

from our viewpoint...

Flag amendment an emotional issue

Do we need a constitutional amendment to ban flag burning?

The Senate is debating what would become the 28th Amendment this week, and observers give it half a chance of passing.

The more conservative House passed a similar measure last year, so if this one gets by the Senate, it's likely that the amendment will go out to the states for ratification. And it's more than even money that the states will give the required three-fourths consent, since all 50 legislators have passed resolutions asking for an amendment.

We may know by the end of the week whether burning an American flag will be just an insult, or a federal crime.

Why the amendment is so popular now we're not sure. Flags burned along with bras in the hippie era of the 1960s, but flag burning is not in vogue today, at least not in this country.

And the U.S. government isn't going to send the FBI out to catch flag burners in France or Syria.

Maybe it's just the emotional content of the act.

Most of us were brought up to revere the flag. We learned the stories of soldiers who risked their lives to snatch a fallen banner, who died carrying the colors, who braved enemy fire to raise it over a captured island.

We get misty-eyed when the flag goes by during a parade and irate when we see a city car dealership flying a faded, tattered Old Glory to bring in business.

When we were Scouts, we learned how to fold the flag, how to display it, how to keep it from dragging on the ground. We pledged our allegiance to the flag as youngsters and many of us swore to defend it — and the nation for which it stands.

Debate on the flag amendment splits mostly along party lines, with Democrats claiming Republicans are using the issue to boost their flagging numbers before the fall elections.

Not all Democrats have lined up against the amendment, though. Wary of being branded as pro-flag-burning, such liberals as Senators Hillary Clinton of New York and Dianne Feinstein of California have come out for the ban.

Rest assured, even if the amendment passes, someone will burn a flag. As Sen. Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania said, flag burning is a mean act, designed to hurt. In some ways, it's an ultimate protest.

Our enemies abroad will continue to burn Old Glory. The amendment may prompt them to even further excess.

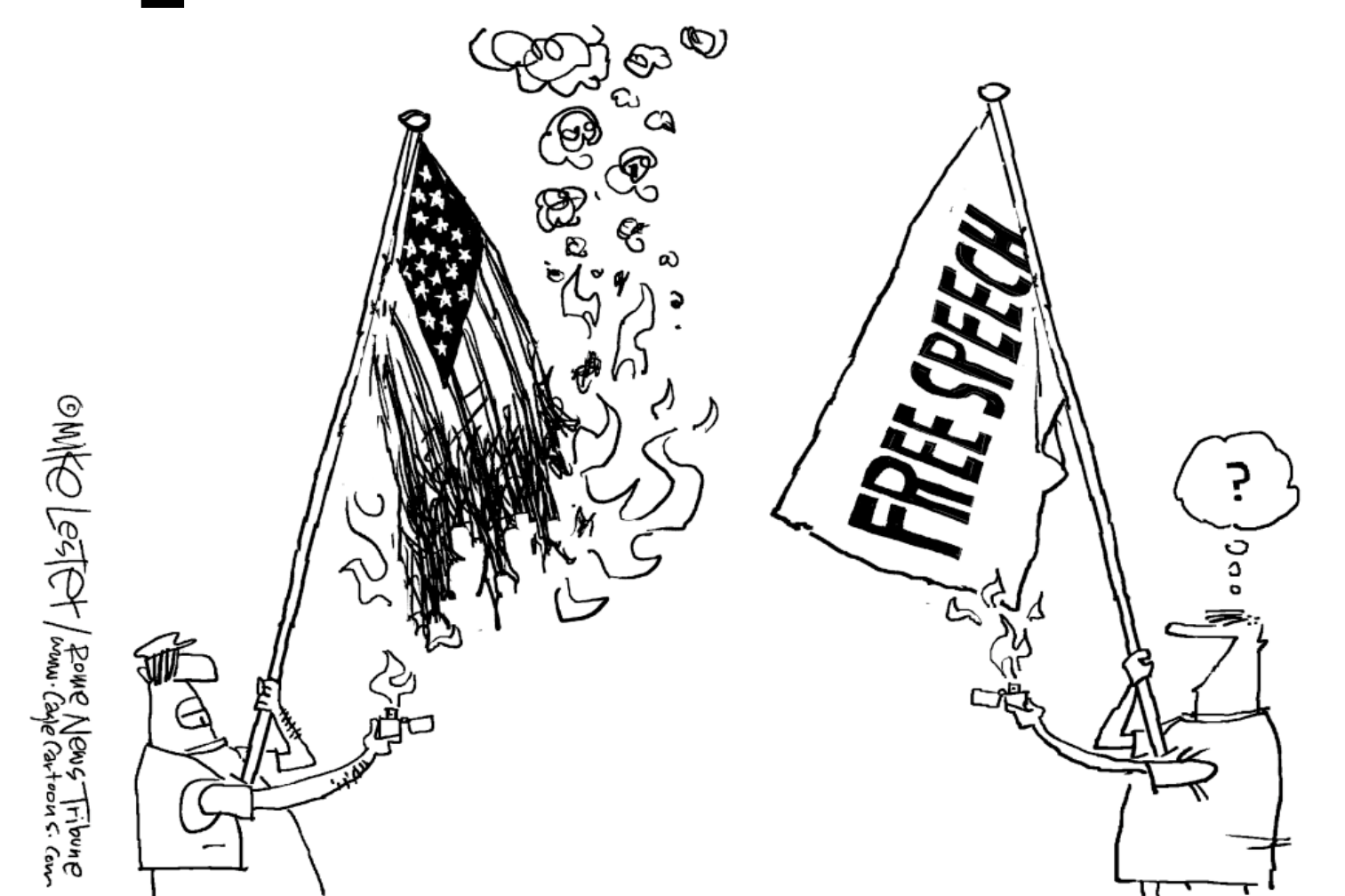
But we should remember, glorious as it is, the flag is only a symbol. The nation for which it stands is stronger and more enduring than ever.

Protesters may burn a flag, but that does not hurt America. It makes us wiser, tougher and more determined.

So why do we need a constitutional amendment?

— Steve Haynes

(The Senate on Tuesday passed the amendment 66-34, but failed by one vote to meet the two-thirds majority of 67 required to send it to the states.)



Las Vegas is a hot city

Las Vegas is hot!
I mean really hot!

I'm not talking about the shows, celebrities, gambling, glitter or glitz.

I'm talking about hot enough to bake your brain in the desert sun.

Steve had a meeting in Sin City. It was a place we'd never been and well may never go again, since gambling isn't at the top of our entertainment list.


Nevertheless, we were ready to have one look at the rhinestone capital of the U.S.

We knew that Las Vegas is in the desert, close to Death Valley. We figured we should take summer clothes. We just didn't realize how hot all that asphalt, concrete, metal and silicon can get and how fast you sweat through whatever you're wearing.

As the plane prepared to touch down, the captain reported that the temperature on the ground was 120 degrees.

Steve looked at me and said, "I thought that was a low baking temperature, not an ambient air temperature."

The official high that day was "only" 109,


cynthia haynes

- open season

so I'm not sure how ambient the air was, but it sure was hot. The jetway, that long skinny tube you walk through to get from the plane to the terminal, was like an oven. I decided Steve was right. That was a baking temperature, and we were being cooked.

Friends from our Kansas City days, Marci and Larry, picked us up and took us out to their wonderfully cool home at the edge of town. We visited, had supper and before we left, she handed us a case of water.

"You'll need it," Marci warned.

I smiled, said thanks and thought, "Yeah right. This is enough water to last us a couple of weeks. We're only going to be here a couple of days."

My advice — never think you know more than the locals.

We ran out of water before our visit was over.

The temperatures got down to a balmy 95 degrees in the evenings and climbed back into the hundreds before noon each day.

When we visited Hoover Dam, we were told that it was 115 degrees on top of the dam. It was only 110 back in town, but town is in a high valley and the dam is on the river at a lower elevation.

You go down, and it gets hotter.

(I don't know where heaven is, but I think I saw a figure with horns slinking around the edges of the dam site.)

Back in Las Vegas, we took a cab to a restaurant. Two signs across the street from each other announced the temperature to be 118 or 123 degrees — take your choice.

By the time supper was over and we were outside waiting for a cab back to the hotel, the sun had gone down and the temperature signs declared it to be 110 or 115 — take your choice.

We had fun in Vegas, but I doubt if we ever get back. I'm just glad we went in June.

They say that it gets really hot in July and August.

Gore, Hillary go where Bush fears to tread

Green isn't what it used to be. It was once just the color of the trees and grass that the environmental movement tried to protect. But now it is also the color of the three dollar bills Americans must suddenly pay for a gallon of gas.


More broadly, our frustrations in Iraq and the stalemate in Iran give an indication that it is only by following where the green movement points — to independence from oil domination — that we can vindicate the red, white and blue and, for Jewish voters, the blue and white, the colors of the Israeli flag.

After five months of inaction, after his "oil addiction" reference in his State of the Union speech, President Bush now faces a Democratic Party galvanized by this new rainbow coalition of colors around a coherent policy theme. While Bush has dithered and the Republicans in Congress have failed to look beyond Alaska drilling as the solution to our dependence on foreign oil, first Gore and now Hillary have passed them by and staked out their claims to the issue.

Bush cannot afford to yield this ground because it is no longer the esoteric preserve of the environmental-policy wonks. Rising gas prices have generated a populist anger at the bottom of the social ladder. The former Reagan Democrats are outraged by pump prices and demand action. Just as Republicans once lured them with promises of lower taxes, so Democrats can now appeal to them with the lure of lower gas costs.

The reason Gore's movie, "An Inconvenient Truth," threatens the Republican grip on Washington is not only because hurricanes pound us with the increasingly clear reality of climate change but because the issue now accesses a broader popular anger at energy prices.

And what was once the green movement now even circles around behind the mainline of the Bush administration and offers the only


dick morris

- commentary

viable long-term strategy for defeating the terrorist threat. The daily death count in Iraq makes it clear we are funding both sides of this war — one with our taxes, the other at the pump.

Most Americans understand that without our oil dollars none of our adversaries could afford war or even suicidal terrorism. The ultimate strategy in the war on terror is energy independence — a reality that lies at the center of how the Democrats can recapture the terrorism issue.

But what makes the broader green movement particularly dangerous for the quiescent Republican Party is the oil man in the White House. If this new coalition of greens, pump-enraged dads and enlightened patriots has any single enemy, it is the oil companies and their Middle Eastern allies. But the Bush family's history of involvement with big oil makes this a uniquely dangerous issue for the president.

Now Al Gore, riding the wave of having been

right earlier than the rest of us, is making a claim to the Democratic nomination. Not to be left behind, Hillary's exhaustive energy speech last week shows she is determined to share in the new green platform.

Hillary Clinton, quite simply, gave the speech Bush should have given. There was no ideological reason why she should have preempted the president in speaking out about the need to move to E-85 cars, but Bush's passivity and knee-jerk reluctance to think beyond oil surrendered the battlefield, and the two Democrats occupied the vacant land. Now the Democrats have the high ground and Bush is looking up into their guns.

Can Bush regain the high ground? Of course. The president can always take any ground he chooses. He has merely to get off the dime and act. But he seems so far, so very far, from understanding what he is up against that action seems to be quite beyond him.

And on that failure to grasp the emerging gas-price/climate-change/anti-terrorism/oil-independence issue, the entire future of the Republican Party hinges. Heaven help it.

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