

from our viewpoint...

Cold can't dampen Flatlander spirit

One theory among Flatlander Fall Festival committee members is that having the event the last full weekend of September pushed it up a week this year to where the weather is more likely to be bad.

The weather this weekend, with the temperatures reaching into the high 80s and no sign of rain, makes the theory sound plausible. Thinking back over nearly two decades of festivals, no one could remember such a cold day or such an icy north wind.

Forecasts for the Flatlander weekend were right on the mark: the weather was cold and miserable on Saturday for the car and bike shows and street fair, but bright and warm on Sunday for the Picnic in the Park.

The organizers of the Early Iron Car Show and Rod Run said they were surprised at the 160 drivers who came despite the forecast. The same was true for the Northwest Kansas Bike Show, which drew 159 bikes. While none of the big shows set any records, the Flatlander Classic car races had about 120 cars for each night of races.

Some events that had been scheduled did not happen, including the Jeep show and the flea market, but that did not seem to bother the people who walked the length of Main. The hardest hit was the beer garden, which did better selling hot coffee rather than cold beer. Another attraction that did not do well was the dunk tank; the chilly wind kept people from volunteering to be dunked.

The festival was a success despite the cold, and produced some good things to build on for next year. Members of the Flatlander committee deserve a pat on the back for their work to plan and organize the event.

Many others deserve a "Huzzah" for the booths and events that did well at the festival. The Fishing Hole was a hit, a welcome addition that gave kids of all ages a chance to hook a big catfish.

The city deserves a great big thank you for installing new electrical services at the corners of 10th, 11th, 12th and 13th and Main. The circuits worked well, and will surely draw more booths in the future.

Committee members are already looking at ways to improve for next year, and to expand the Sunday Picnic in the Park. Expenses were higher this year because of insurance and portable toilets, but the committee has plans to raise money for next year's festival.

The committee — which took over the event after the Chamber of Commerce dropped out — will be looking for more help to organize next year, and would welcome anyone who has ideas to help improve the event. Get a hold of Lincoln Wilson, president of the committee and owner of the Howard Johnson Hotel (785) 890-3644, or Brent Wood, vice-president and financial advisor at AIG (785) 899-9290.

The wonderful weather and enjoyable music Sunday was a great way to end Goodland's biggest weekend of the year. — *Tom Betz*

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The real Clinton emerges

From behind the benign facade and the tranquilizing smile, the real Bill Clinton emerged Sunday during Chris Wallace's interview on Fox News Channel.

There he was on live television, the man those who have worked for him have come to know — the angry, sarcastic, snarling, self-righteous, bombastic bully, roused to a fever pitch.

The truer the accusation, the greater the feigned indignation. Clinton jabbed his finger in Wallace's face, poking his knee, and invaded the commentator's space.

But beyond noting the ex-president's non-presidential style, it is important to answer his distortions and misrepresentations. His self-justifications constitute a mangling of the truth which only someone who once quibbled about what the definition of "is" could perform.

Clinton told Wallace, "There is not a living soul in the world who thought that Osama bin Laden had anything to do with Black Hawk Down."

Nobody said there was. The point of citing Somalia in the run up to 9-11 is that bin Laden told Fortune Magazine in a 1999 interview that the precipitous American pullout after Black Hawk Down convinced him that Americans would not stand up to armed resistance.

Clinton said conservatives "were all trying to get me to withdraw from Somalia in 1993 the next day" after the attack which killed American soldiers. But the real question was whether Clinton would honor the military's request to be allowed to stay and avenge the attack, a request he denied. The debate was not between immediate withdrawal and a six-month delay. (Then-first lady, now-Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.) favored the first option, by the way.) The fight was over whether to attack or pull out eventually without any major offensive operations.

The president told Wallace, "I authorized the CIA to get groups together to try to kill bin



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Laden." But actually, the 9-11 Commission was clear that the plan to kidnap Osama was derailed by National Security Advisor Sandy Berger and CIA chief George Tenet because Clinton had not yet made a finding authorizing his assassination. They were fearful that Osama would die in the kidnapping and the U.S. would be blamed for using assassination as an instrument of policy.

Clinton claims "the CIA and the FBI refused to certify that bin Laden was responsible [for the Cole bombing] while I was there." But he could replace or direct his employees as he felt. His helplessness was, as usual, self-imposed.

Why didn't the CIA and FBI realize the extent of bin Laden's involvement in terrorism? Because Clinton never took the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center seriously. He never visited the site and his only public comment was to caution against "over-reaction."

In his pre-9/11 memoirs, George Stephanopoulos confirms that he and others on the staff saw it as a "failed bombing" and noted that it was far from topic A at the White House. Rather than the full-court press that the first terror attack on American soil deserved, Clinton let the investigation be handled by the FBI on location in New York without making it the national emergency it actually was.

In my frequent phone and personal conversations with both Clintons in 1993, there was never a mention, not one, of the World Trade Center attack. It was never a subject of presidential focus.

Failure to grasp the import of the 1993 attack led to a delay in fingering bin Laden and

understanding his danger. This, in turn, led to our failure to seize him when Sudan evicted him and also to our failure to carry through with the plot to kidnap him. And, it was responsible for the failure to "certify" him as the culprit in the Cole bombing until very late in the Clinton administration.

The former president says, "I worked hard to try to kill him." If so, why did he notify Pakistan of our cruise-missile strike in time for them to warn Osama and allow him to escape? Why did he refuse to allow us to fire cruise missiles to kill bin Laden when we had the best chance, by far, in 1999? The answer to the first question — incompetence; to the second — he was paralyzed by fear of civilian casualties and by accusations that he was wagging the dog. The 9/11 Commission report also attributes the 1999 failure to the fear that we would be labeled trigger-happy, having just bombed the Chinese embassy in Belgrade by mistake.

President Clinton assumes that criticism of his failure to kill bin Laden is a "nice little conservative hit job on me." But he has it backwards. It is not because people are right-wingers that they criticize him over the failure to prevent 9/11. It was his failure to catch bin Laden that drove them to the right wing.

The ex-president is fully justified in laying eight months of the blame for the failure to kill or catch bin Laden at the doorstep of George W. Bush. But he should candidly acknowledge that eight years of blame fall on him.

One also has to wonder when the volcanic rage beneath the surface of this would-be statesman will cool. When will the chip on his shoulder finally disappear? When will he feel sufficiently secure in his own legacy and his own skin not to boil over repeatedly in private and occasionally even in public?

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What we think about God and politics

Caught in the crossfire of culture-war battles over religion and politics, most Americans may be ready to say "a plague on both your houses."

At least that's one way to read a poll conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life released on Aug. 24.

According to the survey, nearly half of Americans (49 percent) believe conservative Christians have gone too far in trying to impose their religious values on the country. At the same time, 69 percent think liberals have gone too far in trying to keep religion out of schools and government.

Though most Americans are religious (and most think religious influence on our society is a good thing), few identify with religious political movements on the left or right. Only 7 percent call themselves members of the "religious left," and only 11 percent say they be-



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long to the "religious right."

Politicians and religious leaders who use "Christian nation" rhetoric will be pleased to learn that 67 percent of Americans see the United States as a Christian nation. But it isn't clear what people mean by that description — or even whether they think it is a good or bad thing. Is America "Christian" because of demographics or cultural influences or history or all of the above? The survey doesn't say.

But the poll does reveal that most Americans reject the views of Religious Right leaders such as Roy Moore (former chief justice of the Alabama Supreme Court), who argue that biblical law must be the supreme law of the land.

Americans were asked "which should be the more important influence on the laws of the United States? Should it be the Bible or should it be the will of the American people, even when it conflicts with the Bible?" A large majority, 63 percent, said the will of the people should prevail.

Christian Americans, like Americans in general, are a diverse group with a broad range of views about both religion and politics. About a third of all Christians (32 percent) describe themselves as "liberal" or "progressive" Christians. And 38 percent identify themselves as "born again" or evangelical Christians. But contrary to media stereotypes, these labels overlap for many Americans. More than a third

of evangelicals (36 percent), for example, also describe themselves as liberal or progressive Christians.

Moreover, people who call themselves "liberal or progressive Christians" are not necessarily politically liberal. In fact, 26 percent say they are politically conservative, while 27 percent are politically liberal and 45 percent characterize themselves as moderates.

Both major political parties will look closely at the survey to see how they are faring with their respective campaigns to appear the most "religion friendly." Republicans (who count evangelicals as a core constituency) have lost ground, with 47 percent of Americans now saying that the GOP is friendly to religion as contrasted with 55 percent last year. Even more ominous for Republicans, the decline is steepest among white evangelicals, falling from 63 percent in 2005 to the current 49 percent.

Democrats don't have much to cheer about either. Only 26 percent of Americans say the Democratic Party is friendly to religion; just three years ago, 42 percent saw Democrats that way. That's a precipitous slide. Meanwhile, 42 percent say the Democratic Party is neutral toward religion and 20 percent say unfriendly.

As we head into the midterm elections, politicians take note. The majority of Americans see a role for religion in public life — but they don't want religion imposed on anyone, especially by the state. Moderation won't stir the culture warriors, but it might win elections.

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