

from our viewpoint...

More than enough blame to go around

The vast majority of people around the world prefer peace to violence and terror, but there is a narrow minority who seem bent on keeping things stirred up.

We were horrified at the recent revelation about the abuse of Iraqi prisoners by our soldiers. The images we have seen are grim reminders of what we knew was happening when Saddam Hussein was in charge, but it hurts to find out Americans were responsible.

No doubt, those who lived through Vietnam will remember the incident at My Lai, when Lt. William Calley and a group of American soldiers killed several hundred Vietnamese civilians, including women and children. After a witness turned them in, Calley and his troops were court-martialed and sentenced to prison. Calley was released after a few years.

He was released because of the uproar from other Vietnam veterans. They had seen this kind of killing all too often. It was more common in Vietnam than anybody in authority was willing to admit.

Jump forward to today. Photographs of American soldiers torturing and abusing Iraqi prisoners in Abu Ghraib surface. Gen. Mark Kimmitt, deputy director of coalition operations in Iraq, is interviewed by Dan Rather on 60 Minutes: Soldiers in the photos are now facing court-martial.

Even Kimmitt admitted, "I'd like to sit here and say these are the only prisoner abuse cases we're aware of, but we know there have been other ones since we have been here in Iraq."

Soldiers don't do this on their own. We train our young people to dehumanize the enemy. It has happened in nearly every war up through Vietnam. It's still happening. For a soldier to call an Iraqi a human is unacceptable.

If you turn the people you are fighting into gooks or ragheads, or whatever non-human assignment you can think of, soldiers are not murdering human beings. They are killing things, thugs, bugs or other irrelevant living creatures.

This is war. War is not pretty or noble. This is what we train our young people to do in order to win.

We should not excuse them any more than we can excuse our government for providing them the kind of training and leadership that would lead to them do this and make them believe they are doing the right thing.

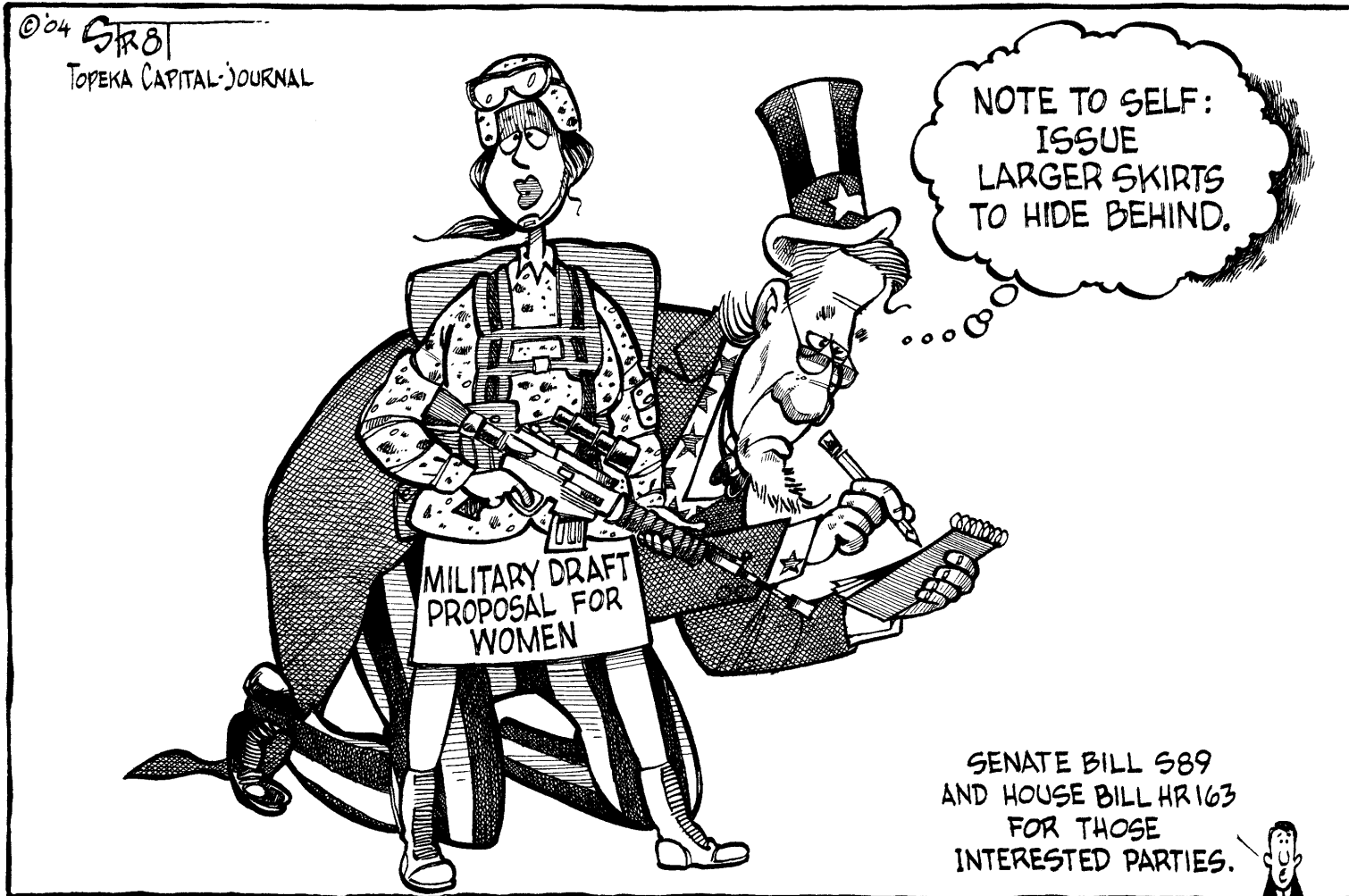
The blame needs to roll uphill, but unfortunately, it won't. We already have the top brass circling the wagons to make sure it doesn't get too high up the chain of authority. The real tragedy is that Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld was given the report on this in February, but as he has admitted he failed to read it.

There are those who believe we should not change presidents in the middle of a war, and give Bush credit for taking the war on terrorism to those who started it.

History shows Americans have changed presidents several times in wartime. Sometimes it was because they were killed or died (Lincoln, Roosevelt and Kennedy). Sometimes it was because the war was used to bring a president down (Truman for Korea and Johnson for Vietnam). We went through four different presidents during the Vietnam war, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon.

We didn't end up winning anything in Vietnam. We proved the ability of American forces in the first Gulf War, but winning in Kuwait did not ensure then President George Bush of a second term.

Today President George Bush must accept the bad with the good, and if he is found wanting by the majority of American voters, he will be the next in a long list of presidents who have won a few battles, but lost the war of the ballot box. — Tom Betz



I am addicted to books and magazines

My name is Cynthia, and I'm addicted to books and magazines.

There really should be a self-help group, 12-step program or support group for those of us who can't pass a book store, hotel gift shop or supermarket newsstand without glomming onto something.

We're really sad cases.

I admit I'm hooked on reading material.

I prefer mystery books — mostly those set in another time, but I also enjoy mysteries with cats, dogs and birds. I spice up my reading with fantasy and science fiction and an occasional western. My mother likes historical romance, so I look for those for her. I find something I would like in that section now and then.

I also love cookbooks and try to buy one on every trip. The idea is to write about the trip on the inside of the front cover, but sometimes I never get to the writing part and my cookbook shelf is littered with everything from Creole cooking to one on how to make treats for your pets.

Oh, I don't really use these cookbooks to make anything. I seldom cook anything new and I know all the old standbys by heart — pour two cups of water in pan, add a pat of margarine, bring to a boil and add box of whatever.

Besides, if I ever feel the need to really cook, I've got the magazines — 15 years of Gourmet, 10 years worth of Bon Appetite and five to six years worth of Taste of Home. I gave up on the



cynthia haynes

• open season

first two after I quit writing a cooking column 15 years ago, but they're still in the basement taking up space.

The basement bookshelves are divided into magazines, old calendars and books. The books take of the majority of the space, but the calendars and magazines provide the most clutter. Let's face it, who leaves space for 25 years worth of Trains Magazine, an average of 12 to 15 calendars per year, a dozen years of National Geographic and all those cooking magazines?

Every month or so, I gather up the books and magazines, which have been collecting in the "finished" pile and take them to the basement, where I pile them in the "finished-to-be put-away" pile and leave them for a couple of years.

That basement bookcase is a disaster.

But back to my uncontrolled book and magazine buying.

I got an offer last year to get Woman's Day for a ridiculously low price. So, stupid fish I am, I took the bait. Now I get another slick, colorful magazine that I have no time to read once a month.

I keep my magazines in the bathroom so that when I take a bath or use the facilities, I can read. Of course, with an average of a magazine every other day, the reading material is piling up. In fact, the back of the commode is a landslide of magazines waiting to happen.

When I do get a chance to go through my pile, I find that the articles in Woman's Day tell me I should clean the grout in my bathroom tile and the rubber thiegee on my fridge once a month. My fridge and stove are lucky to get cleaned once a year to get rid of the jelly stains and grease spills. The rubber thiegees are on their own in my house.

Then there are the books. I have authors I like and series I follow. But, I haven't had as much time to read in the last six months as I used to. That doesn't keep me from buying these books as soon as they come out in paperback. My to-be-read pile is almost as big as the finished pile, and not nearly as neat.

The problem is, I can't stop at buying the books by my favorite mystery authors. I have to buy anything that strikes my fancy.

This is why my unread-but-I'll-get-to-it pile includes "Uppity Women of the Middle Ages," "The Secret Life of Bees," "On the Road" by Jack Kerouac and about 150 others.

Please, someone stop me before I buy again.

PS: I let my National Geographic subscription run out in January. We never read it. Now they have an article and pictures on Oberlin. I'll have to get a dozen, and add them to the pile.

Not a golden sunset for savings program

Amid growing concerns over ballooning federal deficits, some folks are calling for rollbacks in the tax cuts that have been the centerpiece of the Bush Administration's economic stimulus plan.

But, opponents of the marginal rate cuts, tax credits, marriage penalty relief and tax-free withdrawals needn't be too aggressive in their pursuit of rollbacks. Sunset provisions, imbedded in the original tax legislation, will effectively turn the clock back to 2001 when taxpayers greet the new year in 2011 — unless our lawmakers take action.

On its face the expiration or rollback of tax benefits may sound like prudent fiscal policy, but Congress would be well advised to study the consequences of its actions, or — in the case of the sunset provisions — inaction. The failure to extend an attractive tax benefit of state-sponsored '529' education savings programs, such as the Kansas Learning Quest program, will affect millions of parents, grandparents and students attempting to set aside money for college, a noble goal that should be encouraged and rewarded by government.

With the Tax Relief Act becoming law in 2002, participants in college saving plans gained the ability to make earnings withdrawals free from federal taxes as long as the money was used for qualified education expenses. This new perk was in addition to the already-present benefit of tax-deferred earnings growth at the federal level and possible in-state tax incentives, a common feature of many state-sponsored plans, including Learning Quest.

While federal tax-deferral and in-state deductions are compelling reasons to invest in



lynn jenkins

• state treasurer

education savings plans, the recently acquired tax-free withdrawal feature is the icing on the cake. It enables college savers to direct the bulk of their account earnings to covering college costs rather than onerous tax bills. But unless Congress makes this tax benefit permanent, investors extracting savings plan money after December 31, 2010, will pay Uncle Sam before they write a check for their dorm deposit.

The good news is some legislators, recognizing the importance of higher education and the challenges college savers face, are taking steps to extend or make permanent 529 tax benefits. President Bush's fiscal 2005 budget proposal contains a provision to eliminate the 2010 sunset. In early February, Iowa Sen. Chuck Grassley introduced a series of bills that would effectively remove the sunset clause from the tax code. Also, back in 2002, a majority of the members of the House of Representatives gave a "yes" vote to a bill favoring permanent tax exclusion. Unfortunately, two-thirds support was needed for passage.

But while the politicians debate the issue, the general public clearly recognizes the importance of removing the barriers that make it difficult for families to save and invest for college. A new study by American Century Investments shows widespread support for extending the federal tax-free withdrawal feature of these

plans. In a survey of more than 2,000 Americans, 76 percent of respondents want the tax benefits permanent. Not surprisingly, 81 percent of parents with children under 18, as well as 92 percent of those participating in an education savings program, support the extension. Even among parents with no children under the age of 18, 73 percent want the sunset provision removed. People across the political spectrum are supportive of this issue. Democrats (75 percent), Republicans (80 percent) and Independents (77 percent) are overwhelmingly supportive of extending the tax benefits.

While some scoff that tax realities of 2010 are years away and families building an education nest egg shouldn't be overly concerned, the fact is saving for college is a multi-year goal in which decisions made today can have a tremendous impact on the achievement of that goal.

Research suggests the current legislative limbo in which education savings plans are now immersed is a source of angst for many families. In the American Century study, almost half of the parents surveyed (47 percent) said the "uncertainty of the federal tax treatment of withdrawals is a major concern." Unless Congress acts to make the tax advantages permanent, my fear is this uncertainty and concern will lead to inertia and create a crisis in college funding in 2010 and beyond. I encourage you to contact Senator Pat Roberts or Sam Brownback, and your Congressman, and ask them to support making the education savings program (529) tax benefits permanent.

Lynn Jenkins, CPA, is Treasurer for the State of Kansas and administers the Learning Quest Education Savings Program.

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