

from our viewpoint...

Flying the flag shows patriotism

Flying the American flag at your home or office is a proud way to show patriotism and demonstrate support of our troops in far-flung lands around the world.

The Goodland Kiwanis flag project, which had 87 flags out on Memorial Day, is a great way to help get Old Glory flying. The Kiwanis members will be glad to sign up anyone in town to put out flags in your yard on five holidays each year.

It probably hasn't escaped the Kiwanis members' notice that with Memorial Day, Flag Day and July 4, three-fifths of the holidays they will cover come in about a six week stretch. (The other two are Labor Day in September and Veterans Day in November.)

Memorial Day, coming at the end of May, is a day when we remember all our loved ones who have died, and is a federal holiday designated to honor those who served in the armed forces.

At Memorial Day ceremonies, we remind ourselves to honor those who have died, and those who are in harms way currently in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Two weeks later comes Flag Day, June 14, when the country and especially Elks Lodges across the nation honor our red, white and blue symbol of freedom. The Elks long ago adopted the American flag as a symbol and have special programs to celebrate Flag Day.

People living on 16th, 17th and Cherry Ave. found small American flags in their front lawns over Memorial Day, put there by the Elks and a high school club. This is the third year of the Elks flag project; Zona Price, lodge secretary, said the flags were put out with the help of Family Careers and Community Leaders of America members. Ben Waugh of the FCCLA is in charge of the project this year. The flags are purchased by the Elks and people are encouraged to save them and put them back out on holidays.

Price said the Elks' flags are not as large as the Kiwanis flags, and unlike the Kiwanis program, the Elks depend on the homeowners to take the flags in and put them back out. She said three more streets will get flags on Flag Day, bringing the total number of flags the Elks have given out to 864.

The 21 days between Flag Day and July 4 are part of an annual Salute to the Flag authorized by Congress in 1975. Congress declared the three weeks would be recognized as Honor America Days, a time for Americans to publicly celebrate our country and the great ideals our it stands for.

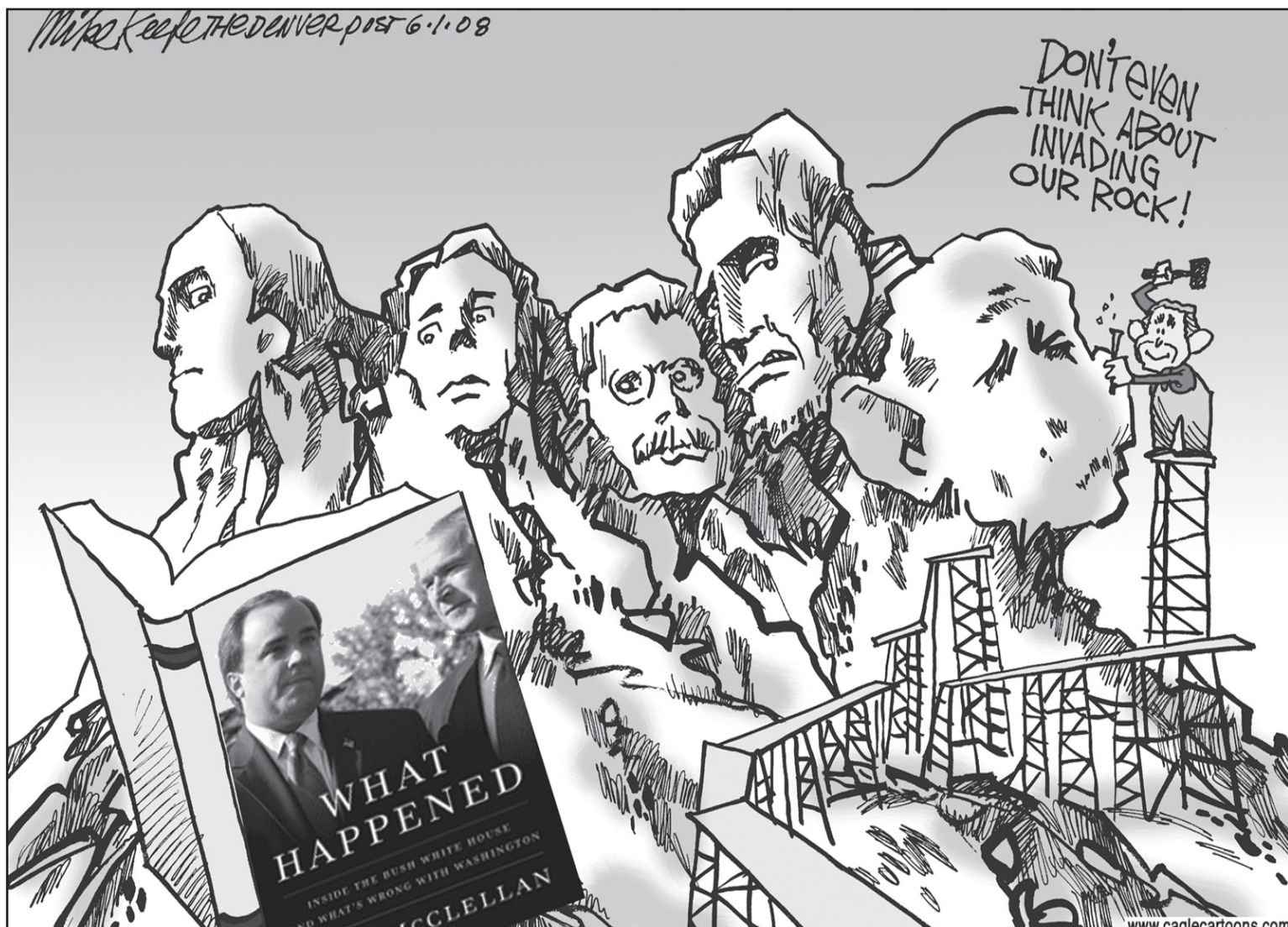
The celebration of freedom and our great symbol conclude on Independence Day, and in Goodland that means the annual Freedom Fest at the county fairgrounds. Freedom Fest has become one of the biggest Fourth of July shows between Denver and Hays with food, entertainment, carnival rides and an unbeatable fireworks show presented by Joe Diaz to finish the evening.

The Freedom Fest committee is asking for donations to make the fireworks show as big as possible, and people can send checks to the Freedom Fest Fund in care of the Sherman County Community Foundation, Box 888, Goodland, Kan. 67735.

Levels of donation receive recognition beginning with the Blue at \$25, White \$50, Red \$100, Shining Star \$200 and Flying Colors for \$500 and up, said Brad Schields, Freedom Fest committee chairman.

Flag Day is coming soon, and Independence Day is close behind, so now is the time to contact a Kiwanis member, Steve Sitton at Finley Motors or Police Chief Ray Smee about signing up for the flag project.

Patriotism is more than just flying a flag, but displaying that symbol of freedom is one of the best ways to remember what a wonderful country we live in, and what it takes to keep us free. — Tom Betz



Rains bring amazing changes

Amazing what a difference four inches of rain makes, isn't it?

Wheat that was just hanging on looks absolutely lush. Corn springs up from bare stubble. Leaves pop out on all the trees.

And the creeks are flowing. How long has it been since that happened?

I don't know where you were when the storms struck Thursday night and Friday. I was in China, getting a blow-by-blow description of Weather Service reports by Instant Messenger from home.

It's a little strange trying to track tornadoes from halfway around the world, but then I was in a high-rise hotel in Taipei, and Cynthia was under the big, heavy tables in the basement where we take shelter.

OK, I was a little jealous. It only rains a couple of times a year, and I hate to miss it. I hate to miss any of the spring here, with the flowers, the new green leaves and all the, ah, interesting weather. Or the excitement of storm season, as long as it's not too exciting.

I got back to Denver on Saturday and she picked me up at the airport. We knew it would be late, since we were leaving the airport after 8 p.m. Colorado time, but we both wanted to be home. Especially me.

Despite having been up for most of 30 hours already, I drove the first leg. It felt good to be behind the wheel after spending much of the week getting on and off a tour bus, eating Chinese food and listening to Chinese officials talk in passable English.

Cynthia has to drive the last lap, but as we



steve haynes

• along the sappa

cruise into Atwood, I tell her to stop. Something is different.

The lake — it's full for the first time in a couple of years. There's water on both sides of the highway, water in the main lake and the east lake. Water pouring over the spillway. Water everywhere, in fact.

We drive over to the dam to take it all in: The roar of the water — we're not about to drive through that, though someone obviously has — the chorus of frogs, the deep croaking of the bullfrogs, all revived from hibernation in the lake-bottom mud for goodness-knows how long.

Bullfrogs, really. And all that sparkling water. It'll be interesting to see if the clay liner they've been installing holds the water for long. Last time the lake came up, it filled only to drain out within a few days. The water table still isn't very high.

Back in Oberlin the next day, Sappa Lake indeed is full, but the drain cock was open and the water would soon be a thing of the past. That made me jealous.

How is it one town saw the value of its lake and revived it, while the next let the water slip away? A difference in vision?

Sappa Park looks good anyway, at least, the

part that's still above water. Most of the new trails are impassable, mired in mud or under water, but that will change soon enough. The bridge below the dam was under water as the lake drained, as were most of those upstream. No one was walking the lake bed.

By Tuesday, most of the water was gone, leaving behind plenty of mud. A turkey, driven off the lake bed by the water, fled the parking area by the dam as visitors approached. Everything is green. It will take days to dry it all out.

Then the trails will reappear, as will the walkers, joggers and dog owners who populate the park most days.

The birds will return to cover, the deer to the timber, the turkeys to the roosts. The creek may flow all summer, though, now that ground is saturated. The dry cycle is gone, and we could get plenty of rain.

Or none at all.

The weather here is hard to know. The only thing that's certain is that wet years will be followed by dry, and just when we think it'll never rain, we'll get too much.

That's the way it's always been.

This year, though, the frogs will reproduce and the corn will have moisture to get up, the creeks will run and the roads may be muddy all summer.

By July, people may be complaining about too much moisture.

Is that possible?

Of course. In Kansas, anything is possible with weather. Until it changes.

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Session highlights, disappointments

It is my honor to serve the 40th District in the state Senate.

I treasure the rural way of life we have in northwest Kansas, and I work hard to protect that. Each legislative session presents new challenges. I accept each one, working to see that our strong family values are kept in place.

Here are some highlights from the 2008 session just ended:

SB 23, Driver's License Fees

This bill increases the photo fees for a driver's license by the Department of Revenue from \$4 to not more than \$8 and requires payment of a photo fee for the cost of the photo to be placed on an identification card.

The bill allows money deposited in the Photo Fee Fund to be used for the administration and operation of offices, including equipment, associated with the issuance of licenses to carry concealed weapons as well as driver's licenses and ID cards. The effective date of will be Jan. 9.

SB 2542, Vehicle Information Processing System

This bill will finance the integration and modernization of the Vehicle Information Processing System, the Kansas Drivers' License System and the Kansas Vehicle Inventory System of the Division of Vehicles in the Department of Revenue. It creates a Division of Vehicles Modernization Fund that will be used for the creation and maintenance of the new system.

The bill authorizes a \$4 surcharge paid at the time of vehicle registration. Registration of fleet vehicles will be exempt from the surcharge. The fee increase will be effective on Jan. 1, and will expire on Jan. 1, 2013.

SB 531, School Finance

In an effort to provide budgeting certainty for school boards, the Senate passed and sent to the governor a school finance plan increasing base state aid by \$59 per pupil to \$4,492 for the 2009-2010 school year and beyond. Recognizing a one-time opportunity to create a rolling appropriation, the Senate took the lead to increase school funding by the rate of inflation. Additionally, the bill changes the law, allowing a school district desiring to consolidate with



Ralph Ostmeyer

• state senator

another district fewer than 150 pupils before July 1, 2011, a guaranteed combined general fund budget for years in which the consolidation take place, plus two school years.

HB 2119, Micro Utility Trucks

This bill defines a micro utility truck as a motor vehicle with the following characteristics that is NOT a work-site utility vehicle:

1. Not less than 48 inches wide
2. With an overall length, including the bumper, of not more than 144 inches.
3. With an unloaded weight, including fuel and fluids, of more than 1,500 pounds.
4. Able to exceed 40 miles per hour as originally manufactured.
5. Manufactured with a metal cab.

The bill makes it illegal to operate a micro utility truck on any Interstate, federal or state highway (except to cross such a highway); within the corporate limits of any city unless authorized by such city; or on any public highway or street unless the vehicle complies with equipment requirements for lamps, brakes, and other equipment such as horns and mufflers. The bill includes micro utility trucks among nonhighway vehicles, and their owners will be required to obtain nonhighway titles. The bill provides for a fine of \$60 for unlawful operation of these trucks.

HB 2858, FHSU Kansas Academy for Math & Science

This bill changes the name of Fort Hays State University Endowment Association to Fort Hays State University Foundation. The bill will appropriate money to the Board of Regents for the Kansas Academy for Math and Science for five years.

This is an accelerated residential program for Kansas high school juniors and seniors talented in science and mathematics. The idea is

allow them to study and learn together, and to earn college credits and a high school diploma at a state educational institution. The regents designated Fort Hays State as the site, and will appropriate money on estimates provided by the university.

Session disappointments

I am disappointed neither Chamber pushed out a bill on illegal immigration. When push comes to shove, too many people view this as a federal issue. My fear is if we wait on Washington to enforce laws, it may never happen.

I believe individual states must take the lead and perhaps then the feds will follow. Several neighboring states are working to pass laws that will require illegal immigrants to follow procedures to become U.S. citizens, and my fear is that if Kansas does not act, we will become a safe harbor for illegal immigrants.

I was disappointed with the governor's veto of the Comprehensive Abortion Reform Act. The bill would not stop a legal abortion, it simply heightens the record keeping and reporting requirements for late-term abortions being performed in Kansas to make sure they are complying with a law that has been on the books for 10 years. The bill provides protection for young women and girls who may be pressured by family, friends, or even sexual predators to have an abortion. It baffles me who could be against enforcing current law and prohibiting coercion and exploitation of young women.

By far the biggest disappointment for me was the governor's continual veto of the Sunflower energy proposal. I am a huge proponent for our Rural Electric Cooperatives, run by local boards that keep the consumer's interest as their main focus. Wind energy proposals are exciting, but I feel we must back that up with energy that is reliable, cheaper, and more dependable, such as coal.

The proposed Holcomb plant is no doubt the cleanest and most modern, safe plant in the nation, if not the world. This affects five utility cooperatives in my district alone, and without compromise it will have a negative impact on the rising costs of western Kansas power.