

from our viewpoint...

Time to step in against Syria violence

It was announced early Tuesday that the United States and seven other countries were expelling Syrian diplomats over the massacre in Houla, and we hope this signals that the international community is finally ready to do something to stop the horrendous civil war in Syria.

The massacre, which left more than a hundred people dead, took place Friday in Houla, a small town northwest of Homs, a city that has seen some of the worst fighting of the year-long war. Opposition leaders have said the town was shelled, and then groups of people moved through, killing 108, including women and children.

The United Nations human rights office said Tuesday that most of the victims were shot execution style at close range. Initially, the Syrian government blamed the opposition, and the opposition, of course, blamed the government. Now the U.N. is saying an investigation has revealed government tank and artillery shells in the area, but has not blamed the government outright.

The violence has continued since the massacre, with another 46 people killed around the country, including both government loyalists and opposition supporters.

Whomever is truly responsible for this human right abuse, it is time for the international community to step in and end the violence. It should be obvious to everyone by now that international condemnation isn't going to stop Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, it is going to have to be something more forceful.

We don't mean it should be just the United States. We have plenty of problems of our own, not to mention that a large part of our forces are still engaged in Afghanistan. The public, which has largely been calling for an end to that war, would likely not tolerate starting another. However, the United States has recently proven it can act in support of U.N. efforts without having boots on the ground.

It's true, the international community largely stayed out of the Arab Spring rebellions. But those uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and many more never reached the level of violence that has taken place in Syria. Only one other similar example stands out, Libya.

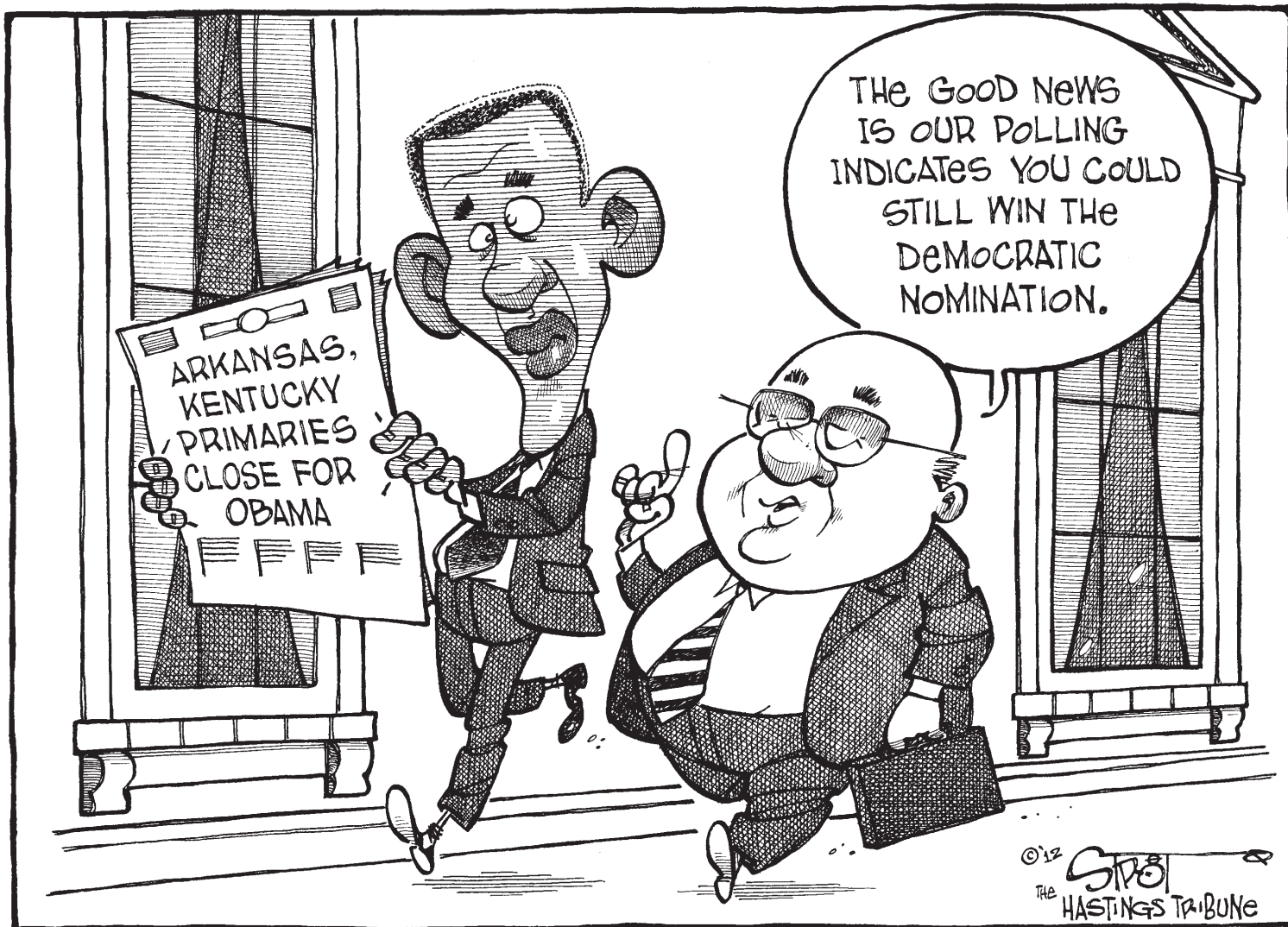
The U.N. intervened in Libya because of the increasing level of brutality displayed by government troops against the rebels. The important thing is that the U.N. action was in support of the rebels, rather than sending in massive numbers of troops to do the fighting for them. A no-fly zone was established over the country, air strikes were conducted by the French and other European powers and the U.S. and United Kingdom struck with missiles.

Why can't the same thing be done in Syria?

Let's not kid ourselves. The whole reason countries like France and Italy were at all interested in helping out in Libya is because that country is in their backyards. Syria does not share that geographic interest. Besides other Arab countries, Syria borders Israel, and you can only imagine the consequences if Israel were to launch strikes on Syria. It also borders Turkey, which has been anxiously trying to get into the European Union for years, not to mention it has been fighting with Kurdish rebels on the Iraqi border, and probably isn't eager for more.

It is going to have to be the U.N., and they are going to have to act fast if they want to stop further massacres like Houla.

—Kevin Bottrell



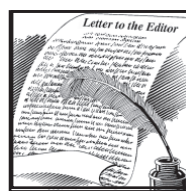
Sheriff helped in difficult time

To the Editor:

At the start of my recent trip to Goodland, Kansas, I found myself to be really apprehensive. There were so many things weighing on my mind and the way this trip could end up.

I was traveling to Kansas as result of my daughter being arrested and now being sentenced to many years away from her family. Things had to be taken care of while I was out there and how I was going to accomplish them was still being considered.

Following my arrival in Goodland, I met the Sheriff Kevin Butts. What a blessing this man turned out to be for us and I wanted to share



from our readers

to the editor

this with your readers.

Sheriff Butts was very calming; reassuring me all I needed to take of while there, with the help of himself and his Deputies, was not nearly as stressful as I had thought. They were all so kind and helpful providing not only assistance in getting things done while I was

there, but also providing the words a father needs to hear in times like these to comfort him. They truly made a difficult situation so much better.

I wish to thank all of you again for everything you did. I couldn't have asked for more. Your community is very blessed to have such a wonderful group of men and women available for you at your Sheriff's Department. God Bless you all.

Richard Stout and family
Palmdale, California

Early wheat harvest not early enough

While combines began cutting in south central Kansas counties at the end of last week, wheat harvest can't come soon enough for most farmers across the state. That's ironic because this year's wheat crop is already two to three weeks early.

Dry heat, above normal temperatures and winds that have whipped what little moisture is left out of many wheat fields across the state has farmers roaring into harvest. While the general census among farmers is there'll still be wheat to harvest, the potential of what might have been looms large across the Kansas landscape.

Less than a month ago the Wheat Quality Council tour estimated the 2012 wheat crop to yield 403.8 million bushels. This figured out to be roughly 45 bushels per acre on the 9.5 million acres planted in Kansas. In three short weeks a lack of moisture dropped this estimate to a 365 million bushel crop.

On the other hand, there remain pockets of optimism across the state. Long-time Sumner County wheat farmer Scott Van Allen says it's been a long time since he's had a good wheat crop. His crop has been fortunate enough to have received the necessary moisture.

"Our crop never really lacked for moisture like I've heard it has in other parts of the state," Van Allen says. "I've got my fingers crossed



Insight this week

john schlageck

we could still have a very good crop."

That very good crop could possibly yield 50-60 bushels-per-acre, weigh in at 60 pounds per bushel and contain a protein level in the mid to upper 11s, the Sumner County wheat producer says.

While attending a Kansas Wheat Commission meeting in Hays on May 18, Van Allen took the southerly route home driving from Kinsley to Hutchison on Highway 50. Here, he saw what he called, "some wheat hurting pretty badly. It was dry, heat stressed and while there will still be wheat harvested - the yield potential got knocked down pretty hard."

Further north and west of Salina farmers also test cut some plots last week. In Phillips County the wheat crop is turning fast and barring the slight chance of rains, harvest in some areas may be underway as you read this.

Veteran farmer Doug Zillinger says some of the crop still looks good while the nearly 100 degree heat and 50 mile-per-hour winds last week are turning some of the wheat white.

"It's sapping what little moisture the wheat has left," Zillinger says. "The wheat condition is deteriorating every day."

The Kansas Agricultural Statistics Services (KSAA) downgraded its crop assessment last week on May 21. KSAA rated the crop 22 percent poor to very poor condition. Thirty-five percent was rated in fair shape, with 36 percent in good and 7 percent in excellent condition.

Wheat farmers know the wheat crop is usually as good as it can be the first week in May. At this stage of maturity, with ideal weather conditions the crop can either maintain its current status or if temperatures turn hot and the wind continues to blow, the crop deteriorates quickly.

Unfortunately that's what happened this year. The wheat headed south beginning in early May.

The 2012 wheat crop will be a mixed bag for sure. Some farmers will harvest good yielding crops and others will not. Those producers will once again begin to think and dream about the great crop next year.

Most farmers are realists. They understand whatever the yields wind up being when they haul the crop to the bin - that's what it'll be.

John Schlageck is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas.

Remember our immigrant roots

My home state of South Carolina has imposed a tough new law to address "illegal" immigration. Like many recently enacted state immigration laws - which bear a curious similarity from state to state - South Carolina now requires law enforcement officers to check the backgrounds of those they suspect may be in the country illegally, makes it a crime to harbor or transport illegal immigrants, requires immigrants to carry Federal registration documents at all times and requires employers to verify the legal status of all new employees. South Carolina's immigration law also, however, provides legal status verification exemptions for agricultural laborers, private residence domestic workers, ministers and fishermen on crews with ten or more hands.

Those exemptions, with the exception of the one provided for ministers, are perfectly understandable to me. I'm a lifelong resident of the state that started the Civil War to defend an economic system based on slavery, designed urban public transit systems to get domestic workers to their employers' homes, Constitutionally mandates a "minimally adequate" public education and recently enacted a Voter ID law to combat "voter fraud," although there's scant evidence of voter fraud in our state.

Those exemptions accomplish two things familiar to those who know South Carolina's history. They offer incendiary inspiration to those easily swayed by the politics of fear and division, and they assure that the affluent who need a cheap and ready labor force won't be unduly inconvenienced. What's truly frightening is that other States are now in step



from other pens

Rev. Joseph Darby

with South Carolina, which isn't exactly a sterling example of educational or economic progress.

The immigration laws passed in many States - like Arizona's SB 1070 currently being considered by the United States Supreme Court - are convenient tools for social control. Like the Jim Crow laws in the early to mid 20th Century American South, the new immigration laws enable some struggling citizens to blame "those people" for their failure to achieve instead of asking hard questions about systemic economic and social inequities. They also enable elected officials who choose not to run on their records or ideas to fan the flames of division for political advantage and prevent honest consideration of what's best for all Americans.

Some of those laws are already being "tweaked" in ways that speak to their real intent. In Alabama, legislators are struggling with protests from business interests whose low wage workers have fled the State by the thousands and the negative publicity of a German Mercedes executive's detention for failure to produce his "papers." In Arizona, the law was revised to make its inherent need for racial profiling less pointed and more palatable. Trying to mask the intent of those

laws, however, is like trying to hide a skunk in a perfume factory - things still don't smell quite right.

The evolving legal history of immigration in the United States is instructive in considering the new wave of state immigration laws. The Naturalization Act of 1790 extended citizenship only to "free white persons." The Immigration Act of 1924 sought to stem the tide of Southern and Eastern European immigrants. Nation of origin quotas weren't abolished until the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965.

Whether our ancestors arrived on the Mayflower, in the holds of slave ships like the Amistad or in the "steerage" of ocean liners in the early 20th Century, the majority of Americans today are the descendants of immigrants. The sad fact is that those whose families have been here for a generation or two are hostile to those seeking new opportunity in America.

If we are to be the world's self-professed "melting pot," then we can't put the lid on the pot when it comes to admitting those who don't look like or don't worship or think in ways acceptable to us. I hope that the Supreme Court will remember that when considering the Constitutionality of the latest wave of immigration laws so that we can address 21st century immigration realities, pave the way for new Americans to pursue the American dream and focus on building new American bridges instead of erecting new American walls.

The Reverend Joseph A. Darby is Pastor of Morris Brown African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina.

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