

from our viewpoint...

Buying local saves our businesses

When county commissioners met with department heads for a showdown on buying local, it appeared the issue was about to be settled. But when the smoke cleared, the problem was still very much alive.

Spending Sherman County taxpayers' money in Sherman County is the best way to keep businesses here open and keep the tax level down.

For the umpteenth time, yes, it is true that not everything county needs can be found in Sherman County.

That is not the issue. The problem is whether there are things being bought out of the county that could be purchased here, and whether county businesses are offering their wares at competitive prices.

Surely anyone who lives in Sherman County and pays taxes here sees that every dollar which stays in the county keeps people employed and keeps taxes coming in to pay county employees' salaries and benefits. Often, it makes sense to spend a little more here if the choice is some catalog center in another state or a big business in the city. The county could save a few bucks, but lose thousands when a local business goes under.

Earlier in the month, the commissioners had devised a simple form to be used when a purchase had to be made out of county. The form was for department heads to list what was bought and a reason it was not available in the county. This document would have gone a long way to satisfy citizens who feel every purchase should be made within the county. County invoices are a matter of public record and are open for inspection at the courthouse anyway.

County department heads saw this form as another piece of paper for them to handle, and argued at the meeting that it interfered with their own purchasing policies.

Two of the three commissioners apologized for the form, and the chairman told the department heads they could throw it away. There is no doubt the department heads felt they were vindicated in their defense of the way they handle county purchases and will continue to do as they see fit.

It will be back to business as usual for the commissioners, who will look at the monthly bills and once in a while raise a question about "Why did we purchase that from that company?" And, as usual, there will be no answer.

The department heads should be able to handle their purchases without every item being called into question. But they should also be able to back up the reason behind their out-of-county purchases with the simple form, available to interested taxpayers.

Commissioners gave in to county department heads over Main Street business. The commissioners blinked and lost some of their authority; the department heads won the right not to fill out a piece of paper and lost the opportunity to defend their purchasing decisions. The problem is still out there.

It's waiting for the next showdown. — *Tom Betz*

The Goodland Star-News

(USPS No. 222-460. ISSN 0893-0562)

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Inland Press Association Colorado Press Association
National Newspaper Association
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Published every Tuesday and Friday except the days observed for New Year's Day and Christmas Day, at 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

Periodicals postage paid at Goodland, Kan. 67735; entered at the Goodland, Kan., Post Office under the Act of Congress of March 8, 1878.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Goodland Star-News, 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

TELEPHONE: (785) 899-2338. Editorial e-mail: star-news@nwkanssas.com. Advertising questions can be sent to: goodlandads@nwkanssas.com

The Goodland Star-News assumes no liability for mistakes or omissions in advertising or failure to publish beyond the actual cost of the ad.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: In Sherman County and adjacent counties: three months, \$20; six months, \$38; 12 months, \$72. Out of area, weekly mailing of two issues: three months, \$30; six months, \$45; 12 months, \$80. Mailed individually each day: 12 months, \$115. (All tax included.)

Incorporating:

The Goodland Daily News

1932-2003

The Sherman
County Herald

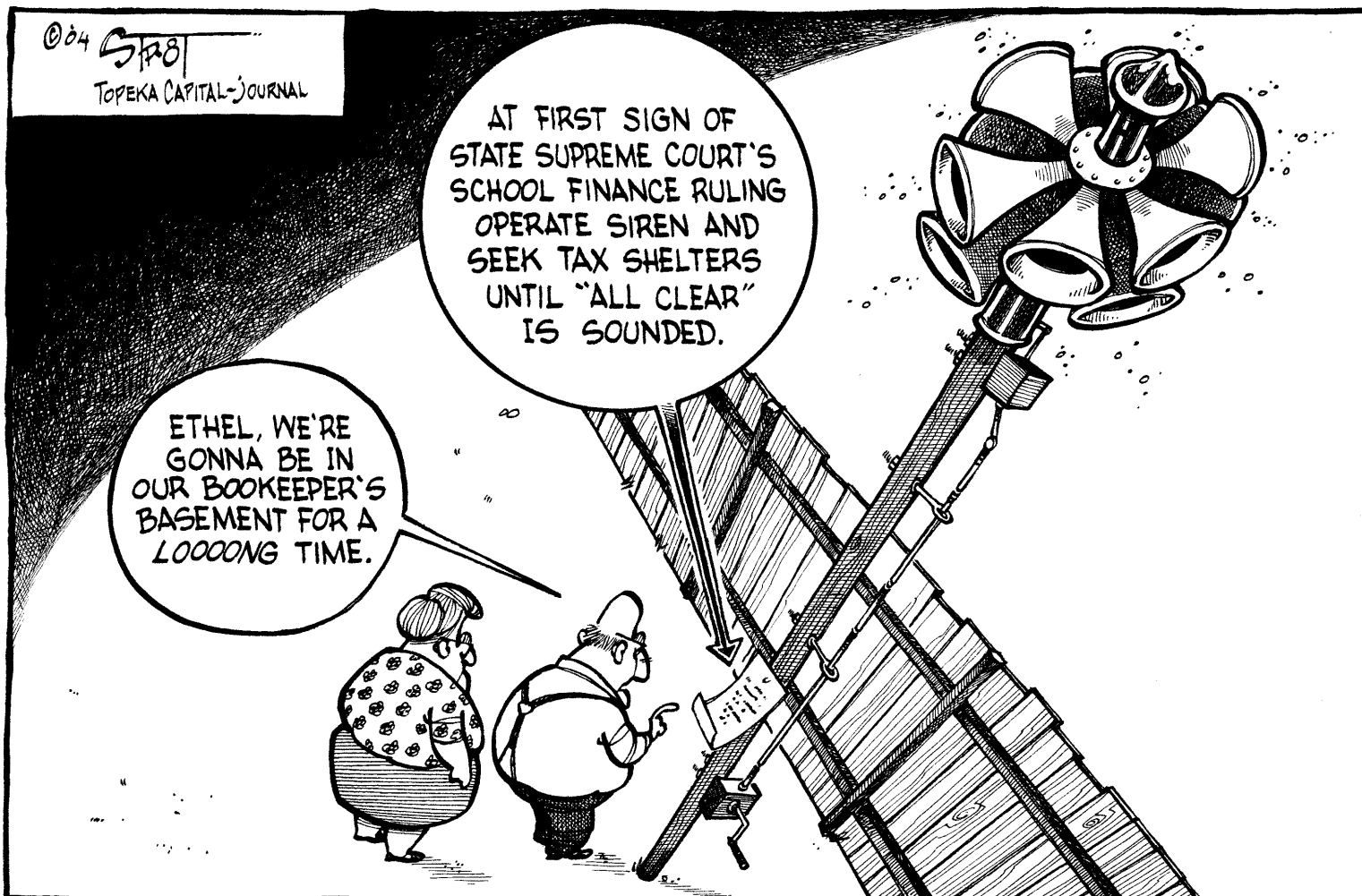
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THE SHERMAN COUNTY
STAR

Founded by Eric and
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1994-2001

Nor'West Newspapers

Haynes Publishing Company



Memorial Day should never end

I don't know about you, but I think Memorial Day should never end.

Here are my thoughts for the 2004 observance:

Monday was Memorial Day. It is a special day to Americans. We gather together to share a common loss, a common patriotism and a common hope.

American has been built on the sacrifices of men and women from the Revolutionary War to the current Iraqi war. Today I wonder: have you and I allowed their sacrifices to be in vain? Are we ruining their dreams for America? An unknown author shares with us: "It's the soldier, not the reporter, who gives you freedom of the press. It's the soldier, not the poet, who gives you freedom of speech. It's the soldier who salutes the flag, serves the flag, whose coffin is draped with the flag. That soldier allows the protester to burn the flag!"

This Memorial Day, our hearts are full — even as we find it difficult to express our feelings. We are proud of our America — and we are proud of those who died to give us that America. Yet we struggle with inconsistencies.

We support our troops in this new war, while struggling with whether or not the war itself is justified. Somehow there are not clear-cut lines in this war, maybe not in any war. Maybe only history draws those lines for us after the battlefields are silent.

As we remember our dead, let us not forget to remember the survivors also.

No one who goes to war comes out of it unscarred. A 'For Better or For Worse' cartoon by Lynn Johnson shows a daughter in front of a television set as her father enters the room:

Daughter: "Daddy, on just about every TV station, there's stuff about the war."

Daddy: "I know. Your grandpa fought in the last world war."

Daughter: "Did he shoot anybody?"

Father: "Yes, he did."

Daughter: "Really?"

Father: "He had to, or the other soldier would have shot him."

Daughter: "Wow! Grandpa never told me about that."

Father: "I know. He doesn't like to talk about it. He says it's just too painful."

Daughter: "Then why do they show the war on TV?"

Father: "Because it was fought for our freedom and allows us to live the way we do today. Strange, isn't it? That something so important for us to remember...is something that others try so hard to forget."

Survivors not only make sacrifices; they have to live with the memories.

We talk about soldiers, sailors and airmen dying to preserve our way of life. Yet, I'm grieved that they're now asked to die for a society that Andrew Greeley says "has become fatally ill from its own excesses." (In Virgin and Martyr). I wonder: how much longer will we have a nation worth dying for?

Human beings can be good or bad, honorable or immoral. It's up to us, the living, to shape values. A popular author Dean Koontz said in Fear Nothing: "We are an arrogant species, full



Lorna
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• commentary

of terrible potential. But we also have a great capacity for love, friendship, generosity, kindness, faith, hope and joy." Let us not only remember sacrifices, but pledge to live for the greater values — to not only keep America free but to work toward helping all peoples be free.

We talk about the American dream and how our military people fight and die for it.

Just who is the American in that American dream? An e-mail was sent around the world last year. It's called "Who is An American?" I'd like to share parts of it with you:

"Sometime in 2003, there was a report that someone in Pakistan had published in a newspaper an offer of a reward to anyone who killed an American, any American. So an Australian dentist wrote the following to let everyone know what an American is, so they would know when they found one:

"An American is English, or French, or Italian, Irish, German, Spanish, Polish, Russian or Greek. An American may also be Canadian, Mexican, African, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Australian, Iranian, Asian, or Arab, or Pakistani, or Afghan. An American may also be a Cherokee, Osage, Blackfoot, Navaho, Apache, Seminole or one of the many other tribes known as native Americans.

"And American is a Christian, or he could be Jewish, or Buddhist, or Muslim. The only difference is that in American they are free to worship as each of them chooses. An American is also free to believe in no religion. For that he will answer only to God, not to the government, or to armed thugs claiming to speak for the government and for God.

"An American is from the most prosperous land in the history of the world. The root of that prosperity can be found in the Declaration of Independence.

"An American is generous. Americans have helped out just about every other nation in the world in their time of need.

"Americans welcome the best: the best products, the best books, the best music, the best food, the best athletes. But they also welcome the least. The national symbol of American, the Statue of Liberty, welcomes your tired and your poor, the wretched refuse of your teeming shores, the homeless, the tempest-tossed. These, in fact, are the people who built America.

"So you can try to kill an American if you must. Hitler did. So did General Tojo, and Stalin, and Mao-Tse-Tung (and others). But, in doing so, you would just be killing yourself. Because Americans are not a particular people from a particular place. They are the embodiment of the human spirit of freedom. Everyone who holds to that spirit, everywhere, is an American."

I want to believe that is who I am as an American — "the embodiment of the human

spirit of freedom."

I want to believe Americans stand for the best that humanity can be.

I want to believe "media personalities" are fair in what they report — and not just spectacular. That they aren't just selling fear.

I want to feel our military personnel stationed around the world have the best standards, the best morals and the highest intentions imaginable.

I want to believe they represent a country and lifestyle worth saving.

I want to believe that war is not America's first line of defense, that first we truly try to negotiate with and understand other ways of life.

I want to believe that the individuals who survive — our young men and women — won't have to spend the rest of their lives trying to forget what they saw and did for freedom.

And above all, I want to believe that Americans today, who we are and how we live, what we value today, are worth the efforts and sacrifices on our behalf.

But I have to tell you, there are many times when I find those things very hard to believe.

Today I ask God's blessing not on America as it is, but on what America can be. And I ask God to strengthen all Americans, everywhere, to work toward respecting every nation — so that one day the Australian's definition of an American as "the embodiment of the human spirit of freedom" — will apply to all people everywhere.

Today is Memorial Day. Today, with all of you —

I'm grateful to God to be an American.

I thank God for all the sacrifices made on my behalf.

I honor all the lives lost in war, in peacekeeping and in any effort for freedom.

I mourn for all who have lost loved ones.

I respect all survivors.

I say thank you to all who have done their duty as they saw it.

And I stand shoulder to shoulder with you today — to salute our American flag — and to remember.

(Lorna GT has compiled some of her columns into book form. Please contact this paper at star-news@nwkanssas.com if you are interested in purchasing one. It is \$24 for a hardback book. This includes postage & handling.)

Letter Policy

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