

from our viewpoint...

## Iowa debate livens Republican race

We watched the Sunday evening rerun on C-Span of the Republican presidential debate held last Sunday morning from Drake University, Des Moines, carried by ABC-TV.

Moderator George Stephanopoulos moved quickly to force the candidates to debate one another.

That resulted in probably the liveliest presidential debate so far this season. Gov. Mitt Romney, generally cool under fire, wasn't all that cool this time around. Sen. Sam Brownback pinned him against the wall for his inconsistent stand on abortion. Romney may have led the field in Iowa, not by much, Nationally, he generally runs third in the polls.

The moderator seemed to focus too much on the supposed front runners Romney, former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani and Sen. John McCain. In fact, Congressman Tom Tancredo (Colorado) complained for that very reason. And rightfully so.

The applause was scattered, although Rep. Ron Paul (Texas) generated quite a bit of response. He's the sly, not shy, guy on stage. And he is often the lonely candidate of the nine to call for immediate withdrawal of the troops from Iraq.

The candidates were all putting their best foot forward, because last week Iowa Republicans were to hold a statewide straw poll. It's nonbinding, but it reflects the feelings voters have for the various candidates.

The straw poll is one of the biggest fund raisers for the Republican Party of that state. Last time around, it brought in more than a million dollars, with some 40,000 people taking part. Because it is a fund raiser, it costs participants \$35 to cast a ballot.

Political observers believed the straw poll will force some of the candidates who are barely detected on the political radar screen out, while at the same time perhaps improving the standing of some second-tier wannabes.

In fact, our Sen. Brownback and Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, both conservatives, ran pretty well behind Gov. Romney, with McCain and Giuliani prominent no shows.

Things are getting lively.  
— Tom Dreiling, *The Norton Telegram*

## where to write

**U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts**, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774; web address — [roberts.senate.gov](http://roberts.senate.gov)

**U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback**, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. (202) 224-6521; web e-mail address — [brownback.senate.gov/CMEmail.me](mailto:brownback.senate.gov/CMEmail.me)

**U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran**, 2202 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715; Fax (202) 225-5124 web address — [www.jerrymoran.house.gov](http://www.jerrymoran.house.gov)

**State Rep. Jim Morrison**, State Capitol Building Rm. 124-N, Topeka, KS 66612. (785) 296-7676; e-mail address — [jmorrison@ink.org](mailto: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](mailto:ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us)

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

## The Goodland Star-News

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

Member: Kansas Press Association

Inland Press Association Colorado Press Association

National Newspaper Association

e-mail: [star-news@nwkansas.com](mailto:star-news@nwkansas.com)

Steve Haynes, President

Tom Betz, Editor

Erica Harlan, Copy Editor

Sharon Corcoran, Society Editor

Pat Schiefen, Reporter

Sports Editor

Jordie Mann, Andrew Liebau Advertising Sales

Sheila Smith, Office Manager

### Nor'west Press

Jim Bowker, General Manager

Richard Westfahl, DeLisa Allen, Betty Morris,

James Jackson, Lana Westfahl,

Dana Huthansel, David Erickson



**nwkansas.com**

N.T. Betz, Director of Internet Services

([ntbetz@nwkansas.com](mailto:ntbetz@nwkansas.com))

Evan Barnum, Systems Admin.([support@nwkansas.com](mailto:support@nwkansas.com))

Published every Tuesday and Friday except the days observed for New Year's Day, July 4th 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@nwkansas.com](mailto:star-news@nwkansas.com). Advertising questions can be sent to: [goodlandads@nwkansas.com](mailto:goodlandads@nwkansas.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

1932-2003

**The Sherman County Herald**

Founded by Thomas McCants

1935-1989

**THE SHERMAN COUNTY STAR**

Founded by Eric and Roxie Yonkey

1994-2001

## Nor'West Newspapers

Haynes Publishing Company



## Bridge maintenance and other thoughts

I'm a Gopher. There aren't many occasions when I have to confess that, because Minnesota doesn't lead the nation's news frequently, but the tragic collapse of a bridge across the Mississippi churned up memories.

Those of you who are in "the Middle Ages" — over 30, under 100 — know how dangerous memories are when they get churned up.

The timing of this memory was eerie because a few days before the bridge went down, my mother sent a clipping she came across in her vast collection of "stuff." The clipping was an article I wrote for *The Minnesota Daily*, the University of Minnesota student newspaper.

It was 1964 and new bridge was being built across the Mississippi that would allow pedestrian traffic on the upper level, plus four lanes of vehicle traffic on the lower level. This would replace the old and dangerous two-lane steel bridge that had three-foot long two-by-fours rippling along either side of the traffic lanes as walkways between the East and West Campuses. The boards were old and shrunken and had the occasional knothole, all of which provided pedestrian traffic a view between their toes of the mighty Mississippi rolling along far, far below.

Who would be the first student to cross the new, improved engineering marvel and, of course, write about it? I was given the assignment. There was little I could do about it — I was a freshman and outranked during a hot summer when my peers were enjoying their last summer of high school freedom, and my college colleagues were primarily upper classmen trying to squeeze in a few more graduation credits.



## from other pens

- commentary

Did I mention that when I was sent on this assignment, the bridge wasn't finished yet?

That long-ago article details my journey, and I won't go into it here, other than to say I gained an appreciation for the workers who construct those mighty structures and the dangers they face doing their job. At the time the "rule of thumb" was "A man per million." By that they meant a construction worker met his death for every million dollars spent on a project. As the workers explained their jobs and some of the traditions of construction, they obligingly laid out plank paths so I could move from girder to girder. It was a memorable adventure and one that I'm sure the liability attorneys for the university were glad they didn't know about until it was over.

Therefore, when I read about the I-35W bridge collapse, I know from personal experience just how far those vehicles and the people in them had to fall. The I-35W is the next bridge over from the university, and was built a few years later — in 1967.

Then, as I say, those thoughts started churning, fueled by reports following the bridge collapse that examined the "health" of bridges across the country. I note with relief that Kansas is one of the light gray states on the interactive map in an MSNBC survey of the state

## The instruments of tyranny

Two years ago, in an article entitled "It Can't Happen Here," Congressman Ron Paul cautioned, "We are not yet living in a total police state, but it is fast approaching."

A lot can happen in two years.

In fact, a lot has happened over the past two years, most of it aimed at amassing greater power for the government while undermining the rights of American citizens. And I would venture to say that Rep. Paul's fears may have come to pass.

For example, sometime in the past two years, President Bush quietly claimed the authority to allow government agents to open the private mail of American citizens, proclaimed his right to assume control of the federal government following a "catastrophic emergency," and assumed the power to declare martial law and use the military as a domestic police force in response to a natural disaster, disease outbreak, terrorist attack or any "other condition." However, these incidents are just the tip of the iceberg.

Unless you've been asleep for the past decade, the increasing militarization of the police has become an inescapable and ominous reality. The role of law enforcement, especially local police officers, has drastically changed from when I was a child in the 1950s. The friendly local sheriff in "The Andy Griffith Show" has been shelved for the federal gun-toting terrorist killer in the popular television series "24."

Some might insist that the new face of law enforcement is warranted, a sign of the times in which we live. After all, whereas we once feared nuclear attacks by the Russians, we now fear each other and the predators that lurk in our midst — serial killers, drug pushers, home-grown and imported terrorists, perverts who prey on small children, the list goes on.

Thus, in order to better deal with these and other threats, congressional legislation now allows the U.S. military, by way of the Pentagon, to train civilian police and provide them with equipment and funding. As a result, our law enforcement agents are armed to the teeth.



## john whitehead

- rutherford institute

For example, in *Overkill: The Rise of Paramilitary Police Raids in America* (2006), author Radley Balko points out that in "Wisconsin alone during the 1990s, local police departments were given nearly 100,000 pieces of military equipment valued at more than \$18 million." Columbia County, Wisc., which only has a population of 52,468, was given more than 5,000 military items valued at \$1.75 million by the Pentagon. These included "11 M-16s, 21 bayonets, four boats, a periscope, and 41 vehicles, one of which was converted into a mobile command center for the SWAT team" — along with surveillance equipment, chemical suits and flak jackets, among other items.

Debating which came first — increased threats requiring greater fire power or heavily armed law enforcement agents in search of greater threats — might seem too much like the chicken or the egg debate, but the numbers speak for themselves. By the early 1980s, there were 3,000 annual SWAT deployments, by 1996 there were 30,000 and by 2001 there were 40,000. Incredibly, these forces conduct approximately 40,000 "no-knock" raids annually across the U.S., some of which are tracked by the Cato Institute on an interactive map on its website.

One thing is undeniable: armed police officers have become a force to be reckoned with. However, it's not just local law enforcement that's loaded for bear. As the federalization of law enforcement continues to grow, more types of federal agents are packing heat. As of September 2004, federal agencies employed about 106,000 full-time personnel authorized to make arrests and carry firearms.

Yet FBI agents are only a small portion of the armed federal personnel. Everyone from postal agents, the Internal Revenue Service,

of bridges across the country. Light gray states have less than 25 percent structurally deficient or functionally obsolete bridges.

The chart goes on to explain that functionally deficient bridges are closed or restricted to light vehicles because of deteriorated structural components. Functionally obsolete bridges have older design features and, while not unsafe for all vehicles, cannot safely accommodate current traffic volumes and vehicles' sizes and weights. Well...still...under 25 percent, and lots of states were colored darker....

So I pressed the interactive button on the MSN site to get specific Kansas statistics. Kansas has a total of 25,511 bridges, according to the site, which used U.S. Department of Transportation statistics. Structurally deficient — 2,526; functionally obsolete — 3,137. Kansas has only 22.2 percent of its bridges in this shape. Minnesota, another light gray state, has only 12.2 percent of its bridges in disrepair.

But it takes only one.

Ruminating over the bridge tragedy I have reached three conclusions:

At one point in our nation's history, we pondered the question, "Guns or butter?" The question now may be "Guns or bridges?"

My career aspirations to be a long-haul trucker have been put on hold.

The guy who invents a remote to send our vehicles ahead of us over 22.2 percent of Kansas' bridges stands to make a fortune.

*Ava Betz is a former newspaper editor and wife of Tom Betz, The Goodland Star-News editor.*

the National Park Service and the Environmental Protection Agency to agents of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Army Corps of Engineers are now carrying deadly weapons. In Virginia, for example, game wardens were recently renamed "conservation police officers" in an effort

to clarify their role as sworn law enforcement officers who are armed and able to make arrests.

Writing for World Net Daily, Joseph Farah declared, "What we've witnessed is the biggest arms buildup in the history of the federal government — and it's not taking place in the Defense Department. The kind of arms that are proliferating in Washington these days are the kind pointed at our own civilian population and carried by a growing number of federal police forces with ever-larger budgets and ever-deadlier arsenals."

"Good grief," remarked Larry Pratt of Gun Owners of America, "that's a standing army." At all levels, federal, local and state, the government and the police have merged. And in the process, they have become a standing army — which is exactly what the Founders feared.

Those who drafted the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights had an enormous distrust of standing armies. They knew that despotic governments have always used standing armies to control the people and impose tyranny. As James Madison, the Father of the Constitution, wrote, "A standing military force, with an overgrown Executive will not long be safe companions to liberty. The means of defense against foreign danger, have been always the instruments of tyranny at home." These "instruments of tyranny" are now in place.

Thus, it may very well be that we are already living in a police state — and that it's all over but the shouting. But still we have to shout.

*Constitutional attorney and author John W. Whitehead is founder and president of The Rutherford Institute. He can be contacted at [johnw@rutherford.org](mailto:johnw@rutherford.org). Information about The Rutherford Institute is available at [www.rutherford.org](http://www.rutherford.org).*