

from our viewpoint...

## Separating church, state still sensible

It's been 50 years since the Supreme Court ruled in Engel v. Vitale that school-sponsored prayer was unconstitutional.

It was and is a wise decision, though much misunderstood by a great many. The court did not, as people often say, outlaw prayer in school. What is outlawed was state-sponsored prayer, dictated by the school administration or state.

There is a great difference. Students can and do lead prayer in school today, though not during class time when others might or might not want to take part. Sports teams often join in prayer before or after a game. Many kids pray in school, before meals, or maybe just before a big test.

What's missing is the prayer led by the principal or written by the state Board of Education that sometimes marked schools of yore. Many would say that's a good thing.

School prayer used to promote a pretty narrow view of God: Protestant, Christian, white-oriented, mainstream. OK for the children of white Protestants, we'd guess, but what about the others, the Catholics, the Jews, the Orthodox?

"Just write a prayer that everyone can agree on," someone will say. Easier said than done, however.

We've seen many examples of why state-sponsored or approved religion has no place in schools. In one town, a Baptist-sponsored troupe asked to put on a play at school. The principal allowed as how he didn't see the harm in it.

Next morning, though, a gaggle of angry Mormon parents was waiting outside his office. They saw the harm, or feared they did. One man's harmless play, it seems, is the next parent's heresy.

The funny thing is, Baptists as a whole usually get it. The Baptist church understands and backs separation of church and state right down the line.

The country as a whole is more observant of religious rights today. It's not that long ago when some public school districts were run by nuns or pastors because "no one else went to school there," or "no one cared."

But aren't we a nation founded by and for God-fearing men? Yes, for the most part, but these same founders saw the need for the Bill of Rights, protecting citizens from the government they were forming, guaranteeing certain rights.

The Constitution says the government shall not favor any "establishment of religion," nor interfere with the free exercise of religious rights. That means schools can't tell students when or how to pray.

They're still free to pray, and we ought to be thankful for that. The freedoms guarded and guaranteed by the First Amendment are the bedrock of our liberty. Anything—including school prayer—that threatens them needs to go. — Steve Haynes



## Freedom of speech threatened

To the Editor:

In Tom Betz's article in the Tuesday, July 3, edition of the newspaper, he wrote about the Supreme Court's ruling on Obamacare. He wished not to dwell on the issue of the Affordable Care Act and instead wrote about another Supreme Court Decision that refused to limit the scope of free speech and the first amendment. He paralleled this decision with the Affordable Care Act, pointing out that the Supreme Court was still in the business of protecting the Bill of Rights.

I would like to argue however, that the Affordable Care Act threatens the First Amendment just as much as the Stolen Valor Act would have done, but in a different way. As all know, the First Amendment also includes the free exercise of religion. Right now, due to a decision by the Health and Human Services regarding a certain provision of the Affordable Care Act, the First Amendment is under attack. If things remain the way they are now, it will amount to a very real persecution of the Catholic Church.

This provision is known as the HHS Mandate and gives an exemption to insurance agencies and employers who conscientiously object to providing coverage for contraception, but this exemption is so narrow that, as one Catholic bishop put it, not even Jesus Christ himself would qualify for it. The mandate attempts to redefine freedom of religion as freedom to worship, which leaves out ministries to oth-



### from our readers

• to the editor

ers. This is no comfort to us, because in the former Soviet Union, freedom of worship was included in their constitution, which restricted churches to simply performing religious rites in public places of worship. The ability to practice charity and live the Gospel in our public lives, as Jesus Christ has commanded us, was denied to them. We have fought a long cold war to defeat that vision, yet here it is appearing again.

According to the Catholic Church, contraception is a grave moral evil and the teaching of the Church on this issue simply cannot change. In an unprecedented stand, every Catholic bishop in the United States has clearly stated that they cannot and will not comply with this mandate. For the Catholic Church, there are really only three options if the mandate were to stand: (a) to close the large number of Catholic schools, colleges, hospitals, adoption agencies, and charitable organizations or (b) selling these organizations to non-Catholics, or (c) pay heavy financial penalties until the organizations go bankrupt. The bishops will elect towards the first option if made to choose, but all three options amount to a persecution. There

are currently 23 lawsuits pending against the HHS Mandate.

So how does this concern the readers of Goodland Star-News? To be clear, the point of this letter is not to argue against contraception, but to point out a very big problem today, which will affect future generations. Firstly, this does not solely affect Catholics, but those of all faiths. The Jewish community and many protestant churches have expressed alarm at the mandate because, even though it doesn't affect them directly, it is still an open attack against religious freedom and could soon be them next. Secondly, Catholic institutions have played a huge part in our nation's history. The mandate would shut down roughly 13 percent of the nation's hospitals which also happen to be Catholic.

I ask your readers to please contact our senators and representatives at the state and national levels to express their alarm at this attack against the First Amendment. I ask them to research the issue and raise awareness of what's going on. Currently, the Obama administration is trying paint the issue as "women's health issue" rather than one of religious freedom. We must not allow them to erode religious freedom in the name of a false notion of women's health. Most importantly I would ask for the readers' prayers, for without prayer, we can do nothing.

Brad Geist  
Goodland

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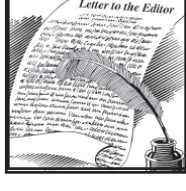
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## Out-of-towners enjoyed Freedom Festival

To the Editor,

I wanted to write and say thank you to the community of Goodland for their annual Freedom Fest. Years ago our family lived in Tribune and would come up to your event and have a ball. Then my brother-in-law moved to Goodland many years later and my husband and I were tickled to learn you still were doing Freedom Fest. We drove about 2-3 hours to get there yesterday, from east of Colorado Springs, and had a ball.

You have the best people running your rides



### from our readers

• to the editor

and it is a great time. My son was the little boy who blew chunks on a ride and the guys running the ride were so nice about it. The merry-go-round had an older gentleman with a grey beard who actually stopped and helped my son

get a rock out of his shoe before helping him on a horse. Such a nice way to be treated when you are six - thank you to that gentleman!

Then there was the great fireworks - wow, what a show. Thanks for a wonderful night for my family for not very much money. We truly love to drive out and visit, I think this is our third Freedom Fest, but it won't be our last.

The Clemons Family:

Brian, Mary Anna,

CheyAnne, CaseyAnne and Dylan

## Hard choices for farmers during drought

Across the state Kansas farmers are looking skyward, praying for rain and some relief from the record heat and drought. An early spring and ideal planting season had row-crop producers feeling optimistic about the potential yield for this year's crop.

That enthusiasm has faded as we now realize the harvest for many Kansas farm families will be limited - or nonexistent. Kansas recorded one of the driest Junes ever and one of the hottest months in this state's history. While the western third of Kansas is blessed with irrigated crops, they are already feeling the brunt of the hot, dry weather, and the rest of the state is being devastated by this brutal heat.

While most farmers have some level of crop insurance and will recover a portion of their economic losses. Producers must remain proactive and begin working with their crop insurance agents immediately. This will ensure they receive the indemnities they are entitled to.

Kansas row-crop farmers are already making hard decisions based on the likelihood this drought will continue and grow. Some of these decisions include: is it time to take this crop out and salvage something? Is the crop already too far gone and should I leave what remains as residue? Should I hay what remains of my corn or milo? Do I need to divert some of my irrigation and choose which fields I believe will still yield a crop?

Hard choices?

You bet; however, the key is to begin talk-



### Insight this week

• john schlageck

ing with your crop insurance agent about your individual situation.

"Make sure you're getting all your i's dotted and your t's crossed regarding your crop insurance policy," says Mark Nelson, Kansas Farm Bureau commodities director. "And remember, if you do decide to harvest your crops early, beware of prussic acid."

Prussic acid can cause livestock deaths. Ruminant animals (cattle and sheep) are more susceptible to prussic acid poisoning than non-ruminant animals because the ruminal microorganisms have enzymes which will release prussic acid in the animal's digestive tract.

Once plants containing prussic acid have been consumed by an animal, the toxin rapidly enters the blood stream and is transported throughout its body. Prussic acid inhibits oxygen utilization by the cells in the animal's body. In essence, the animal suffocates

With conditions shaping up like they are in Kansas, any number of common plants may accumulate large quantities of prussic acid (cyanogenic compounds). Corn, sorghums and related species readily accumulate these compounds.

Another potential problem that may be facing row-crop producers is aflatoxins. Aflatoxins are highly toxic chemicals produced by certain mold fungi. They're often associated with drought conditions during grain fill and the accompanying high daytime and warm nighttime temperatures, that are conducive to fungal invasion and aflatoxin production, Nelson says.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has established strict limits for the presence of aflatoxins which can impact the deliverability, use, price and insurance indemnities that farmers may receive for aflatoxin-contaminated grain.

"For crop insurance claims, aflatoxin tests must be done by a Risk Management Agency (RMA) approved testing facility," Nelson emphasizes. "Make sure to keep in touch with crop insurance agents. Let them know what your plans are before you take action if possible, and definitely before you cut, so an accurate appraisal can be made."

A farmer's biggest risk remains the weather. This fact is being hammered home in a big way again this year.

John Schlageck is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. Born and raised on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.