

Burning the flag can't threaten our freedoms

As we celebrate our freedom after this Fourth of July, one of the things we ought to be thankful for is that Congress hasn't yet passed a constitutional amendment banning flag burning.

Sure, it's disgusting to see anyone burning an American flag.

We love our flag. We fly it proudly. It honors the thousands who have died in defense of our Liberty.

But burning our flag *cannot* hurt this country.

Our enemies burn our flag because they cannot defeat us.

Our detractors burn our flag because they cannot match the strength of our ideas.

Sometimes, Americans burn the flag because they, mistakenly, believe our government or our system is the enemy.

But part of our treasured freedom, enshrined in the First Amendment to the Constitution, is the ability to think and act as we please.

And as a political act, burning an American flag is part of that.

We're not in favor of flag burning, mind you.

It's disgusting to see, whether it's a crowd in some Asian nation stomping on Old Glory, or protesters in Seattle.

But the act of burning the flag just shows how strong the ideas behind it are.

No flag burner can desecrate the memory of our Revolution or undermine the freedoms protected by our Constitution.

Only we can do that.

And by focusing on a non-issue like flag burning, we might hasten the day when those liberties slip away.

The First Amendment protects not just majority speech, not just popular speech, but everyone's speech, everyone's thoughts, everyone's ideas, everyone's religion.

That, unfortunate as it might seem, includes someone who would desecrate the American flag to make a political point.

So what should we do about flag burners? Ignore them.

Let them be.

No one buys the line they are selling.

The act itself is a political turnoff.

Those who sink so low have no following, no leverage, no success.

We don't need a constitutional amendment to deal with them.

We don't need to worry about them *at all*.

Our Constitution, our Bill of Rights, our Liberty are a lot stronger than that.

For that, we should be thankful.

This country has more important problems to deal with. Let's turn to them.

— Steve Haynes

Carry protection from bears

The man finished putting his wife and three Yorkies in the truck and approached us as we were preparing to walk up a familiar trail.

"Did you bring protection?" he asked.

"Protection," we both thought. "What is this man talking about?"

We were in the Colorado Rockies, about a quarter mile from the Rio Grande and almost in sight of a subdivision. What was he thinking?

Steve said he thought, "Protection — like a tetanus shot, a payment to the Mafia, a condom, what the heck is this guy talking about?"

I thought, "Protection — hey we have rain gear, sunscreen, insect spray and good walking boots. There are no poisonous snakes or poison ivy up here. What is this guy talking about?"

Steve was the brave one who asked him what he was talking about as we both stood there feeling like fools.

"Bears," he said. "They saw a bear up here a couple of days ago. You should take a couple of sticks and pound them together as you walk to warn off the bears."

Ohhhhh, bears.

Well, we know about bears. There have been bears up this trail forever. We have friends who set up bear stands on top of the mountain.

In recent years, there have been bears in the garbage all over southern Colorado because of the drought, lack of food and overpopulation brought on by an initiative election that ended the spring bear hunt.

Do-gooders claimed that the spring hunt left baby bears to starve in their dens when mom was killed. Biologists warned that without the hunt, there'd be way too many bears. Guess what?



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
chaynes@nwkansas.com

Now the mountains are lousy with bears.

Several years ago a memo, purportedly from the Forest Service, was circulating in Colorado:

**U.S. Forest Service
Southern Colorado District**

"Due to the danger posed to persons and pets by the overpopulation of bears in the area, all hikers and campers are asked to take the following precautions:

"Campers should keep all food in bear-proof containers and hung high in trees. Hikers should blow whistles or wear little bells. For the most part, brown and black bears are shy and will avoid people unless hungry, injured or threatened.

"The Forest Service does not believe there are any grizzly bears in the area, but they are larger and much more dangerous.

"To determine if there are black or brown bears in the area, check for bear scat. It will usually contain the remains of berries, insects and fur.

"Grizzly bear scat, on the other hand, can be recognized, as it will

contain the remains of little bells and whistles."

We did not see any bears on the three walks we took up the trail. We did see scat and it contained the remains of a deer, which probably died of natural causes as bears do not normally kill large animals. We also saw the deer's bones scattered over a hillside.

On the second trip on the trail, we noticed a foreleg of the deer right next to the trail. We neither one had seen that leg the day before.

We're not saying it hadn't been there, but....

From the Bible

And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.

Luke 10: 27

Write

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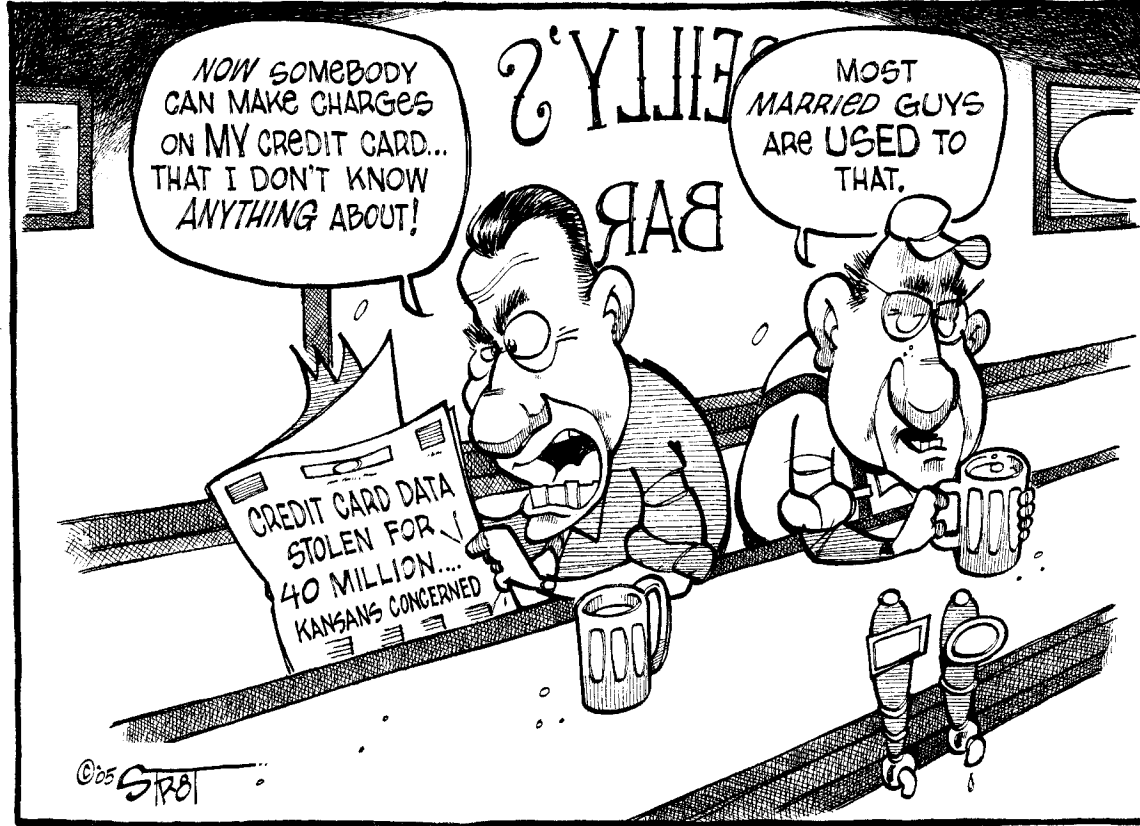
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Husband happy to harvest

Oh, there are a few fields left, but harvest is, essentially, over.

Farmers, hired hands, wives and kids, too, have all been pushing, pushing, pushing to get the crop in. It's an exciting time. But it can also be a tense time.

Perhaps the rain over the weekend was just what was needed to give everyone a little breather so they can recoup before the final push.

Yields were better than expected in lots of cases, worse than predicted in others. But, all-in-all, harvest turned out to be OK.

The important thing, though, is that Jim got to play farmer for a week. Mostly, he drove a grain truck, but once, when Alan wasn't looking, he took the combine for a spin around the field, and managed to cut a bin full.

"It all came back to me," he said, "just like riding a bicycle."

Our friend is insisting on paying Jim for his help, but Jim had so much fun, I think we owe him.

Today is the Fourth of July; my brother Jim's birthday. It is the only brother's birthday I am truly sure of. Mom said when Jim was a little boy, he believed all the celebrating was just for him.



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
cplotts@nwkansas.com

In 1976, during our country's bicentennial, I organized a one-car parade to celebrate his birthday. The girls and I made posters that said, "Today is America's birthday...and Jim Kelley's, too," and "Happy Birthday Jim Kelley and the U.S.A."

I recorded some rousing John Phillips Sousa marching music and enlisted the help of another sister-in-law to push "play" and her little girl, Cathy, to wave a flag.

A phone call to Jim's wife, Linda, made sure he would be outside at the right moment. After all, it doesn't take long for one car to pass in review. This had to be synchronized.

We parked the car a block away from Jim and Linda's house to attach streamers and balloons, turn up the volume on the tape player and

place ourselves on the hood. With horn honking, music blaring and a kid hanging out of every window waving a flag, we drove slowly by their house. I think the entire spectacle had the desired effect. Jim Kelley was totally embarrassed. It was a birthday he'll never forget.

Whether or not the Fourth was your birthday, I hope you had a good day. I also hope you took a moment to remember the soldiers of today, who are fighting for freedom on foreign soil. Their commitment is just as great as that of our ancestors who fought for this country's freedom almost 230 years ago.

My husband sings that Lee Greenwood song, "God Bless the U.S.A." And like the song says, "I'm proud to be an American."

Fireworks create traffic jam

You don't see a traffic jam at The Gateway every day, but Monday's was pretty impressive, as what looked like half the town snaked out of the parking lots and fields east, south and west of the fairground.

It was another great fireworks show, thanks to the Oberlin Business Alliance, Rusty Addleman and Decatur County and Oberlin City.

Not everyone was driving. Kids strolled off, teenage boys tossing firecrackers, junior high-age girls chatting and gossiping, little kids with punks and fireworks ran and shouted.

It had been a day for kids: kids at the pool, kids headed to the fireworks stands with summer savings, kids setting off explosion after explosion.

Adults stayed inside where air conditioning stood between them and the heat. At midafternoon, a single car was parked downtown. Nothing moved on Main Street.

Well, almost nothing.

Out in front of the museum, a pair of rabbits nibbled gently on grain spilled by harvest rigs last week. Not even a passing car could chase them back into the grass.

One thing that wasn't happening



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
schaynes@nwkansas.com

was harvest. After rains Sunday, not a combine was moving. There was no one at either elevator.

And with another rain Monday night, it could be a day or two before combines get back into the fields. How long ago was it people were praying for rain?

The downpour was gentle, just what the corn and sunflowers farmers have out for fall need. Not enough to hurt the surprisingly good wheat many still have standing.

Some custom crews had headed north over the weekend, but others took the holiday at the fairground or wherever they had camped. It was raining in Nebraska, too.

The rain did hold off long enough to get in two nights of racing at the fairground, and to get the fireworks all lit off. The show lasted nearly half an hour, though it seemed like

minutes.

In fact, a few who showed up at 10 o'clock were disappointed. The traffic jam took off about the time they were parking.

To the south and west, nature had her own light show going. Electric bolts rolled across the sky as a line of storms marched south. It was nearly an hour later when one swerved into town, and by then the clouds held more rain than wind.

The city shouldn't have any trouble meeting water conservation goals, at least not for a few days.

As the big display faded, people went back to setting off their own pyrotechnics at home. The rain dampened that for a while, but as midnight rolled around, the roman candles and night works returned.

The Fourth may start out quiet, but it never stays that way for long.

Restoration of lake on city agenda

Editor's Note: This letter outlines plans for Sappa Park which are to be discussed at a City Commission meeting at 6:30 p.m. Thursday at The Gateway.

To the Editor:

Restoring Sappa Park Lake has been an active subject of interest, discussion, studies, and meetings for the past 20 years. Although restoring the dam, lake, and adjacent recreation areas is technologically feasible, we believe this is not practical or reasonable.

The lake is almost completely filled with sediment, and the right to store water in the lake was vacated long ago. Removing the sediment would be costly.

Current laws and regulations governing appropriation and use of water in Kansas (and also requiring permission from Nebraska for this stream) would probably not allow total restoration of the lake.

Therefore, we propose a reasonable solution for restoring at least a small part of the lake and park property. Current water-rights laws allow construction and storage of a maximum 15 acre feet of water. Although this may seem small compared to the once 100-acre lake, if properly planned the 15-acre-foot

rule could create a nice aquatic system with a pond and wetlands.

We have performed some conceptual analysis of the abandoned lake bed using information developed previously by others. We estimate that a five-acre pond and two or three acres of adjacent wetlands could be created just north of the shelter house.

This site would be a great location to view wildlife that would frequent the pond and wetlands, and the water quality there would support a good fishery. This multiple use could support educational programs about the environment and water quality. Enhancing the educational mission could be boardwalks with interpretive signage describing the natural habitat and natural processes in the pond and wetlands. Adding a dock for small boats would complete these components of a great public amenity.

What would it cost? Our current "ballpark" estimate is \$60,000. The major cost of construction would go toward excavation of approxi-

mately 20,000 cubic yards of sediment. Possibly, one or more small cost-share grants could help with construction.

The proposal fits well with current plans by Pheasants Forever to plant habitat buffers on part of the property. Pheasants Forever might also be an additional source of money or partner for the project, along with the Kansas Alliance for Wetlands and Streams, and the Watershed Institute.

Other partners might be Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks to stock and manage the pond, local conservation contractors and equipment dealers, the public school district to create an outdoor environmental education laboratory at the site, and other groups interested in improving the natural environment.

We believe that this proposal is probably the only viable alternative to have a restored lake at Sappa Park. Therefore, we recommend that it to the City Council and local leaders.

Dennis Haag
The Watershed Institute, Lenexa