

from our viewpoint...

Open government best for all people

Why should freedom of speech and of the press be allowed? Why should a government which is doing what it believes to be right allow itself to be criticized?

It should not allow opposition by lethal weapons. Ideas are much more fatal things than guns. Why should any man be allowed to buy a printing press and disseminate pernicious opinion calculated to embarrass the government?

Practical reality, or antidemocratic thinking at its worst? Government leaders sometimes think they know what is best for us. They think it would be easier to "get things done" if they could work behind closed doors.

To this way of thinking, allowing the public or its representatives, the press, to watch the government process is just a waste of time.

Behind closed doors, that's how government used to operate in America, despite our two-century pretension to democratic ideals.

Political parties chose candidates nominated in smoke-filled rooms. Party bosses made the decisions, sometimes voting uncommitted slates, making deals for ambassadorships, cabinet seats and pork-barrel projects.

City councils and state legislatures often went behind closed doors. Ward healers delivered the vote in city precincts, and candidates did as they were told once elected.

A lot has changed in America since that day. We come a lot closer to living up to our ideals.

Presidential candidates are chosen in an open process, involving millions of voters and far fewer back-room deals.

States have laws requiring government meetings to be open and allowing citizens to inspect public documents.

Still, many officials might be tempted to agree with the words above. After all, they believe they are trying to do what is right. From hard experience and great devotion, they know the city or county or school district needs.

They miss the point: It's not just what government does that people need to know in a democracy, but why and how a decision was reached. Then, and only then, can voters make intelligent decisions on their leaders.

All that may sound high minded, theoretical. But people need to know what their officials are doing and why. They hire the press — newspapers, magazines, television stations, bloggers — to tell them what's going on. And it's hard to get a story right when decisions aren't made in the open.

The author of those words above?

V.I. Lenin, founder of the Soviet state.

Lenin did not start out to build a soulless government. He thought he was doing the right thing for "the people." Thomas Jefferson had a different view. He believed a free press provided the only way for a large population to know the truth.

"If I had to choose between a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I would choose newspapers without a government," Jefferson wrote.

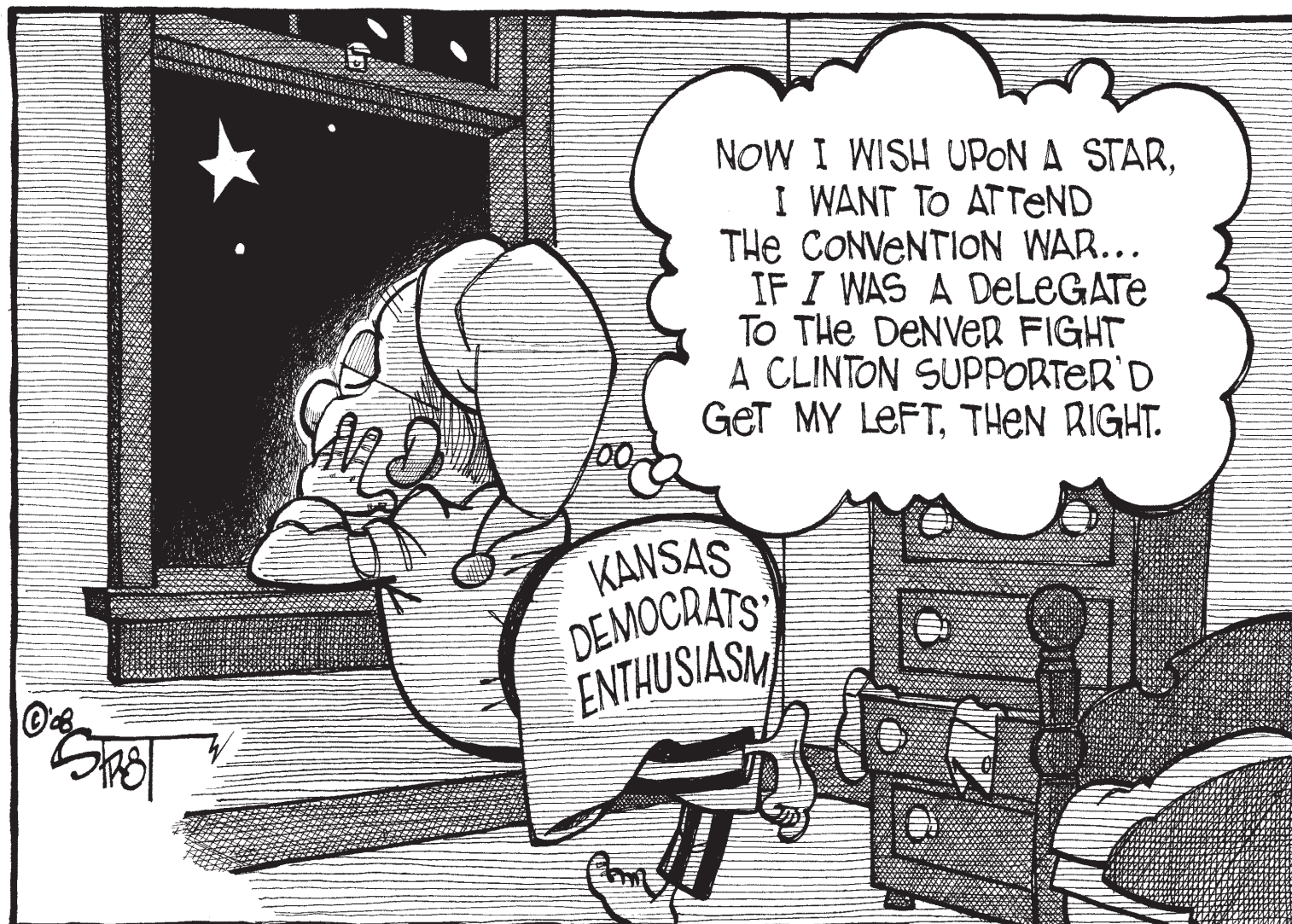
His pen helped shape the First Amendment, still the greatest statement of freedom in our history. It's sparse language says more than many books. Its influence is mighty.

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

Today, no doubt, it would take a couple dozen pages to say all that.

Lucky we are to live in the shadow of Jefferson, and not of Lenin.

— Steve Haynes



Weather watching makes evenings stressful

The weather service is predicting rain and hail, thunderstorms and tornados. Well, how is that different from almost every night since mid May?

Some years are just like this. Watch the clouds move in every night. Pray for rain. Hope it doesn't hail and keep a flashlight in the tornado shelter.

Thursday was no different. The forecast was for rain, lightning, hail, and possibly, the wrath of God. We left anyway.

I know. I know.

"What's with this 'we left' stuff. You guys are never home, anyway," you say.

It's true. But, this time it was a short trip to Washington — Washington, Kansas, that is — for the annual U.S. Highway 36 Association meeting.

We left before the weather got nasty in Oberlin. Stopped in Norcatour to pick up Bob Strevey, who was going to the meeting, and headed on down the highway listening to the police radio give out warnings of tornados, damaging winds, hail the size of baseballs, flash floods and other doom and gloom.

I'm not sure why we even listen to that thing. Police radios never have any good news. Some days, you think there's no good news in the paper. Well, try listening for something, anything good on the police, fire and ambulance



cynthia haynes

• open season

channels.

Anyway we watched the clouds swirl around us — dark to the south, east and west. The crew at the newspaper called and said they were closing down and heading home before the hail struck. Could they use our empty garage and basement?

Sure.

The next report was that they didn't make it to the garage and had to shelter under a big tree out front. With the number of leaves I found in my yard the next day, I'm not sure if that was a good move or not. Still any hailstone that hits a leaf or branch probably loses a lot of force before it has a chance to bounce off your windshield or hood.

We pulled into Washington and the town was real quiet and damp. People were coming out of their basements. We had made the whole 3 1/2-hour trip without getting so much as a drop on us.

At the motel, the owner said she had 15 people with her in the basement. Apparently, we

just missed the thunderstorm and tornado alert. There seemed to be no damage around town, so I'm guessing the tornado missed them.

Back home, there was no tornado, but the hail mowed down my bean plants. Poor beans. The first planting got frozen. (Remember that freeze we had on Mother's Day?) Now the rest got creamed by hailstones.

I only lost a couple of corn plants and one tomato. I was short a green pepper plant also, but since the cat had done that one in before I left, I'm not blaming the weather.

Knowing that I'd lost some plants, I bought several at the Duckwalls in Washington. I'd already scoured Oberlin for pepper plants and had bought just about the last tomatoes in town the week before to replace earlier canine and feline damage.

Some people say that they had no hail. Others were busy replanting. I offered them some of my imported plants.

I figure we're pretty luckily. The corn, peas, tomatoes, peppers, broccoli lettuce and spinach came through fine. The beans took a beating, but they'll come back or they won't. They're not all gone. We'll get a crop. Or, we may get more hail.

Guess, I'll do that only thing I know to do about hard water from heaven.

"Hail Mary, full of grace..."

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Swim meet a success because of great help

To the Editor:

On Saturday, June 7, the Goodland Swim Club hosted a Northwest Kansas Swim League Meet in Goodland.

This was the fifth swim meet that has been held at Steever Water Park. The meet drew 255 swimmers to our pool from 10 different communities in northwest Kansas and eastern Colorado. The facilities we have to offer far exceed any water facility in our league.

This meet began with a tribute to the Dennis Stone family. The family has been a part of our



from our readers

• to the editor

team for more than 25 years.

The swim club is proud to boast we placed first at the meet with 242 points. We have not placed first at a meet since 1993.

While putting on a meet is a great feat, it can

not happen without the help and support of the employees of the City of Goodland and the employees of Steever Water Park. A very special thank you to Richard Simon and Phil Erickson's city crew along with Kendra Billinger, manager and Janelle Wolak, assistant manager, and the lifeguards at the water park.

Each morning, rain or shine, the lifeguards greet us and assist the team. Their support for the team is appreciated.

Gennifer G. House, secretary
Goodland Swim Club

Needed — Will Rogers



tom purcell

• commentary

As the presidential campaign moves along and Americans take to arguing around water coolers and dinner tables, we ought to embrace the wit and wisdom of Will Rogers:

"The short memory of voters is what keeps our politicians in office."

"We've got the best politicians that money can buy."

"A fool and his money are soon elected."

Rogers spoke these words during the Great Depression, but they're just as true today. With 24-hour news channels, our memories are shorter than ever. And in the mass-media age, the politician who can afford the most television advertisements often does win.

"Things in our country run in spite of government, not by aid of it."

"Alexander Hamilton started the U.S. Treasury with nothing. That was the closest our country has ever been to being even."

"Be thankful we're not getting all the government we're paying for."

Today, unfortunately, we're getting MORE government than we're paying for. We cover the difference by borrowing billions every year.

As the king of the velvet-tipped barb, Rogers never intended to be mean, but to bring us to our senses. One of his favorite subjects was to remind the political class that it worked for the average American, not the other way around.

"When Congress makes a joke it's a law, and when they make a law, it's a joke."

"You can't hardly find a law school in the country that don't, through some inherent weakness, turn out a senator or congressman from time to time ... if their rating is real low,

even a president."

"The more you observe politics, the more you've got to admit that each party is worse than the other."

That's for certain. I used to fault the Democrats for cronyism and reckless spending. But that was before Republicans gained power and showed us how cronyism and reckless spending are really done.

Rogers' thinking on American foreign policy hits home today:

"Diplomacy is the art of saying 'Nice doggie' until you can find a rock."

"Diplomats are just as essential to starting a war as soldiers are for finishing it. You take diplomacy out of war, and the thing would fall flat in a week."

"Liberty doesn't work as well in practice as it does in speeches."

Rogers was born and raised on a farm in Oklahoma. His wit reflected the heart of America -- the horse sense, square dealing and honesty that are the bedrock of our country's success.

"When a fellow ain't got much of a mind, it don't take him long to make it up."

"This country is not where it is today on account of any one man. It's here on account of the real common sense of the Big Normal

Majority."

Franklin Roosevelt, a frequent target of Rogers' barbs, understood how valuable Rogers' sensibility was during the years of the Depression. Here's what Roosevelt said of Rogers:

"I doubt there is among us a more useful citizen than the one who holds the secret of banishing gloom ... of supplanting desolation and despair with hope and courage. Above all things ... Will Rogers brought his countrymen back to a sense of proportion."

A sense of proportion is a hard thing to maintain, and we need to get ours back.

Not long ago, we were attacked by people who hold an ideology we're still having trouble getting our arms around. At first we were united, but we've since stumbled and become divided.

We've got a rapidly aging population — a Social Security and Medicare train wreck is just over the horizon — and there is no shortage of other woes we must resolve if we expect the American experiment to keep on rolling.

But instead of working to resolve our challenges, we snipe, point fingers and make silly accusations. We forget we're not Democrats or Republicans, but Americans.

What we need is the calm, clear perspective of Will Rogers. He offered some sound advice on how we can get started:

"If stupidity got us into this mess, then why can't it get us out?"

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