

## More than just ships held hostage by pirates

What is wrong with this picture: Pirates, really just children in leaky boats, carrying rifles and grenade launchers, rule the high seas. They seize ships and demand multi-million-dollar ransoms, which shipping companies and insurance firms are only too willing to pay.

Pirates lurk off the Horn of Africa, among the islands of Indonesia and the Philippines, even in a lake between Mexico and Texas.

When threatened, they murder their victims, then surrender. They know somewhere, they'll get a fair trial and maybe even wind up living in the free world.

The world's most powerful navies — from the U.S., China, England, Germany, Holland, France, all the great and small powers of the civilized nations — seem powerless to stop the pirates.

When pirates are caught at sea, they claim to be fishermen. Instead of blowing them out of the water, the world's navies just let them go. Their arms are seized and they get a slap on the wrist.

Their masters have more boats and more children to send out to sea, anyway. What do they care? They're making a lot of money.

Shipping companies resist arming their vessels. They claim it's bad for business, and besides, just having armed guards might not deter the pirates. Never mind that these kids attack tall steel ships from wooden boats and have to climb the sides to take over a freighter or tanker.

Government officials claim they can't track pirate vessels in an area so vast as the Indian Ocean, though that seems disingenuous in

an era when spy satellites can see virtually anything that moves on the face of the globe and computers can be used to interpret images.

The situation is remarkably like the one that faced the American Navy and Marine Corps in their earliest years, when President Thomas Jefferson sent them to subdue the Barbary Pirates who preyed on Mediterranean shipping off North Africa. The Marines went ashore to assault pirate bases, as we may have to ask them to do in Somalia today.

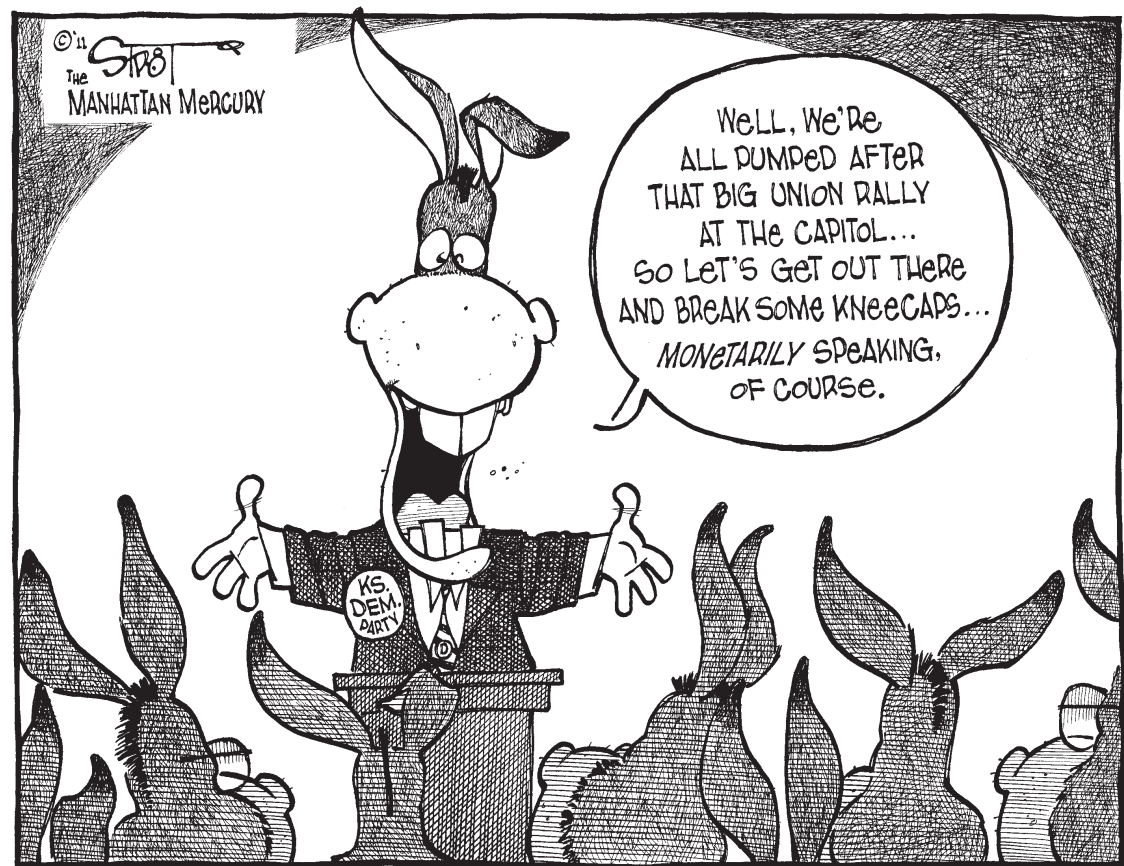
In that era, more than 200 years ago, the pirates seemingly had all the advantages. Today, surely the world's great and most civilized nations can find some way to discourage and defeat vicious pirates. It must be done.

Our forces should be able to back up international law with military might. They should treat the pirates — and their warlord masters ashore — as the terrorists they are, showing no mercy and giving no quarter.

If arrests and trials will help, by all means arrest those willing to surrender. The rest, treat them with the same mercy they show their victims.

The civilized world cannot afford to be held hostage by pirates, whether off Africa, in southeast Asia or in Texas. Freedom of safe transit on the high seas is too important to all nations to be abandoned.

Unless the world reacts, there will be more killings, more kidnappings and more bloodshed. The time to make a stand is today, not after it's too late to save the next victims. — *Steve Haynes*



## Officials deaf to voter's voices

Brewster city officials have protested the conundrum of the polling place for their city election being in another city, thanks to penny pinching by county officials:

To be eligible to vote in the election, you have to live in Brewster, but to vote, you must drive to Colby. The same logic applies to Rexford, Menlo and outlying towns in many other counties.

That's because Thomas County is one of several in the state to consolidate all voting at one site after federal law required better access for handicapped voters and use of machines to help them vote.

Thomas and Sherman county officials, among others, decided apparently that voters in the smaller cities didn't count for much. They claim it's not much of a hardship for them to drive to the county seat to vote.

And mind you, this is in a city election where they are choosing city officials for their own independent towns. Not a state or federal election.

It's undoubtedly true that the counties will save a little money, perhaps a few thousand dollars per election. We'd be the last to



### Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes  
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suggest that counties should spend taxpayers' money unwisely. But the amount to be saved here is nothing compared to the raises many counties routinely give their employees.

In Decatur County, by way of contrast, when city officials and residents in outlying cities protested a decision to close the polls in those towns, commissioners listened. They wisely decided that having polls in each city was part of the cost of democracy. They reversed themselves and kept the rural polls open in Jennings, Norcat and Dresden.

So far, officials in Sherman and Thomas counties have not been so thoughtful. They have flat refused to reconsider. And that just flies in the face of what democracy is all about.

There might be some legitimate way to save money on outlying polls. At one point, county clerks were offering to take "advance" ballots out to the small towns as a sort of compromise, but that's not really the same as having a polling station on election day, is it?

No, people deserve to be able to vote in their own elections in their own towns. And the county ought to find a way to allow it. The commissioners and county clerk ought to be committed to serving voters in the smaller towns as well as they serve those in the county seat.

The Brewster leaders have a point, a good one. Thomas County officials should listen. So should voters, because how this issue is handled will say a lot about the county's priorities. — *Steve Haynes*

## Lost in her own back yard

Steve will tell you that I'm directionally challenged.

To put it more bluntly, I get lost swimming across a pool. North and south have little or no meaning for me, and I can only distinguish left and right because I have a writing callus on my right hand.

Our children sent us a Garmin global positioning device for Christmas a few years ago after I got lost trying to get to Leoville. I wasn't really lost, just took the wrong road, a dirt road after a rain storm. I made it off the road, but just barely, and the car and I took a lot of road with us to the wash.

But how lost can you get driving from Colby to Oberlin? You only have two turns once you leave. You drive to the Nine-Mile corner, turn left, drive by Rexford and through Selden to the junction, and turn left again.

Sounds easy, doesn't it? So how come I found myself rolling into Hoxie?

Steve was working at the paper and I was at the pharmacy at Dillon's, and we decided that, since we didn't get off until 7 p.m., we would just stop at the Southwind Steakhouse in Selden for supper.

Since I had to be at work at 9 a.m. and he didn't come in until later, we had separate cars, but I went to the office after getting off, so we left at pretty much the same time.

I had a book on tape I had been listening to, and so was riding



### Open Season

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along with a western mystery in my ears..

I left the *Colby Free Press* and headed east in light snow. (I do have a compass in my car, but Steve has the Garmin.)

The good guy was after the bad guys and the story was exciting. I drove along watching for deer or other road hazards but not paying too much attention to the signs. After all, I had done this trip hundreds of times.

I passed some lights on my right and vaguely figured that had been Rexford but wasn't really paying much attention.

Soon, I could see the lights of Selden ahead. But something wasn't quite right. The town was wrong. What happened to the Co-op station that's supposed to be on my left? And what were these buildings? What had they done to Selden since 8 a.m. this morning?

I was almost to the junction when I realized that this was the west edge of Hoxie. Snow was getting heavier.

I had completely missed the left-

hand turn at the Nine-Mile and kept going. Straight on to Hoxie.

I was definitely going to be late for supper.

Dang, I'd have to call Steve and admit my mistake. There was no covering this one up.

The good guys got the bad guys as I headed north along K-23, doing no better than 45 in the snow, and I was able to get to supper just 30 minutes late. Steve had warned the kitchen and was waiting for me with a grin and a beer as I pulled in.

Oh well. At least the road was paved.

### From the Bible

*Romans: 5: 1-2*  
Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

## Mexico, here we come again

In less than four hours, I have to be ready to roll. We are leaving on the first leg of our spring Mexico mission trip, and of course, I don't have one thing packed. The good news is I have all the laundry done.

Besides, the clothes you take on a mission trip are the kind you don't care if you bring home or not. I'll be wearing one decent can-be-seen-in-public outfit, with "church clothes" packed in my bag.

Everything else is T-shirts, sweat pants and tennis shoes. Jim does the lion's share of packing. He is responsible for our sleeping bags, air mattress, tools and all the second-hand gift items I pack along as presents for "our" family. Really, after packing my stuff, all I have to do is jump in the van and we're gone.

I don't mean to sound blasé, because inside, I'm all giddy and excited to go. To know we are helping build a safe, secure home for a poor family is a great feeling. One we would love to share with anyone who would like to help change lives, one family at a time.

But I warn you, you WILL be



### Out Back

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changed as well. You never come back the same person you went.

One day the television was on, for noise mostly, when I overheard what was probably a commercial. A guy approached a girl and said, "Do you know how much a polar bear weighs?"

She said, "No. How much does a polar bear weigh?"

He said, "Enough to break the ice. Hi. My name's Bill. What's yours?"

Now, that was a pretty good pickup line. Almost as good as one used on me ages ago — back in "the day." I was out with some girlfriends after work. We were at a table in a nice lounge when this guy approached. Don't remember his name, but I'll

never forget the line: "You look just like my third wife." Rather smugly, I replied, "Really? And how many times have you been married." Without missing a beat he said, "Two."

Back then, I was known as the Queen of Snappy Comebacks. So, I said, "Well, that sounds like a proposal to me. My club has rented a party boat Saturday night. Why don't you come and we can have the captain marry us at sea."

Wouldn't you know it. He called my bluff and showed up. My only out was to tell him the captain said we had to be in international waters (we were on a land-locked lake) so he couldn't perform a wedding.

Whew! Dodged that one. Besides, look at what I would have missed.

## Grant paying to duplicate service

To the Editor:  
I was invited to testify before the U.S. House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Communications and Technology. The hearing was the first step for the new Congress to take a closer look at how broadband money was distributed under the economic stimulus plan.

There are members of Congress who believe that some of the money was given without appropriate consideration for businesses like Eagle Communications, which are then forced to compete against government funding.

Here is what you need to know and what has not been reported:

Eagle Communications does not have any conflict with Rural Telephone-NexTech or Government Recovery Act Taxpayer funds. The objective of Recovery Act taxpayer funding was to provide more broadband in rural communities.

We know there are places in Kansas with inadequate broadband Internet service.

Eagle Communications is not afraid of fair competition; we already compete every day.

Yes, Eagle Communications did apply for a government grant. However, Eagle's applications fo-

cus on serving areas where there were truly unserved customers. One example would be our application for a grant in Cheyenne County that would have provided wireless services to rural customers near St. Francis. This is significantly different than NexTech's application that included overbuilding (building additional broadband services where they already exist) in Hays. Eagle did not apply for a loan or grant in Ellis County or Hays. That area is already well served, as explained in a report by the Kansas Corporation Commission.

The KCC report explains that in Cheyenne County, about 60 percent of households have access to broadband Internet. (This is where Eagle wanted to build, and our application was turned down.) We applied in other unserved areas in addition to Cheyenne County.

The report also states that 99.99 percent of homes in Ellis County have access to broadband Internet coverage. (Where NexTech wants to build, and their application was approved.)

Hays, by definition, is not a rural community; Hays and Ellis County already have access to superior broadband service in comparison to other parts of the state of Kansas — as evidenced by the KCC report. Eagle Communications, ATT and Rural Telephone have invested considerable funds to bring Ellis County this superior service. Now the Rural Utilities Service has given taxpayer funds to a single one of those already existing providers — Rural Telephone/NexTech.

Prior to Recovery Act funding being approved, there were calls to wait until a national broadband map is done — and that map is near completion. The worry was that funds would be allocated to areas where service already exists — and it happened here. If a business is listed in the yellow pages, the government probably should not be in that business. I think most taxpayers would agree.

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