-mail: star-news@nwkans.com. Advertising questions can be sent to: goodlandads@nwkans.com

The Goodland Star-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, \$29; six months, \$46; 12 months, \$81. Out of area, weekly mailing of two issues: three months, \$39; six months, \$54; 12 months, \$89 (All tax included). Mailed individually each day: (call for a price).

Incorporating:

The Goodland Daily News

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The Sherman County Herald

Founded by Thomas McCants

1935-1989

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Founded by Eric and

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State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building Rm. 124-N, Topeka, KS 66612. (785) 296-7676; e-mail address — jmorrison@ink.org

State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol Building, Rm. 128-S, 300 SW 10th, Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785) 296-7399; e-mail address — ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

Kansas Attorney General Phil Morrison, 301 S.W. 10th, Lower Level, Topeka, KS 66612-1597 (785) 296-3751 Fax (785) 291-3699 TTY: (785) 291-3767