

from our viewpoint...

Murder plea halts publicity discussion

Goodland won't have a murder trial this week, so we'll be spared the usual defense whining that the accused can't get a fair trial because of "prejudicial pre-trial publicity."

If you listen to a defense attorney, any pretrial publicity is prejudicial.

That's especially true if it gives the defendant's name, say, or relationship to the deceased — or any obvious facts of the case.

There probably is such a thing as "prejudicial" publicity. In a culture where murder is rare, people take great interest in this ultimate crime. In a region where we count murders by the decade, rather than by the year, a single homicide is a major event.

People want to know about the crime. They'll talk about it, over the paper or at the coffee shop.

And, of course, they'll talk about whether the defendant is guilty. They usually are. Most murders are no mystery.

The defense of the guilty — and occasionally the innocent as well — being what it is, though, lawyers will make whatever motions and whatever arguments serve their cause. The plea of "prejudicial pretrial publicity" and an accompanying motion to move the trial to another part of the state have become a standard part of the defense arsenal.

If a judge feels the motion is valid, he should grant it. Moving the trial now and then, is a small price to pay for a free and open court system. In most cases, a defendant can get an unbiased jury at home, or at worst, in the next county over.

What we cannot afford is to give in to the temptation to close up these cases and keep the details secret.

Some will argue that people don't need to know what happened. In a very narrow sense, that might be true. If their interest is only prurient, they can go buy a cheap detective novel. There is some of that in any murder case.

But in a democracy, it's vital that the public as a whole knows how major cases are handled. They need to know if a defendant is being treated fairly by the system. They need to know if the poor are oppressed or the rich treated lightly by the courts.

And they won't know if trials are closed or so much of the evidence is kept from them that they cannot form a reasonable opinion. That's why our courts traditionally are open and our courthouse files can be inspected by any citizen. The Founding Fathers had seen the abuse possible when courts did not answer to the people.

Defense attorneys will continue to file motions. That's their job.

Newspapers will continue to report on murder cases and the rest of the court system. That's our job.

Sometimes, a trial must be moved to give a defendant a better shot at an unbiased jury, but that's not often necessary. When it happens, it's part of the price we pay for our freedom, for a system that not only offers rights to the accused, but actually cares about them.

In a closed system, those very rights would not exist. — Steve Haynes.

The Goodland Star-News

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

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Inland Press Association Colorado Press 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.)

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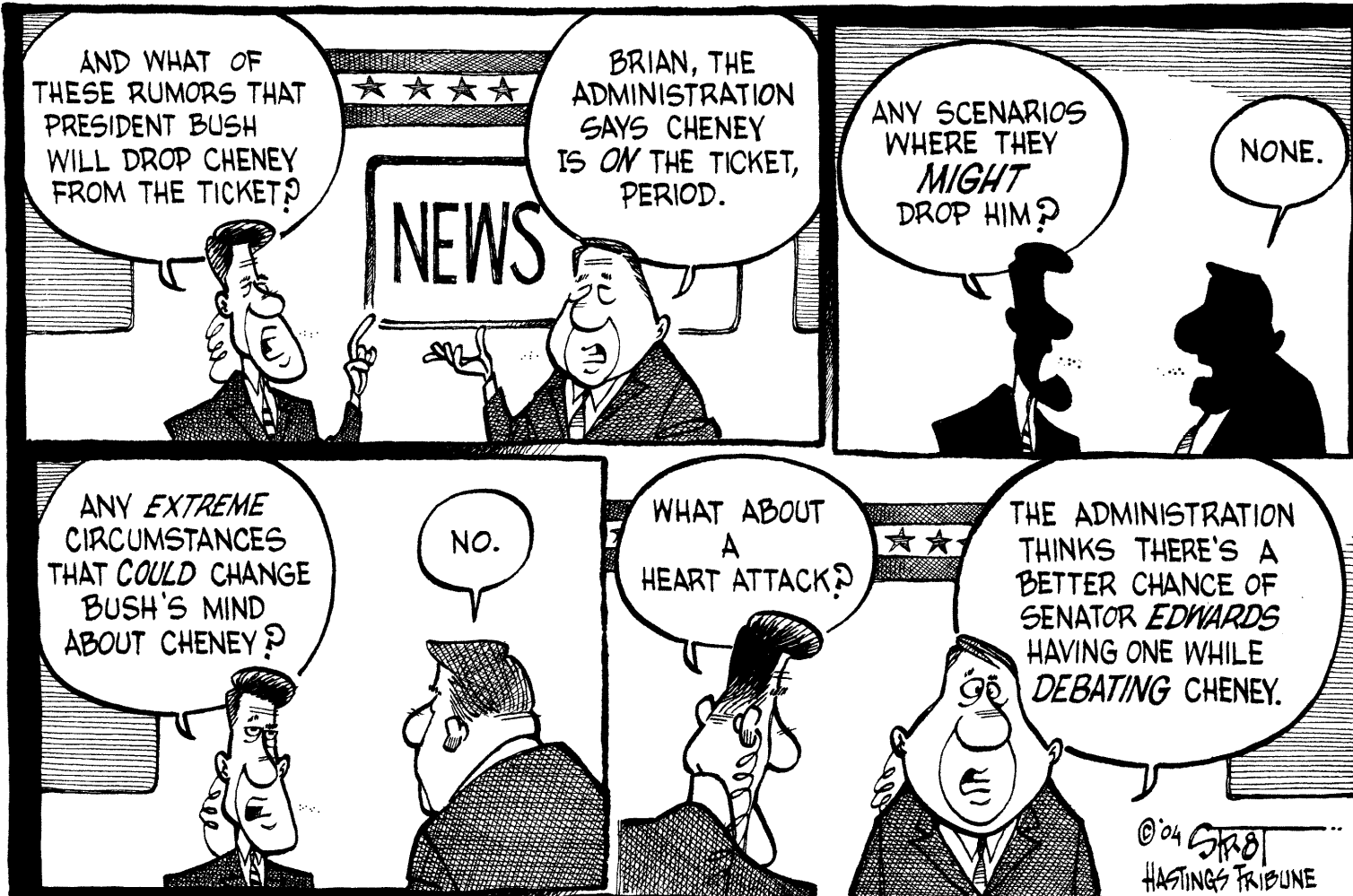
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I've seen the face of God in many places

I don't know about you, but lately I've seen God - in a lot of places.

I saw God in a man's face at a hospital. He is terminally ill and tired. I assured him of God's presence as I held his hand and prayed with him.

One Sunday this month about 10 of our church's middle school children went out on a mission. With the help of five men with trucks and chain saws, they cleaned up someone's yard.

They hauled away limbs, did some trimming and a little mowing. It only took about an hour and a half. Afterwards they came back to the church with grins on their faces and soaked from a water fight.

They had fun — helping someone else. They didn't get paid — except with a sense of satisfaction. They didn't get refreshments except for cold water. I saw God in their faces.

One Saturday evening the men of our church showed God to our community. They served a brisket dinner, just asking for a donation toward our mission projects.

Hopefully all who were there heard about and saw the dedication of our church toward helping and serving others.

Christ calls us to show hospitality and graciousness while we help ease the suffering of the world. I saw God in all the faces there.

Between those two events, our church hosted a community-wide Vacation Bible School. Many dedicated volunteers built props, told Bible stories, served refreshments and loved about 110 children. Some of the children were rebellious and only moderately cooperative. Other just soaked in everything — literally seeing and hearing God. God was reflected in each one of their faces, and they blessed my life.

Our goal and prayer was that they should see God in a new way.



**lorna
gt**

• commentary

The theme of Vacation Bible School was Hero Quest. They learned that heroes don't all wear capes and fly. Some heroes are ordinary people who do the right thing at the right time.

Daniel wouldn't bow down to an unfair law; he wouldn't worship a false god. And he was strong enough to face lions in a lion's den.

They learned how Esther got to be queen and how she saved the Hebrew people from being killed. She was brave enough to go to the king and ask his mercy for them.

They learned about determination. Heroes never give up. That story was about the friends who took their sick friend to Jesus for healing, but they couldn't get through the crowds to where Jesus was. So they removed part of the roof so they could lower their friend down on a stretcher to Jesus.

Then they heard the story of the widow who put her coins into the collection plate — even though that's all the money she had. She trusted God.

And on the last night, they heard about the greatest hero of all time.

They heard about Jesus - the best hero ever.

These young children heard about God all week long. Some of them will never forget those stories and songs they learned.

The story-tellers dressed up for their parts. After the first night, one little girl went home and told her parents.

"We heard a story from the Bible, and there was a real Bible person there!"

I'm not sure what two other boys learned.

We must stand up to protect marriage

To the Editor:

You've probably heard in the past few weeks the charge that the Federal Marriage Amendment, which would define marriage in the U.S. Constitution as the union of one man and one woman, would write discrimination into our country's founding document.

Don't believe it for a second.

The truth is, the Constitution is going to be altered one way or the other.

Either that change will come from unelected, unaccountable judges intent on creating a right of homosexual couples to marry when the Constitution grants no such right, or it will come from the American people through this amendment to preserve marriage as it has served society for millennia.

Amendment opponents have turned to an emotional argument in asking, "How does one couple's gay marriage threaten anyone's heterosexual marriage?" This question misses the point:

The goal of gay activists isn't the individual relationship of any two people, despite such statements; it is the revision of national policy



**from our
readers**

• to the editor

to say that gender, especially in child rearing, is inconsequential, even though research indi-

where to write

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cates children do best when raised by a married mother and father.

This aggressive campaign to undermine marriage as it has always been known can be defeated-but only if we all stand up to support the Federal Marriage Amendment.

Randy and Peggy Berls

Goodland

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