

from our viewpoint...

Remember Jesus' first commandment?

We teach our children they should live by the golden rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." It translates back to the Lords commandment to "love thy neighbor."

It seems like these words cease to be important when the subject is prairie dogs. Suddenly, the thought that these "rodents" could have any useful purpose is impossible. Out West, they must be exterminated.

A plan to reintroduce the endangered black-footed ferret — which eats prairie dogs — on a ranch south of Russell Springs is causing all kinds of commotion. A 1909 Kansas law allowing counties to eradicate prairie dogs is bucking against the national Endangered Species Act, a federal law passed more than 25 years ago.

A court hearing in Topeka on Nov. 20 on a restraining order to stop the poisoning of prairie dogs on Larry and Betty Haverfield's land, and a neighbor's range that he manages, produced no agreement.

The hearing lasted four hours and at one point the judge asked if there was any way both sides could agree on the amount of border area that could be poisoned to keep the prairie dogs in control. That proved impossible; both sides had different ranges. A decision by the judge is expected next month.

However, while Haverfield was on his way to Topeka, the Logan County commissioners sent a man into poison more than 200 acres of land that was part of what was being discussed in the court hearing. Haverfield didn't know about the poisoning until he got a bill for more than \$2,000 after he returned from Topeka.

Under Kansas law, the township officers, or commissioners in counties with under 4,000 population, apparently are not required to notify a landowner when they are going to use poison to exterminate prairie dogs.

Friday, Congressman Jerry Moran stepped into the issue with a letter on the county's side, asking the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to "discontinue efforts to reintroduce black-footed ferrets in Logan County."

A short news release from Moran's office said he believes the agency has "failed to adequately examine all potential adverse impacts associated with the reintroduction of the black-footed ferret..."

We know Moran has not talked to Haverfield and apparently he has not looked at the proposal the Interior Department agency developed. It includes steps to protect the neighbors, offering to pay to kill any escaped prairie dogs within a mile of the Haverfield ranch. Haverfield said a Fish and Wildlife spokesman said last week, that most, if not all, of the neighbors have agreed to accept the subsidy.

A prominent part of the ferret plan is that no farmer or rancher outside the reintroduction area would be fined or have any legal steps taken against him if one of the ferrets gets out of the designated area and meets an untimely end.

This is not the first place the Fish and Wildlife Service have reintroduced black-footed ferrets in the more than 25 years they have been trying to rebuild the nearly extinct animal's numbers.

Haverfield says he has built 22 miles of prairie-dog barriers and has voluntarily poisoned the barriers more than once, and this year hired a company out of Nebraska to carry that out in late October.

Haverfield says it is a confused situation, but thinks he and his friend Gordon Barnhardt are doing the right thing. They understand there are different points of view on the issue, but believe they are doing everything that can be done to reduce the impact on their neighbors while allowing them to reintroduce the meat-eating ferret to bring their prairie dogs into more of a balance.

In this emotional battle, though, all thoughts about the golden rule and the Lords' commandment get trampled into the prairie dust. — Tom Betz



Cedar trees choking some prairie pastures

Cedar trees.

Out here, we plant them for windbreaks. They don't spread too much in this climate, but they can be a nuisance.

They're almost viral: they grow like weeds and, when conditions are right, they spread like weeds, too.

Driving across Kansas, you have plenty of time to think about stuff like this. In the tall-grass hills east of Russell, I started wondering why people don't take better care of their pasture.

Some of it is because they don't really use the land much, I think. Small plots owned by people who don't graze cattle tend to go to trees if you don't burn them. Farther east, you get elms and hackberry and oak, but in the grass country, you get cedars.

While the eastern red cedar is considered a native species, it's not normal to find them growing in Kansas hill country. Centuries of prairie fires and grazing kept them in check, kept the grasslands open and the grass lush for the buffalo — and later the cowman's stock.

Then people started planting windbreaks, and that upped the supply of cedar seeds. Birds eat the berries and spread the seeds, so



steve haynes

• along the sappa

it doesn't take much to get them started miles from the nearest shelter belt.

Today, especially around Manhattan, you see these little plots just choked with ungrazed tall grass and cedar. Pretty soon they're no good for pasture, they're overgrown and the trees just spread. The cedars are kind of like prairie dogs, in their own way.

For a guy who doesn't care about using a small acreage, that may be fine. But like the guy with a big stand of dandelions, he's just growing seeds to infest his neighbor's grass.

But then you see some pretty fair-sized pastures overgrown with cedar trees. And the operator, or maybe the guy who just bought it, is trying to get them out.

While burning will control small cedars, you can't get rid of bigger ones that way.

They burn the fields, then they spray the ce-

dars. They pull them out by the roots, bulldoze them, pile them and burn the carcasses. At least if they ever want to graze livestock again.

And it looks like quite a job. I didn't volunteer to stop and help.

I guess it's just one example of what happens when we introduce something into an ecosystem that doesn't belong. And then change the rules.

One thing you can't help but notice, driving across the state for hours and hours, is the condition of I-70. It's great, smooth, quiet, well maintained. Only a few miles of older pavement remain to be replaced with new concrete east of Salina, and west of there, all the asphalt has been redone.

Kansas is lucky to have good roads today. It wasn't always that way, and it won't last if we don't come up with a new highway program. If you've driven the Interstates in any of our neighboring states, you know what I mean.

So, thanks to the state Department of Transportation. Good job. Everyone is quick to criticize, I know; even this newspaper on occasion. But the department overall does a fine job and we should recognize that.

Speak English, get ahead

It's no secret that in America knowing how to speak the English language is the basic requirement for success — if you can't speak the language everybody else speaks, you are back at the Tower of Babel wondering what everybody around you is trying to say.

For any youngster starting out in life, knowing and speaking the common language is the first step in moving up the ladder. And in the United States, English is the common language, and has been from the beginning. The Constitutional debates were conducted solely in English. Only English is spoken in Congress and in the world of business, not only here in America, in most of the world.

Bill Cosby recently spoke about the vital necessity of youths learning and speaking English.

"They're standing on the corner and they can't speak English," he complained. "I can't even talk the way these people talk: 'why you ain't, where you is, what he drive, where he stay, where he work, who you be'... And I blamed the kid until I heard the mother talk. And then I heard the father talk.

"Everybody knows it's important to speak English — except these knuckleheads. You can't be a doctor with that kind of crap coming out of your mouth. In fact you will never get any kind of job making a decent living. People marched and were hit in the face with rocks to get an education, and now we've got these knuckleheads walking around. The lower economic people are not holding up their end in this deal."

Somebody ought to read those passages to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, preferably in English. It seems that Madame Pelosi has her heart set on forcing the Salvation Army to hire workers who can't speak English.

The lady from San Francisco, where English is presumably spoken, is set on forcing the



michael reagan

• making sense

Salvation Army and all other employers to embrace polyglot as their official hiring standard. Employers would be forced to hire workers who can't speak a word of the language all their customers understand and use — English.

So strong is her intent in this matter that she has sought to block an amendment introduced by Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., to shield the Salvation Army from an absurd requirement of the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission that it must hire non-English speaking employees. His amendment passed the Senate by a 75 to 19 last month, and the House by a recent vote of 218 to 186.

"I cannot imagine the framers of the 1964 Civil Rights Act intended to say that it's discrimination for a shoe shop owner to say to his or her employee, 'I want you to be able to speak America's common language on the job,'" he told the Senate last Thursday, according to The Wall Street Journal.

Mrs. Pelosi, however, caved in to a demand from the House's Hispanic Caucus that specified that the House will not vote on the bill funding the Justice and Commerce Departments unless the English-only protection language is dropped.

As the Journal observed, "The late Albert Shanker, head of the American Federation of Teachers, once pointed out that public schools were established in this country largely 'to help mostly immigrant children learn the three R's and what it means to be an American, with the hope that they would go home and teach their parents the principles in the Constitution and the Declaration that unite us.'"

The newspaper quoted Sen. Alexander as warning that this "noble effort is in danger of being undermined: We have spent the last 40 years in our country celebrating diversity at the expense of unity. One way to create that unity is to value, not devalue, our common language, English."

Somebody please translate that for Mrs. Pelosi — in English.

Mike Reagan, the eldest son of the late President Ronald Reagan, is heard on talk radio stations nationally. E-mail comments to Reagan@caglecartoons.com.

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e-mail: star-news@nwkans.com

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nwkansas.com

N.T. Betz, Director of Internet Services

(ntbetz@nwkans.com)

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

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