

from our viewpoint...

Bill of Rights taken for granted

"I see that Bill of Rights Day is December 15th," a bored American yawns. "Ho, hum. That Constitution stuff is so dull and tedious that I never read it. Besides, no one can take my rights away from me."

Anyone who harbors this blasé attitude hasn't been paying attention. U.S. citizens have argued about, and fought for, some of these precious rights during this very year.

Freedom of the press is under attack. Journalists have been called "unpatriotic" because they reported the facts. Some try to bully or discredit the press by claiming it is too far "right" or too far "left" when they don't agree with reports.

While professional journalists try to deal only in facts, their critics ignore one thing. Even though members of the press are more unbiased than most Americans, they too have a right to state opinions ... just as you have a right to sit in the local cafe and regale your fellow coffee drinkers with your slant on the truth.

Along with freedom of speech and freedom of the press, we Kansans hear arguments about freedom of religion.

Just this year, we have witnessed an attack on another freedom crucial to our Bill of Rights — the right to a speedy and public trial. Some Americans want to water down the right of habeas corpus, which protects us from arbitrary imprisonment, gives us the right to face our accusers, and liberates illegally detained persons.

Probably you are hard-pressed to remember exactly what other rights you have. It's easy. Go to your computer and search for "Bill of Rights," then print your own copy and study it.

Or, if you prefer, here are a few highlights: You have the right to a trial by jury, and the right to bear arms (another of today's arguments). You are protected from unreasonable search and seizure (which brings to mind warrantless wiretapping), and the Bill of Rights outlaws excessive bail and fines, along with cruel and unusual punishment (another hot issue in the U.S. Congress). You don't have to incriminate yourself in a court of law, and you can't be tried twice for the same offense.

Say what you think, and write what you wish (as long as you don't libel or slander someone), but at the same time be thankful that our Founding Fathers were wise enough to guarantee those privileges in the Bill of Rights.

We should set off fireworks, play patriotic music, and dance in the streets to celebrate the ratification of our Bill of Rights on December 15, 1791. This event is just as significant as the Fourth of July, and deserves parades with marching bands.

That probably won't happen, but at least find a moment to cherish your freedoms. Then argue about them if you must, but be careful about tampering with them. They grew out of the Magna Carta, which limited the powers of English kings way back in the year 1215. These protections have served us well ever since they were adopted as amendments to the U.S. Constitution more than 200 years ago.

Most of all, don't take those rights for granted, because the world has too many people who would curtail your freedoms if they could. A British contemporary of our Founding Fathers, the statesman Edmund Burke, penned this warning: "All that is necessary for the forces of evil to triumph is for enough good men to do nothing."

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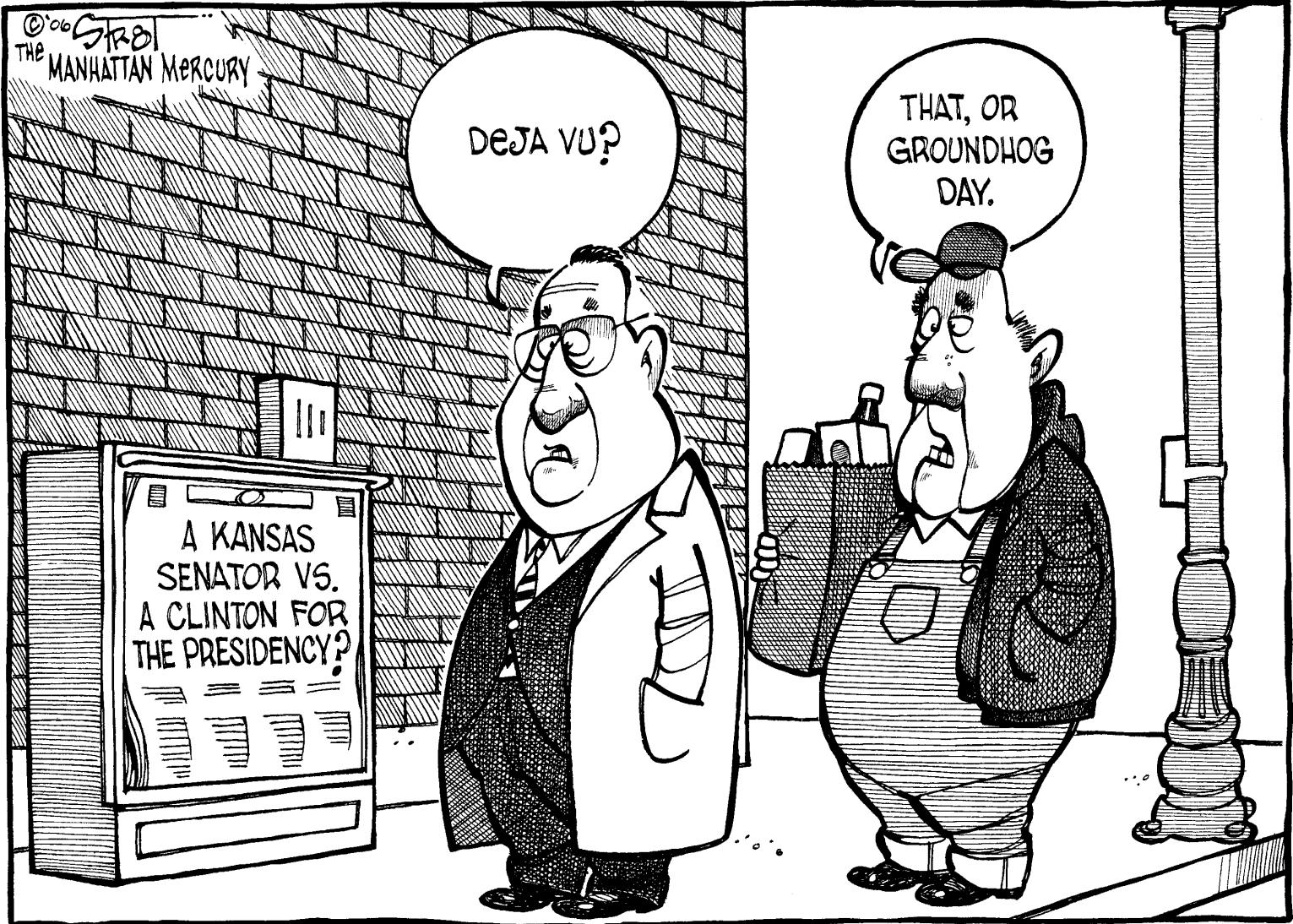
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Old curmudgeon will be missed

A lot of nice things have been said about Bill Meyer, a much-beloved figure among Kansas editors, the last couple of weeks.

Oh, he'd hate that.

Bill was our curmudgeon, fit and feisty at 81 until he fell at his home earlier this month. He was gone within a few hours.

Bill was many things.

He was fearless. Devoted to his job. Crusty — that one fits pretty well.

He loved his adopted home town, Marion, where he edited the paper for 57 years. He loved his wife, Joan, and his family, his state and his college, the University of Kansas.

At his funeral, self-scripted along with a three-page obituary, Bill asked for three songs, "Home on the Range," "America the Beautiful," and the KU "Alma Mater."

At least a dozen of his fellow past presidents from the Kansas Press Association lined up to pay respects, along with hundreds of townsfolk and friends. There were few dry eyes as the strains of the hymn faded away. "Far above the golden valley, glorious to view..."



steve haynes

- along the sappa

Beloved, Bill Meyer?

He never backed away from a fight. He lost his last big one, to bring a regional landfill to Marion County for economic development, but he won more than a few. He was proud of the bullet hole in his office window, pointed it out to visitors ... until someone smashed the glass.

But at 81, he's outlived a lot of his enemies. Those who knew him respected his honesty and his keen sense of right and wrong. He edited a good newspaper and he fought for what he saw as right. He was fond of this saying, "Show me a beloved editor, and I'll show you a lousy newspaper."

OK, he didn't say lousy.

Bill somehow became an honorary Ken-

tucky Colonel, fitting, since with his white hair, rotund figure and goatee, he looked a lot like that other famous Kentucky colonel, Harlan Sanders. Harlan could be crusty, too.

He'd not only been a newspaperman, but president of both the Kiwanis Club and school board in Marion and editor of the 99th Infantry Division newsletter. He helped establish the county hospital district and the judicial reform plan that led to appointment of many Kansas judges rather than election.

He claimed to be no hero, but suffered severe frostbite when his unit was pinned down by Nazi troops during the Battle of the Bulge. The Army thought enough of him to offer a commission if he'd come back for the Korean War, but he declined.

Decorated soldier, loving father, devoted editor. He was a hero to a lot of us in the business, and to many at home who knew him during six decades of leadership, courage and care.

A character? Sure. An original? Absolutely.

They don't make many like Bill Meyer, darn it. We'll miss him.

Democrats' suicide impulse emerging

Just days after winning control of the House and Senate, Democrats have stopped gloating over their victory long enough to turn on each other in a spasm of self-destructive behavior.

To start their triumphant march towards January, when they will assume actual control over the House, Democrats handed Speaker-to-be Nancy Pelosi a humiliating defeat in her first effort to assert control over her party.

By a vote of 140 to 86, they rejected her hand-picked candidate to be majority leader, the ethically challenged John Murtha, and elected her current No. 2 man, Steny Hoyer, with whom she has anything but a cordial relationship.

Some of her apologists whisper that she really didn't mean it when she sent a letter to the Democrat House membership giving Murtha a ringing endorsement, or when she made a speech nominating him for the post, or when she directly intervened by urging Democratic freshmen — all of whom depend on her for key committee assignments — to vote for Murtha. She was just going through the motions for a long-time ally, they insist.

That alibi loses steam when you consider the



michael reagan

- making sense

fact that she made those endorsements as the speaker-to-be, not as San Fran Nan, the darling of Haight-Ashbury and fanatic liberals everywhere. She put her prestige on line in her very first attempt to assert her leadership in the Democratic caucus, and she got slapped in the face.

This, however, was merely one of several instances of Nancy Pelosi driving the leadership bus over her colleagues.

Her attempt to settle old scores by throwing Steny Hoyer under the bus was only one of her vindictive acts. The fact that he got up, brushed himself off and climbed aboard as her co-pilot does nothing to free her from the consequences of her attempt to crush him.

It will come back to haunt her whenever she tries to push through some hare-brained piece of far-left legislation and finds herself facing

strident opposition from the moderates and Blue Dog Democrats emboldened by having given Hoyer a nearly 2-1 victory over her pet candidate.

Another of her hit-and-run victims is Jane Harman, the ranking Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee and obvious candidate for the committee chair. Harman is not Pelosi's cup of tea and thus is to be passed over, apparently, in favor of Rep. Alcee Hastings, a Florida Democrat whose principal qualification for the job is that as a federal judge he was once impeached and convicted of bribe-taking by the House and tossed off the bench with even Rep. Pelosi among those finding him guilty.

Pelosi is not alone in the game of cannibalism now rife among Democrats. Sharp-tongued strategist James Carville stopped castigating Republicans long enough to say his party should dump Howard Dean as national chairman because he's incompetent — and that after a major election win.

It's going to be an interesting next two years.

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