

from our viewpoint...

Security breeds laws outside public view

Secret laws?

Well, the war on terrorism has given us secret courts and secret detention camps, so it shouldn't be any surprise.

Americans are finding that, under the rather badly named Patriot Act, security regulations are written and put in place without the public ever knowing.

A former member of Congress from Idaho was denied boarding at a western airport when she asked to see the regulation that allowed screeners to pat her down.

"That's secret," they said.

She reportedly hasn't flown since.

Some of this may make sense.

If it's the actual operating plan we're talking about — how screeners select which persons to pat down — there may be information there that we don't want terrorists to know. The authority to search is something anyone who asks should be able to see.

As is usual, though, the bureaucracy tends to expand the definition of that which requires secrecy. Give them an inch, and they'll take a mile, as it were.

As federal control over all types of transportation expands, people are beginning to realize that the government has a reason to keep secret whatever it wants. Opponents of hauling nuclear waste around, for instance, fear they they'll never again have any idea when and where shipments are moving.

People who like to watch trains and planes are being reported to the police, possibly entered into national databases, maybe earning a file at the FBI. Screeners probably make a record of anyone who protests security procedures.

Security is important. The threat of terrorism is real, but while there are things that should not be made public, there are dangers here.

The government may not want terrorists to know how security operates, but it's impossible for Americans to judge the quality of our security services when their work is secret.

We need to know that these things work.

The government might argue that it doesn't want terrorists to know our weaknesses, but it's just as possible to use secrecy to cover a bad job or a bad plan.

Our open society is going to suffer as secret government grows, and the worst part is, we won't have any idea how big these operations have become.

The government, *for our own good*, isn't going to tell us what it's doing.

It'd be easy to dismiss these fears, but the price of freedom is eternal vigilance. If we don't keep an eye on our government, we may wake up some day to find that it is keeping more than an eye on us.

Maybe the terrorists won't win, but if we let that happen, we won't, either. — *Steve Haynes*

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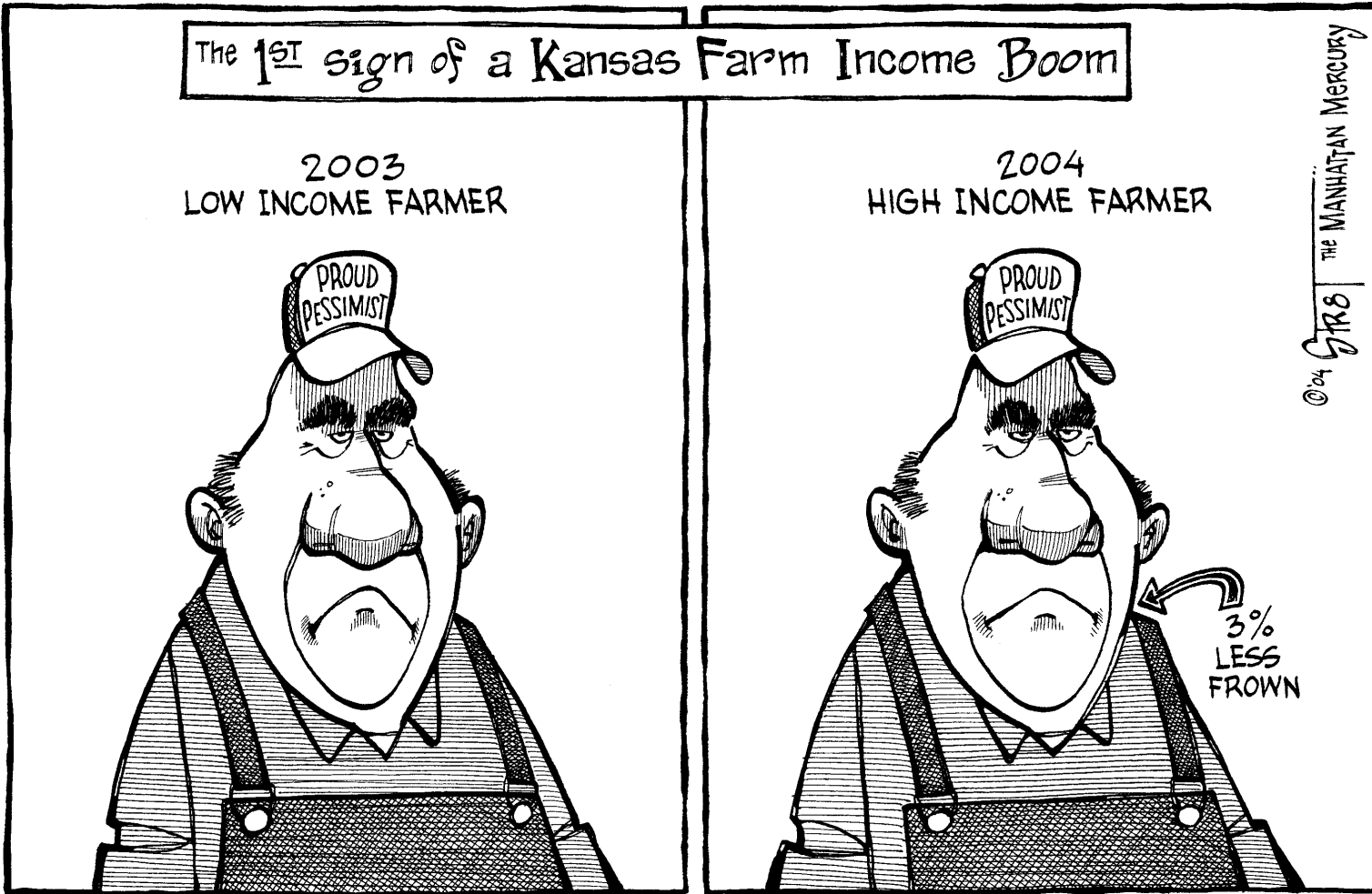
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Christmas seems to get easier every year

I don't know about you, but my Christmases get easier every year.

Or maybe I just get more lazy. Either way, I celebrate at a much slower pace than in the past.

Christmas used to be a time to bake cookies, send over 100 cards, go to club parties, buy presents for everyone (finances allowing), and often travel to be with family. It was all fun and exciting, but also tiring and left a feeling that I didn't get everything done. And my repetitious New Year resolution was always that I would get organized and start earlier next year.

I've given up on New Year's resolutions. I know me too well. I've pretty much accepted that my basic nature is my basic nature, and I might as well not try to pretend I'm going to change it.

As I've grown older, my celebration of most holidays has changed. I enjoy solitude and calm. Friends feel sorry for me and invite me to celebrate with their families, but often it is too much like forced gaiety. I meet so many people in the course of my work that celebrating with large groups is like working. Meeting new people and trying to remember their names — as well as to whom they are related — is not a way to celebrate Thanksgiving or Christmas.

At least for me. If I can't be with my own family, I'd rather be alone and spend the day with memories. Of course I do appreciate that friends care enough to be concerned about me.

Christmas is a wonderful time of year. Most

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people are kinder and more generous. Too bad it doesn't always carry through into the rest of the year.

I don't go shopping anymore. I don't know the latest "have-to-have" gift for children. I don't like the frenzy; in fact, I got lost in a mall the other day. That was an eye-opener for me. It seemed to emphasize my aging process. Another reason to mail checks, instead of gifts no one might want anyway.

Two weeks ago I did my Christmas cards. I made 75 copies of my Christmas letter. When I finished the process, I had 35 of them left over. I guess as you get older, you have fewer living friends. Or maybe you just realistically understand that most people don't really care about your yearly activities anyway. They're too busy trying to keep up with their own.

I used to think that everyone was curious about my adorable children, so I would include a picture. Now I hesitate to include a picture. Who wants one of another senior citizen? We all begin to look alike after awhile anyway.

Each year I become more distressed over the

government's regulating Christmas. To be politically correct, we can't have anything religious in the school programs or civic events. Nativities are offensive and have no place in public areas. Christmas programs have become Winter Celebrations. We might offend someone if we wish them a Merry Christmas.

To have a supposedly-Christian country not allowed to say Christ is the reason for the season is disheartening. Then let's not acknowledge any holidays — Jewish, African-American, Muslim or any other.

Schools celebrate and teach history lessons on some of those occasions. Why can't students be told the meaning of Christmas?

Please understand I'm not being Scrooge today. I'm just reminiscing and thinking out loud. (Well, maybe not out loud, just on paper).

I love the lights and sentiments of the season. I even decorated inside and outside the house this year. I'm at peace and looking forward to church services which remind me of the wonderful gift of Jesus, sent by the God of love. That is enough for me to celebrate!

Risking criticism, I still wish you all a Merry Christmas! Jesus is the reason for the season. If you do nothing else, go to the church of your choice and thank God for the gift of love you've been given.

That is the only way to truly celebrate this wonderful season.

Guardsman fighting 'stop loss' clause

Last month a news story appeared about a few National Guard soldiers who are challenging the U.S. Army's "stop loss" program in court.

In a nutshell, "stop loss" is when the military extends, during a time of national emergency or war, the time a man or woman must serve beyond what they signed up for.

This happens in most wars. It happened during Desert Storm and it is happening now.

In an article in *USA Today*, a California Army National Guard soldier is said to be arguing that the "stop loss" program did not apply to the Guard.

The soldier's lawyers claim the policy that allows the military to extend the time a soldier must serve can only be used when Congress declares war.

Part of every Enlistment/Reenlistment Document, DD Form 4, which is the contract between the individual and the military service he or she joins, has several provisions that apply to everyone joining the military, regardless of service, component or term of service. This includes contracts signed under the national guard's "Try One" program.

One reads: "In the event of war, my enlistment in the Armed Forces continues until six (6) months after the war ends, unless my enlistment is ended sooner by the President of the United States."

This is commonly referred to as "the duration plus six months." The President, of course, does not personally make decisions on who has to stay and who gets to go home and when. However, as commander-in-chief, he is the authority under which the military establishes

greg stover

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it policies.

"Duration plus six months" does not apply to Operation Iraqi Freedom, since war has not been declared. However there is another standard provision which reads: "In the time of national emergency declared by the President of the United States, I may be ordered to active duty (other than for training) for not more than 24 consecutive months."

This is the provision being used by the military today. While most reservists and national guardsmen are being ordered to active duty for 18 months, which may include 12 months in the Persian Gulf area, both time periods are tentative, not "set in concrete."

Many soldiers will have their tours extended or cut short depending on the needs of the Army. There will be soldiers who return from their year in Iraq and be released early rather than making them stay at some stateside post just to complete the 18 months. Others will actually serve 13, 14 or more months in Iraq because of operational needs.

These provisions are not new. From personal experience, I know they have been a part of a soldier's contract for at least the past 32 years. I have to admit some recruiters may not explain them clearly to people joining up for the first time, which can cause trouble later.

Serving beyond the term of enlistment in time of war or national emergency is part of what being in the military is all about. The trade-off used to be that the military, in turn, would take care of its men and women in all ways.

Problems surface when the military appears not to do this. It is difficult to hold soldiers to their obligations when the military they serve seems not to honor its own.

There have been several items in the news that make the military seem like an uncaring machine using up America's men and women, then discarding them without concern when they are no longer useful.

This is a wrong perception. Some of these problems are based simply on a lack of understanding of what being in the military is all about and some are genuine problems caused by a breakdown in the system for which someone must be held accountable.

Reporter Greg Stover served 27 years in the Army, including 15 on active duty. He currently is a member of the Individual Ready Reserve whose retirement has been put on hold due to "stop loss."

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.

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