

from our viewpoint...

Fireworks coming from all sides

The large crowd at the Sherman County Fairgrounds and parked around the fairgrounds enjoyed another great Freedom Fest fireworks show produced by Joe Diaz and the Sherman County Community Services.

Diaz included quite a few special displays including red, white and blue shots and some to spell out U.S.A. While the U and A were a little tough to see the S came out beautifully.

The fairgrounds were full of people and kids of all ages were enjoying the rides that ran for about three hours. Hungry and thirsty people kept the Kiwanis burger shack busy, and Goodland Rotary sliced up about 30 watermelons for people to take and eat.

Traditionally the watermelon table has been in front of the Agriculture Building west door, but as the sun invaded the Rotary members decided to move the operation to the south where it was more in the shade, and where more people were walking.

The new concrete along the north side of the 4-H Building and strip between the 4-H building and the south Ag building door has been done. This was a project the fair board did with a contribution from Geraldine Gannon's family to improve the accessibility.

A special plaque will be erected to Geraldine and Bill Gannon. Those who have power chairs, wheelchairs or strollers can thank them as they roll down the wider sidewalk and the smooth sidewalk connecting the two buildings.

One never appreciates these small things until a relative or friend find themselves needing to use a wheelchair. The world is quite different when bumps, uneven sidewalks and curbs become serious obstacles to a person's free mobility.

Fireworks of another sort got going last week when the U.S. Postal Service announced they will be moving the mail processing from Colby and Hays to Salina. The move will cost Colby one person and cost Hays three, and is expected to be in place by October.

For Northwest Kansas the other cost will be a change in schedule for the mail trucks from the area post offices to carry the mail to Colby and eventually to Salina.

At a meeting held in May in Colby a postal official said the change would probably mean the trucks from most post offices – including Goodland – would have to run up to three hours earlier.

For Goodland the change will mean outgoing mail will have to be at the post office by 1:15 p.m. to make the outgoing mail truck going to Colby. Now the mail truck leaves Goodland about 4:40 p.m., but to be sure to make the truck people bring mail to the post office by 4 p.m.

Mail brought to the post office by 1:15 p.m. will make the truck, and should be delivered on the regular schedule the next day from Colby. Mail for the 677 zip code will be processed in Colby, but mail for other zip codes will be sent to Salina to be processed. Mail on the truck for Topeka and Kansas City will get improved delivery cutting the two days to overnight.

We have always believed a mistake was made in 1971 when the U.S. Postal Service was reorganized on the basis it had to make a profit. Today the postal officials are asking Congress to allow them to cut Saturday delivery. We feel the country needs to support a first class mail system, and bring the postal service back as a government department. When it was under full government control the customers had more options and more control about how things work. If we need to spend money for something we feel Ben Franklin was right the post office is of vital importance. – Tom Betz



Yeah, they were in Yankee Stadium

I started to get a little irritated this weekend as the Rockies played a three-game series in New York.

The broadcasters, supposedly veteran sports announcers, were acting like little kids admitted to the candy factory.

It was like, "Geez, we're in YANKEE STADIUM."

First of all, it's a new stadium, not the crumbling ruin of the place where Babe Ruth hit all those home runs. And these guys are supposed to be experts, experienced people. They've been there before.

OK, the Rockies don't go to American League parks all that often. But announcer Jack Corrigan used to travel with the Cleveland Indians. We know he's been there.

OK, I know a lot of people across the country grew up in the thrall of the mighty Yankees. I wasn't one of them.

As a kid growing up in eastern Kansas, I learned about the Yankees.

Our first "home" baseball team was the hapless Athletics, who moved from Philadelphia to the old Muehlebach Field in Kansas City in 1955. The first year, they finished sixth with a 63-91 record. But we had a major league team.

The A's had long been the No. 2 team in Philly, and owner Arnold Johnson was peren-



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nially short of cash. If he needed some in the middle of the season, why he'd trade his best player to the Yankees.

One year, a young guy named Roger Maris was thrilling fans in Kansas City when... well, you get the picture. In New York, of course, he became the first to break Ruth's single-season home run record.

Another time, Bob Cerv, a supposedly worn out outfielder, came down from the Yankees in an outright purchase. The former University of Nebraska star had what today they call a "career year" – in 1958, hit .305, smacked 38 homers, and had 104 runs batted in for Kansas City. He was elected to the American League All-Star team, beating out Ted Williams for the starting spot, and finished fourth in the Most Valuable Player voting that year.

Before you could say "Damned Yankees," why he was traded BACK to New York in 1960. (The old '50s musical sort of summed up the way we felt.)

Life, sigh, was like that when your club was

so bad it could only make it through the year by dealing with the devils in pinstripes.

Then Charles O. Finley of Chicago bought the team, and things got worse, though much more interesting, until Finley pulled up stakes and moved to the Bay Area in 1968.

In his few short years in K.C., however, Finley changed baseball, bringing on brightly colored uniforms, grazing goats (and a mule named Charlie O) in the grass out past the outfield, building an elevator to make a green-and-gold dressed rabbit pop up out of home plate to deliver balls to the umpire.

Everyone hated Finley. One year, they bought a field out in Johnson County and threatened to play there if the city didn't come to terms on stadium rental.

Oh, we had Yankee fans. For years, the Kansas City Blues, owned by beer baron George Muehlebach, were a Yankees Triple-A farm team, and many storied players came through town.

We just weren't among their fans. I still hate the Yankees, and I know I have a lot of company.

And if I have to listen to much more of the hero worship from the Denver broadcasters, I may have to switch back to the (hapless) Royals.

Damned Yankees.

Time to bring the troops home

As he was announcing his second increase in troops for Afghanistan in December 2009, President Obama promised by July 2011 those troops would begin coming home.

As relayed by Bob Woodward's book, Obama's Wars, we know the president was skeptical about the United States' war effort in Afghanistan. In spite of that skepticism, the president's new plan for the war extends the longest war in American history for the foreseeable future.

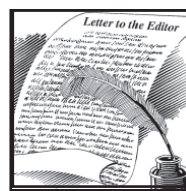
President Obama announced his first surge of 20,000 troops in spring 2009. Pushing American forces well above the 50,000 mark and reinforcing a counterinsurgency strategy, he escalated a war in a country entering its fourth decade of continuous conflict.

Thousands of Marines and soldiers were rushed in, with the announcement they were there to ensure free and fair Afghan elections. That summer, these troops found an insurgency fueled by resentment of their presence. Either because of hostility to foreign occupation or because our troops simply sided with someone else's rival, akin to supporting just one side in a Hatfield-McCoy feud, 2009 became the deadliest year of the war, doubling the amount of American dead in 2008.

Meanwhile, the fire hydrant-like stream of dollars, being pumped into the second most corrupt nation in the world, seemed to purchase only further grievances among the population against a government radiantly kleptocratic. When President Hamid Karzai blatantly stole the elections in August, American officials were forced to abandon any narrative of Americans fighting and dying for democracy in Afghanistan. Then, in October, National Security Advisor Jim Jones announced al-Qaeda had fewer than 100 members in Afghanistan.

However, given little political cover from the left, feeling little political pressure from the right and receiving nothing but a choice of small, medium or large escalation of the war by the Pentagon, President Obama in December 2009 ordered 30,000 more troops and billions of dollars into what soon would become America's longest war.

Predictably, by doubling down on a policy that had proved counterproductive, we betrayed our national values and failed to inflict damage on al-Qaeda. We went from being



from other pens

• commentary

waist-deep to chest-deep in quicksand.

This past year surpassed 2009 as the deadliest year of the conflict, killing 57 percent more American service members.

Tragically, but unsurprisingly, 2011 has been even more deadly. Insurgent attacks from January to March increased nearly 50 percent from the same period in 2010, while American deaths from March to May of this year increased 41 percent from last spring's totals.

Nationwide, a U.S.-led campaign of night raids on homes has terrorized families, while a massive nation-building program funded by U.S. taxpayers has enriched a corrupt few and disenfranchised a poor majority. Again, betraying our own values, we looked the other way when elections were stolen for the second time in as many years. The number of civilian deaths are on pace to surpass the totals from 2010, the deadliest year of the war for civilians since 2001. The result: Eight in 10 Afghan men now say the U.S. presence is bad for Afghanistan.

By the administration's own account, al-Qaeda has not existed in any meaningful capacity in Afghanistan since we successfully scattered them in 2001. Over the last decade, they have evolved into an increasingly flat or networked organization(s) of individuals and small cells around the globe that is most successfully attacked through good intelligence, international law-enforcement cooperation and surgical-strikes, such as the raid against Osama bin Laden's compound in Pakistan. Our Afghan war policy does not affect al-Qaeda.

American troops killed or maimed in Afghanistan and others who have returned home with physical and mental injuries, increasing numbers of whom are taking their own lives, cannot be said to have made a worthy sacrifice. We must acknowledge to families their losses did not prevent another Sept. 11.

Moreover, our policies have destabilized the region, most notably in Pakistan, a nuclear nation with 170 million people.

Indeed, President Obama was right to be skeptical.

However, despite growing bipartisan support for an accelerated drawdown, on Wednesday President Obama announced the withdrawal of 30,000 troops through next year. Such a withdrawal, particularly without a change in strategy will only bring us back to where we were in December 2009. With only modest cuts in troop levels and no real changes in our strategy, we will continue to be stuck in Afghan quicksand for years to come.

The president should go further – removing the most recent 30,000 surge troops by the end of 2011 and reducing to a total of fewer than 30,000 troops by the end of 2012. Combined with sincere political efforts in Afghanistan and the broader region, and by maintaining a focus on al-Qaeda, the United States can move Afghanistan and the region toward stability, while freeing itself from its quicksand.

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The American Forum, a nonprofit, non-partisan, educational organization, provides the media with the views of experts on major public concerns in order to stimulate informed discussion.

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