

from our viewpoint...

Is Iraq more than a sound bite war?

Do you sometimes get the feeling we are fighting nothing more than a sound-bite war in Iraq?
How often have these bites surfaced:
“Stay the course!”
“Cut and run!”
More times than any of us can count.
Republican. Democrat. Makes no difference. Neither has come up with a firm exit strategy.
President Bush says we won’t leave until the job is done. He never seems to get around to explaining how we will know the job is done. We recall a huge sign on an U.S. Navy ship a couple of years ago that declared, “Mission Accomplished.”
The question begs: Without an exit strategy, how in the world are we going to find the exit when “the job is done?”
This war has confused millions of Americans. They run hot and cold. Nothing is clear, other than we’ve lost 3,000 men and women so far in a war that was supposed to be a cake walk
On Nov. 7, voters said they wanted a new direction in Iraq. They turned control of the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives over to the Democrats.
That got President Bush’s attention, so he booted Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.
The Democrats can’t seem to find common ground in their search for a new direction in a war that gets uglier by the hour. They are nowhere near the red zone, so don’t expect them to score anytime soon.
Then Thursday, in Jordan, President Bush was high in praise of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki as the man to get the job done. He said this despite a White House memo leaked to the media the day before which questioned Maliki’s fitness for the post.
And all the while, the U.S. military body count goes on.
Don’t look for a new direction.
Look for more bullets and more sound bites. —Tom Dreiling

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Kids make Christmas decorating more fun

It’s just not as much fun decorating for Christmas without the kids.
Son did come home for the weekend. Although he missed Thanksgiving, we had turkey and all the trimmings on Saturday.
We even had both football and basketball games for him. He wasn’t so interested in KU football, he said; Colorado is his team.
However, he loves KU basketball and almost yelled himself hoarse as the Jayhawks beat the defending national champion Florida ‘Gators late Saturday night.
Before he got to do that, however, his father dragooned him into helping decorate the bushes around the front of the house with hundreds of sparkly Christmas lights.
Then I made him help me put icicle lights all over a 12- to 14-foot aspen tree in the front yard. It looks a little strange in the daylight with strands of white wire hanging all over, sort of like very thin toilet paper. But at night, it’s very nice.
I had to figure out what to do with the icicle lights.
I picked up two big bags at a community yard sale in Colorado this summer. I didn’t have a clue what was in them,, but figured that most



cynthia haynes
● open season

of them would work.
Except for a few odds and ends, the bags were full of icicle lights — and they all worked.
We’ve never done icicles on the house. We’ve trimmed around the porch when the children could be cajoled into climbing the ladders and stringing them from the eaves, but our house is tall — real tall and skinny. It’s not a good house to hang lights off the eaves, and icicle lights just demand eves.
I suggested putting some up on the garage, but Steve was not buying it. He’s the one who suggested the tree.
So while the neighbors behind us and across the street have icicles hanging from their eaves, we have ours dangling from a small tree.
After son left on Sunday, I brought the tree up from the basement. It’s a family heirloom. My mother-in-law used it every year and kept it in her basement all set up except the ornaments.

When she died and the children divided her things, somehow the tree got put in with our share.
I was surprised, but every year, when we bring it upstairs, I remember her.
After straightening branches, I plugged it in. Most of the lights still work and there are enough that those that don’t just don’t matter.
I put some of our hundred of decorations on it. We have balls we bought the first year we were married, macaroni angels from school projects and collectible ornaments, gifts from friends.
Around the bottom I put the non breakables — plastic clowns, needlework snowflakes and fabric angels, anything the cats can steal but can’t break. During the season, I’ll find these all over the house and return them to the tree. The cats are happy and so am I.
I do miss the children, though. I miss their bickering over which ornament got to go on the tree and which had to stay in the boxes. I missed cleaning up the broken balls and allowing someone else to hang the stockings.
The house is decorated. I’m satisfied. Steve’s satisfied. The cats just stole another ornament. It’s Christmas time.
Enjoy.

Prairie dogs are not really ‘dogs’

To the Editor:
I read your article on the prairie dog situation in Logan County and your editorial about prairie dogs in the Tuesday, Nov. 28, edition of *The Goodland Star-News*, and it seemed to me your bias showed through.
Let me enlighten you. Prairie dogs are not really dogs. They are rats and should be called prairie rats.
Prairie rats destroy pastures and carry diseases that can infect and kill humans. I suppose you will call me one of those villages carrying a pitchfork and shaking my fist as you elaborated in your editorial, but that is OK. I am tired of those tree-hugging environmentalists that live on asphalt and eat organic food and don’t know the difference between corn and wheat, cattle and sheep telling us that make a living off the land how to live on the land.
It’s like the Ted Turner types who buy up huge chunks of land, wear big cowboy hats and huge-heeled boots and raise those stupid bison. There was a reason they were replaced with domesticated bovine.
As to the property rights agenda that you tried to hide behind in your editorial, I have no problem with a landowner who wants to infect his own land with these pests. The problem occurs when the prairie rat moves to the neighbor’s pasture — as you probably don’t know, a prairie ran cannot be fenced in.
I have read articles in you paper about cleaning up our fine town, and you don’t seem to have a problem with making property owners be responsible to clean up their lots or being forced to do so if not done voluntarily and being forced to pay the clean up because it is good for our town. So maybe you should write an editorial standing up for property owners of junky lots and rat-infested buildings.
But I suppose I will forgive you, as you are like many uninformed people who think a prairie rat is cute as long as it doesn’t affect your property or lower your income-producing ability.
Ron Schilling
Edson

Editor’s Note: Mr. Schilling probably knows that the prairie dog is not in fact a rat, but a ground squirrel. Or maybe his bias is showing. The Star-News stands by its defense of all landowners’ rights, even unpopular landowners. Our rights are only as good as those of the most unpopular among us. — Steve Haynes



from our readers
● to the editor

To the Editor:
Recently returning from the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts convention in Wichita, I feel it is necessary to share my viewpoints and experience on the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s plan to close county Service Center offices.
I am certain the consensus of the ranchers and farmers who were present in Wichita is that they do not want to see any county Farm Service Agency or Natural Resources Conservation Service offices closed or merged. Through legislative and administration research, I have come to find that some very unorthodox decision-making has been going on.
Money allocated for conservation practices and administration has been reallocated to other states that have not done so well. Kansas ranks sixth in the nation for conservation applied to the ground. Why on earth would you try to fix something that isn’t broke? Is this what you call taking from the efficient and giving to the less efficient? Do we not need more conservation rather than less?
May of 2004 should answer that for you. I was taught and led to believe through time that agriculture was the backbone of this country — has this changed? Do other industries not depend on agriculture anymore?
This decision to reallocate conservation dollars was made by a man who goes by the title of chief conservationist and the name of Bruce Knight. Since this decision, the president has decided to promote Mr. Knight to undersecretary of agriculture for marketing and regulatory programs.
Arlen Lancaster has since then replaced him as chief of the conservation service. Mr. Lancaster said in a recent meeting in Salina that 150 miles to the nearest agriculture service center was no concern to him.
How many of you would like to drive 150 miles every time you visit the center? The average farmer visits a service center five times a year. Now let’s put this in perspective for the average taxpayer.
As Area I Representative of Kansas resource conservation districts, there are 18,870 farm-

ers in my 18-county area, which extends from Cheyenne County south to Wallace east to Russell and north to Smith and all in between.
I don’t like to deal hypothetically, but if 18,870 of us drive half the distance of 150 miles, then drove home that would be 2.8 million miles, and at the current Internal Revenue Service rate that would come to \$1.3 million in expenses. If this were to happen, how many other dollars would be spent from your county in relation to saving miles for other trips? I am sure that you understand the situation farmers are in right now.
There are 11 proposed agriculture service center closures and many to follow. Just a few facts to throw into the dilemma are the agriculture department’s budget is \$77.7 billion, which is less than 1/2 of 1 percent of the federal budget. Less than 25 percent of that 1/2 of 1 percent of the federal budget is put into farm programs and conservation combined. More than 50 percent of the department’s budget goes to food and nutrition programs.
Perhaps the new farm bill should be renamed the Food and Nutrition Bill. I have been told by many legislators it is hard to sell agriculture to urban legislators before elections. It looks to me like more than twice the money in the farm bill goes to schools and welfare programs. Where are all the people on welfare — urban or rural? In my more recent conversations with legislators, they have told me they have received a few communications from ranchers and farmers concerning this subject matter. It is obvious to me that if you don’t all get involved with communicating to your legislators, state and federal, then when the economy turns sour, you will have absolutely no right to complain when you have to move to another area for a job.
It is a fact that agriculture office closures will create a very large, negative impact on our communities. Farm program payments for this area alone come to over \$191 million, which does not include loans, yield increases and conservation practices. As agriculture service offices are closed across the state, services, population, and money will decline at a progressive rate.
I urge all of us, whether we are directly involved in agriculture or not, to individually and through group efforts convey the importance of county offices as they now exist within our state.
Jon Starns, KACD Area I representative
Brewster