

# Putting limits on filibusters

We'd like to congratulate the U.S. Senate on getting bipartisan support for reforming the filibuster.

A filibuster is a political obstruction tactic in which a piece of legislation can be blocked by a senator or series of senators speaking continuously on any topic they choose. They keep the floor as long as they hold the floor, and no other business can be conducted as long as they do. Only a two-thirds majority vote can put it to an end. For many years, neither party has held enough of a majority to end a filibuster on its own.

The filibuster actually dates back to ancient Rome, where it was used to obstruct Julius Caesar, though perhaps that is a more positive example, as Caesar's imperial ambitions needed obstructing.

In the Senate, it is more often used as a threat so legislation that the minority doesn't support will never come to the floor.

Last week, Democrats and Republicans came together and approved new language for Senate rules that will, if passed, avoid filibusters. The Democrats pushed for broader reforms, such as changing the two-thirds majority rule to a simple 51 out of 100 majority. Republicans argued that as the minority party, the filibuster was the only thing granting them leverage. What came out of the leadership's negotiations was a compromise.

The measures includes shortening the time delay for cloture motions to be filed. Another provision says that if amendments offered aren't relevant to the legislation at hand, that majority vote isn't required to end a filibuster. It also limits debate on some presidential nominations.

This kind of bipartisan compromise is an encouraging sign from a government that has been mired in obstructionism for decades. On Monday there was more encouraging news, that a bipartisan group in the Senate got together and created a framework for how they want to handle immigration reform for the coming year.

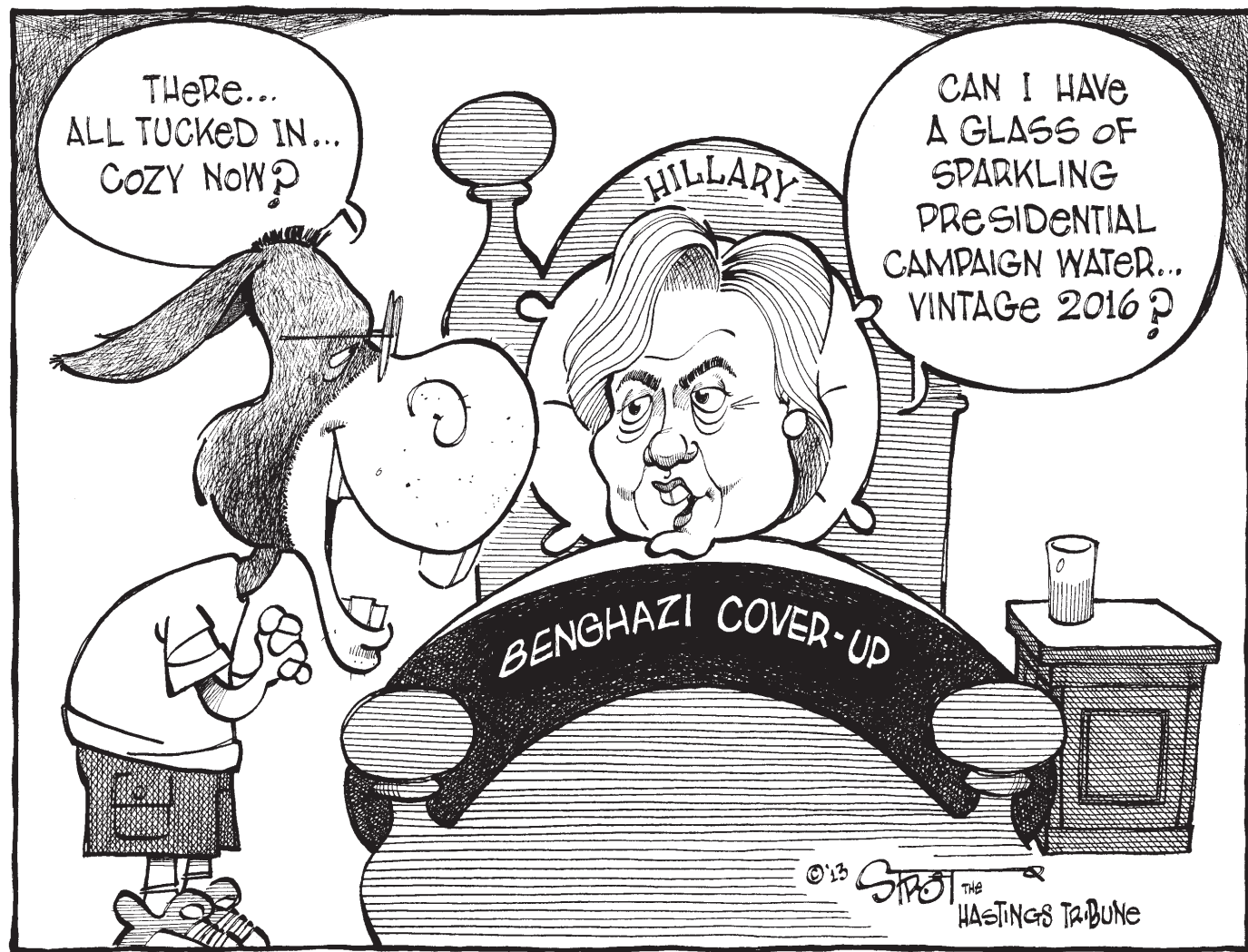
Not every senator is happy with these deals, of course. But isn't that the definition of a compromise, when no one goes home entirely happy, but something still gets accomplished?

Politicians always talk about ending the political gridlock in Washington. Perhaps this is finally a step in the right direction. Perhaps our leaders have finally got the message. Divided government is good, unless the important work goes by the wayside while the two sides fight. We can only hope they will keep up the good work.

-Kevin Bottrell

### Simple tricks and nonsense

Kevin Bottrell



# In the spirit of communication

If you get Christmas/New Year's newsletters mailed before Jan. 31 they still count, don't they?

Every year Jim and I say, "We ought to write one of those family newsletters for our Christmas cards." And every year we don't do it. I enjoy getting newsletters from our friends, so I thought they might like to receive the same from us. We have many long-distance friends and family. Some we only hear from at Christmas.

This year, I actually wrote the letter. After a few re-writes we were both satisfied with its content... Newsy, but not too many details. You know, just hit the highlights.

But here's where I got bogged down. The technical side. I didn't know how to get the picture on my desktop to the letter, then how to get it to print on the cute stationery I've been saving for years. We have three printers in our office. Do you think I could get the letter to print on any of them. The letter has been written for weeks and I felt time slipping away.

I swallowed my pride and made a phone call to my technical support staff (son James). A push of a button here, a "drag" there and soon everything was ready. The letters are printed and neatly stacked on the dining room table waiting to be addressed and mailed. Now comes the real test. Taking

## Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



that address book and putting pen to paper. Because, even though I wrote a newsletter, I still hear my mother's voice saying, "You can't send cards with just your name signed at the bottom. You have to write a little something." So it may take me until next December, but everyone who sent me a card is going to get one back and it will have a personal note, too.

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Our lives are a series of peaks and valleys. A phone call from the ministry group we go to Mexico with informed us they wouldn't be needing our services in Juarez or Acuna this March. We have led a team in March every year for the past 10 years. That was a valley.

The peak soon followed when the Casas por Cristo coordinator said, "We have something else for you two. How would you like to go to Guatemala and Jim can train two teams in how to lead teams and how to build the house."

Our reply was an instant, "Yes!"

followed by, "But we've never built the kind of house you build in Guatemala."

"That's OK," said the coordinator, "We know Jim can figure it out."

So Jim's in charge of the physical stuff, I am in charge of getting us there. I Googled what kind of immunizations we need to go and the list is lengthy. We need to get started soon. I have a million other questions for the Casas por Cristo staff. Like, "Is there any plumbing/electricity in the town where we will be staying? Do we need mosquito netting? Will anyone meet us at the airport? Does anyone speak English. Will it be hot or cold? Will I be able to do laundry there? Will my curling iron work?" You know all the important things.

My Spanish is progressing (slowly), but I am no where near able to communicate beyond the basics. I can say hello and good-bye; ask someone how they are; ask where the bathroom is (which might be a moot point, anyway); ask how much something costs; and I can ask how to say something in Spanish. Will that get me by? Don't know. But I have six weeks to kick my language lessons into high gear.

So if I say "Hola," instead of "Hello," to you. Forgive me. I'm just trying to get into the spirit of the adventure.

Call Dana for your next ad. 877-3361!

### Letter to the editor

Once again the norton county judicial system has dumbfounded me. This time, a man pled not guilty to a domestic abuse charge. He was found guilty. He was sentenced to FIVE DAYS in jail, which was suspended, and was NOT given any court fines or fees! What did he get? Once again the victim got the short end of the justice stick.

I realize the jails are overcrowded, but this decision very blatantly sends the message that domestic abuse is acceptable in Norton County. So what if the jails are full. Bring in some sleeping bags! Maybe if the lawbreakers in this county had to suffer a little in jail, there would not be so much crime and therefore, not so much overcrowding. What the heck is wrong with punishing lawbreakers?

Pat Ambrosier  
Almena



# Remember farmers, Kansas is your customer

While food safety will always be the cornerstone of our food production process, allegiance is making inroads into why and where consumers buy their products.

Sure, the majority of today's shoppers enjoys and often takes for granted the expanded menu in supermarkets. They look forward to shopping in a meat case filled with dozens of new cuts, pre-packaged, oven-ready, custom portioned, "natural" and pre-cooked products. They can't wait to get their mitts on the marinades, dry rubs, cooking bags and other specialty items designed for time strapped, two-income families.

There's another growing group of consumers who are purchasing products based on trust and nostalgia. This notion of nostalgia harkens back to the good old days - a time when events and lives were perceived as simpler, more wholesome, just downright better.

Many in this new group of consumers want to share in the story behind the product they are buying. They wish to establish a direct link and cultivate a relationship with the producer who provides them with tomatoes, asparagus, corn or their leg of lamb for the upcoming holiday.

There are a fair number of shoppers who yearn to develop a trust with producers who they believe will

## Insight

John Schlageck



provide them with a quality, consistent wholesome product.

Tapping into this ever-changing consumer landscape, today's food producer - especially those located near large-population, urban areas - must not miss the opportunity to reach the hearts, minds and stomachs of consumers who feel strongly about their food.

Some consumer-savvy food growers are already honed in on this concept. They've retooled their farming operation from a conventional commodities-only business to one that includes pick-your-own sweet corn, pumpkins, asparagus, tomatoes and strawberries. They're giving people what they want.

Others now provide home deliveries of fresh produce and sell their produce at local farmers' markets. Still others have added a corn maze, day-on-the-farm activities, ice-cream socials and chuck-wagon cookouts for everyone from school-aged kids to wedding

rehearsal parties.

This new direction in farming is being driven by farmers and ranchers who are attempting to be less dependent on cheap land and vast acreage. These pioneers are tapping into the population surge and wealth of consumers who shop online, drive a couple cars including a SUV and don't mind paying a premium for the food they feed their families.

Another common element of this non-traditional farmer is the belief that this shift in production style may not make them rich, but will keep them out in the open spaces, running their own business and doing what they enjoy. A large percentage of those willing to try something new are younger farmers. In many cases, a young farmer is often considered someone who has yet to reach the half-century mark.

For some traditional farming became too expensive. Others decided traditional farming was no longer worth the effort. Whatever the reason, any farmer will tell you that farming is a challenging vocation. Still most would agree they are glad they bought their land, and glad they're doing what they enjoy.

No doubt, more and more farmers will be looking at new strategies. Those who are determined to stay in this business of agriculture will have to find innovative ways to farm.

# THE NORTON TELEGRAM

E-mail: nortontelegram@nwkansas.com

OFFICE HOURS:  
8 a.m.- 5:30 p.m. Mon.-Thur.  
8 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Friday  
Phone: (785) 877-3361  
Fax: (785) 877-3732

### STAFF

Dana Paxton..... General Manager  
Advertising Director/Managing Editor  
email: dpaxton@nwkansas.com  
Dick Boyd..... Blue Jay Sports  
nortontelegram@nwkansas.com  
Michael Stephens..... Reporter  
Society Editor/Area Sports  
mstephens@nwkansas.com  
Vicki Henderson..... Computer Production  
Marcia Shelton..... Office Manager

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