

from our viewpoint...

## Rhetoric gets deep in politics, marriages

The country is astir with the winds of the recent court decision in Massachusetts and the mayor of San Francisco's declaration that the county clerk must allow marriage licenses for gay and lesbian couples.

For a few days anyway, the focus is less on the presidential race and more on the emotional question of same-sex marriages.

In the 50 states, there are 10 (20 percent) that have no laws dealing with the subject (Oregon, Wyoming, Wisconsin, New Mexico, New York, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Hampshire, New Jersey and Maryland). Vermont recognizes same-sex unions as a civil contract, and two, California and Massachusetts, have registries for same-sex couples.

In the past week, Massachusetts has been wrestling with a constitutional amendment to ban such marriages. A previous law was struck down by the state Supreme Court as being unconstitutional.

In California, the mayor of San Francisco wrote a letter to the county clerk saying under his interpretation of the state Constitution it is discriminatory to refuse to recognize same-sex marriages.

The mayor ordered the county clerk to keep the office open over the weekend to allow lesbians and gay men to apply for wedding licenses. Over 500 couples turned up, and the number is expected to continue rising unless a group from Arizona can convince a judge to issue a restraining order and hear a case to stop the clerk.

For San Francisco, it has meant a few more dollars of income, as it costs about \$100 for each couple to get married.

The action is on both coasts, while the rest of the country — including Kansas and the surrounding states — has existing laws against homosexual marriage.

This is one of those issues — like abortion — which bring out people's emotions. In most cases, it does not matter what is logical or fair; it is a matter of religious fervor or righteous indignation that anything like this would be allowed or even suggested.

Looking at the history of the United States, there are a lot of questions about what the Founding Fathers thinking was on how far the rights granted under the First Amendment could be stretched or ought to be expanded to encompass.

Many of these men were not exactly upstanding and faithful in their days. That does not mean they had any idea how the world would look over 200 years later.

Any time there is a question of being fair or allowing people the constitutional freedom the founding fathers fought for, we believe they should be given the leeway as long as the action does not hurt someone else.

No doubt the rhetoric about same-sex marriages will slowly slide out of the news and the nation can get back to the real question of whether or not President Bush made all his National Guard weekends while campaigning in Alabama about 30 years ago during the Vietnam War.

These are the issues which draw our attention away from the more mundane events, such as the violence in Iraq. — *Tom Betz*

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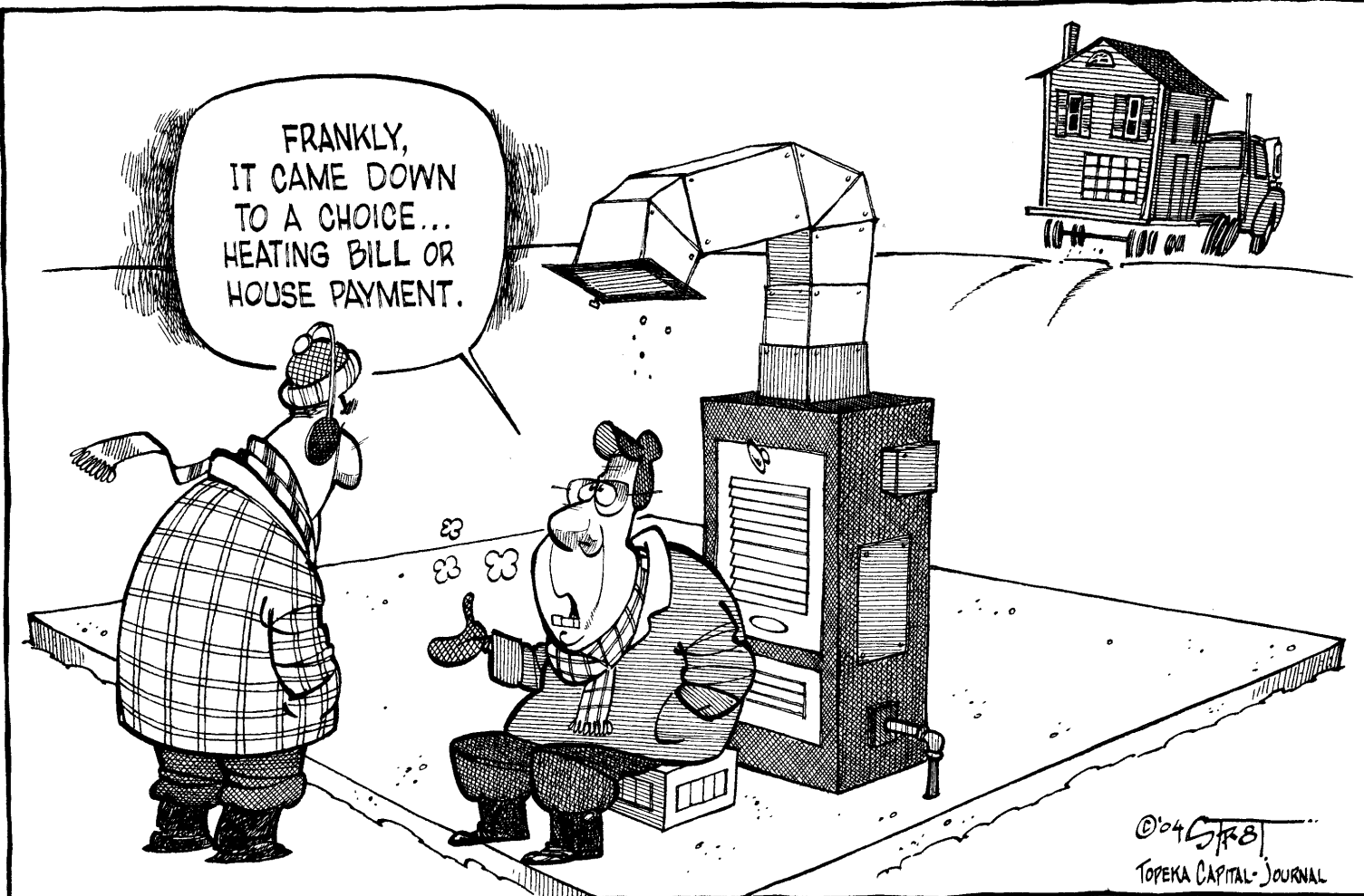
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## Agencies need to be on same frequency

In almost every community in Kansas, local law enforcement agencies, emergency medical services, fire departments, the highway patrol, the Department of Transportation, city and county road departments, public health, and public utilities all communicate by radio on different frequencies.

For the most part, units in the field lack the ability to communicate with each other when necessary. Not only do they operate on different frequencies but in most cases they refuse to share space on the towers they own.

We have a bunch of fiefdoms that tend to act like a king with a moat surrounding his castle. The plea for many years was for all of these groups to get together and share their resources because the citizens just want a coordinated response in times of emergency.

From 1992 through June 2002, the Kansas Department of Transportation constructed 76 towers at a cost of \$36.5 million across our state to provide an 800 Mhz radio communications system for the Kansas Highway Patrol and highway workers. In 1996, additional radio equipment to assist Emergency Medical Services personnel was added. Two years ago, legislation was passed that required the department to allow a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration weather warning transmitter on one of the 76 towers but Gov. Bill Graves vetoed the bill.

One of the benefits since the tragedy of Sept.



**stan  
clark**

• newsletter

11, 2001 is there is an awakening that we have to communicate and work together during an emergency. Excuses like an additional antenna might cause the tower to collapse during an ice storm are proving to be hollow rhetoric. A structural integrity test can be confirmed by calculating of the loading on the tower. Similarly, concerns about radio interference from multiple users on the same tower can be controlled and corrected by filtering equipment. Concerns about site security and access to communications buildings at the base of the tower can be controlled with locks and individual fencing.

Barriers that were erected by bureaucracies, turf battles that were impenetrable with common sense and any legislative or citizen-based cajoling, which only increased the hostility, are starting to ease. It is refreshing to see a willingness to open up and work together for the common good. Voice, data, and Global Positioning System information has to flow among all emergency service agencies throughout the state because an effective and efficient emergency response re-

quires coordination, communication and sharing of information among all agencies.

Can we actually share our resources and provide a coordinated emergency response today? Well, we are seeing a willingness to work together that has never existed before. This week, in the Senate Utilities Committee, which I am chairman of, the secretary of transportation presented her vision of a communications network that included opening access to tower space for other public safety agencies and private companies; and creating a fund from fees for tower rental—to provide grants and loans to local and state agencies to buy 800 Mhz radio equipment, and generate money to maintain, support and enhance existing communications services. Following her presentation we heard enthusiastic support from representatives of just about every public safety organization in our state.

It is wonderful witnessing the barriers being broken down and seeing a willingness to work together. Maybe this can serve as an example of how agencies can cooperate and actually work together.

Please feel free to contact me on this or any issue. I can be reached by writing to Sen. Stan Clark, State Capitol-Room 449-N, Topeka, Kan. 66612; calling (800) 432-3924 or (785) 296-7399; by fax at (800) 457-9064; or by e-mail at [sclark@ink.org](mailto:sclark@ink.org).

## Going to Mexico is our best vacation

I was ready for my vacation. It's the only one I take all year.

Those who work with me will raise their eyebrows, but it's true. I travel a lot, but I always take my computer and spend half the time writing, editing or setting up special features.

This one week a year, however, we go to Mexico, to the resort in Cabo San Lucas, where we have a time share. The resort has two telephones — both at the front desk — and two televisions — both in the clubhouse.

It is impossible for me to work there. The only thing I can do is sit in the hot tub, sunbathe, eat, drink, sleep and read. It's great.

This year, the trip started off a little strangely. Steve spent a week in North Africa, and while he was gone I got Montezuma's revenge so bad I was in the hospital for a short time. I had to check myself out of the hospital Sunday afternoon so I could drive to Denver to pick him up. We spent the night there and drove home Monday. He spent Tuesday washing his clothes and I helped put out *The Norton Telegram*. Tuesday night, we drove back to Denver so we could catch our plane Wednesday morning.

Our direct flight from Denver to San Jose — the airport for Cabo San Lucas — was full of Gringo tourists headed for fun in the sun. Among them were 13 Elvises — one dozen guys dressed in white jumpsuits and one guy in a black jumpsuit. They took up more than two rows of the aircraft.

It turned out they were a bachelor party. I assume the guy in black was the groom. They spent three days at the same resort we did, but none of them was the real Elvis. We know this because they all got drunk and tried to sing "Hound Dog." None of them could sing. The King was probably turning over in his grave or wherever.

We have been going to Mexico for about a



**cynthia  
haynes**

• open season

dozen years now, and this was only the second time it was chilly. Not cold, just chilly. But, when you pack shorts, T-shirts and swim suits, chilly can be pretty cool. Since this was the second time, we had been wise enough to toss in our jeans and a sweatshirt each. Of course, after seven days of wearing those in a place with no laundry facilities, they were pretty grungy.

Still, the hot tub was wonderful and I got a lot of reading done. We didn't walk on the beach as much as usual, but we walked around the town and watched the other tourists. None of them were as interesting as the ones back at the resort.

We didn't do much sunbathing, but we did get to watch the big cruise ships maneuver into port.

We spent one day fishing. We love to fish in Cabo, and found a couple of retired pilots to share a boat with. In years past, we have caught dorado (mahi-mahi) and tuna. Last year we didn't even catch a cold, but we had high hopes for this trip and we weren't disappointed.

After about three hours of running around on the Sea of Cortez and getting one bite of something that got away, we were slightly bored. Then we got a strike. Steve took the pole and reeled like heck, only to see the line go out faster than it had come in. Then it broke the water — a marlin, the king of sport fish.

It took Steve about 40 minutes to land a 150-180 pound fish that I estimated to be about five foot long. Estimate is all I could do, since we never took him out of the water. It's legal to take

the marlin home, have him stuffed or have him for dinner, but it's considered better form to let them go.

The first mate spent about 10 minutes holding the fish behind the boat's wake to make sure he was breathing and swimming well before letting him go.

Over the next three hours, we caught two more marlin, allowing each to go on his way after making sure he wasn't injured by his acrobatics, the wild ride or the large hook stuck in his jaw. Each of the pilots took a turn at catching a fish and we took lots of photos.

We sailed home with three marlin flags, plus three catch-and-release flags, flying from our rigging. We were the only three-marlin boat in the harbor.

The guys said thanks for letting them catch the fish. I wasn't unhappy. I had gotten to watch the action as well as see whales, dolphins and sea lions, and I was the only one who didn't complain of shoulder and arm pain the next day.

Now when Steve puts his arms their full distance apart and says it was thiiiisss big, we've got pictures to prove it.

### Letter Policy

The Goodland Star-News encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, and must include a telephone number and a signature. Unsigned letters will not be published. Form letters will be rejected, as will letters deemed to be of no public interest or considered offensive. We reserve the right to edit letters for length and good taste. We encourage letters, with address and phone numbers, by e-mail to: [<star-news@nw-kansas.com>](mailto:<star-news@nw-kansas.com>).

### garfield

