

The limits of free speech

“I may not agree with what you say, but I will defend your right to say it,” is a superficial creed. Speech has limitations. We cannot yell “Fire!” in a crowded theater – unless there is one. And we have laws that provide legal remedy for speech that is slanderous (oral) or libelous (written). But in this age of off-the-cuff, shoot-first, aim-later social media communication, there is another constraint that is not codified in law, but to which we must pay attention. We may have “freedom of speech,” but we do not have freedom from consequences. For example, a teenager may decide to tell parents “%#*&^”! But if the teenager is over 18, the parents can set his or her suitcase on the front steps and wave goodbye. You must consider your audience. As a teacher, it is my responsibility to communicate effectively with my students. It is not enough for me to know what I mean. I must select words so that my students, my audience, will accurately understand what I mean. Communication is the paradigm – the central core – of teaching. As a supervisor, I will flunk a student teacher who cannot refine their message for effective and accurate communication with students. When a speaker broadcasts their message openly on social media, the task becomes even more complex, but the responsibility still resides with the speaker. Literary theorist and legal scholar Stanley Fish wrote a book titled: “There’s No Such Thing as Free Speech ... and It’s a Good Thing, Too.” He explains how we must be constrained in what we say. And as his title states, “it is a good thing, too.” It is not just the laws that keep us civil, but the consequences of our speech. Simply, within the constraints of libel, slander, immediate endangerment, inciting to riot, and divulging how to build a nuclear bomb, we can have freedom of speech. But we are not free from its consequences.

I cannot follow some university colleagues into wholesale defense of a recent controversial tweet on guns and gun control because I believe that the message was not worthy of defense. It was more of an emotional outburst than a communication of valuable substance. All “heat,” no “light.” And no “dignity.” It deserved to be ignored. Instead, the Kansas Board of Regents adopted bad policy. And in this national and state political climate, it might even threaten professors’ sabbaticals and tenure. With rights come responsibilities. My speech and debate teacher, Otis Aggertt, explained it clearly when he wrote “A Hippocratic Oath for Speakers.” “Inasmuch as membership in society requires concern for ethics, the instrument of public speaking has incalculable power over the minds and hearts of humans, and engaging in public speaking demands corresponding concern for ethical standards. “I, therefore, affirm that as a public speaker, I will so evaluate the techniques of my art by the measure of my purposes and receptivity of my audience as to effect practical limitations on what I say; “I will remember at all times the inherent dignity of humans, for that is more important than any other concern; and I will strive when speaking publicly to be adequately informed, for I have no right to disseminate ignorance; to think straight, for I have no right to promote confusion; to be fully honest both in letter and spirit, and to be socially responsible as I bear in mind the welfare of those who may be affected by my speaking.” But neither can I condone the over-the-top reaction of the Regents, who have embraced ill-advised guidelines that stifle responsible criticism in the name of collegiality. There are many other board policies in bad need of critical input and discussion. At the university level, both faculty and students should have learned that no issue is black-and-white – that no “principles” are absolute. A polarized cat fight between faculty and regents could overshadow the other serious problems that the board needs to address. One mission of universities should be to develop young ladies and gentlemen. Hopefully the faculty and the board can address this issue as ladies and gentlemen as well. This issue is not black-and-white.

John Richard Schrock



Dust, cats and duty, just another day

Sunday started out to be a beautiful day. Just like the day before, the temperature was mild, requiring only a jacket. And if you were physically active, even that became too much and was quickly removed. But this is Kansas and we should have known things were gonna change. Driving home Sunday afternoon from chapel services at the prison we saw a haze in the northwestern sky. At first, we wondered if it was smoke or dust. As we came closer, it became evident that it was a dust storm. We were driving towards a wall of dirt and it was blowing towards us. When we met, it was with such force that the wind actually rocked the vehicle. The dust was so thick you couldn’t see 50 feet in front of you and we had to drive with the headlights on. Those last five miles were a little scary wondering who might be coming at you from the front, but more worried about who might be driving too fast and coming at you from the rear. Home looked pretty good as we made the dash from the car to house in record time.

Out Back
Carolyn Plotts



Lord....we sure could use a little rain down here, please. At least enough to settle the dust. I sure hate to see our topsoil being deposited somewhere down in Oklahoma. -ob- Against my better judgment our cat family ranks have gone back up to three. We had been getting along so well with only Bootsie. But then, our neighbors to the north of us decided to leave town. Unannounced. In the middle of the night. Guess what else they left? Two cats. One is an old friend, Tomas, who we met a couple of years ago and the other is a black cat with a little white “bib” under his chin. I asked my young

friend, Sydney, what we should name him and she suggested “Barry.” However, when Jim took him to the vet to be checked out and to begin his shots he was asked for the cat’s name. I guess he missed my conversation with Sydney about Barry, so when I told him the name he said, “Oh, like Blackberry.” Ri-i-i-ght. Berry it is. -ob- I’m a little disappointed. I had been summoned for jury duty this week and I was anticipating it. It was doubtful that I would have been selected because of my affiliation with the newspaper, but I was eager to serve. I have been called for duty two other times and never picked. The letter from the judge accompanying the summons advised potential jurors that the parties might settle out of court. A call last week from the clerk of the court’s office informed me that that is what happened. No trial for me. That’s life. Always the bridesmaid, never the bride.

As consumers, the choice is up to you

Do organically produced foods have higher nutritional value? According to international, national and regional research studies the nutritional value of organic crops compared to conventional crops reveals little if any differences. Colorado State University (CSU) researchers compared vitamin content of organically and conventionally grown vegetables (carrots and broccoli). They found no statistically significant differences. Other research from CSU focused on growing potatoes using four different farming techniques under the same growing conditions: an intensive high-chemical system; a moderate conventional system; customary organic farming and virgin organic production. Nine minerals and seven vitamins were analyzed and no clear differences were discovered. Another U.S. study found more soluble iron in conventionally grown spinach but the proportion of the soluble iron available to the consumer’s system was somewhat higher for both spinach and peppers grown with compost and manure. In overseas studies, Norwegian research found conventionally grown carrots contained more beta-carotene, more magnesium and more manga-

Insight
John Schlageck



nese. The organic carrots had more aluminum. When carrots of the same variety were compared, the only difference was a higher level of carotenoids in the conventionally grown carrots. A German study discovered lower levels of nitrate in carrots, beets and potatoes grown with manure but the differences were minute under good storage conditions. Stressful storage conditions enhanced the difference. Consumers can conclude from such findings that people who do not buy organically grown fruits and vegetables can find equally good products with equal nutrition at supermarkets and roadside stands. It also means people who wish to eat organically grown fruits and vegetables should do so. Bottom line – differing farming systems produce virtually no difference in the nutritional value of the crops. The variety, or strain, of the carrots and potatoes grown appears to have a bigger impact on their nutrient value than or-

ganic production methods. It’s no secret, plant breeders have long advocated that fruits, vegetables and grains require three main nutrients – nitrogen, phosphate potash and trace minerals in varying amounts according to the plant species. If a plant is sorely lacking in one of these nutrients, it will not grow. If it has access to these nutrients, it will grow into the crop its heredity determines and will pass along the nutrients its heredity intends. Translation – for a healthy diet eat plenty of fruit and vegetables each day, regardless of how they were grown. Doing so will probably mean a person eats more fiber and that is healthy. It also means less room for fatty foods that are one of the major contributions to poor health. Eating five fruits and vegetables per day reduces our risk for heart disease and cancer. Researchers tell us this health-enhancing effect is derived from the high levels of antioxidant chemicals in the fruits and vegetables. So much of this research on conventional versus organically grown food has demonstrated little nutritional differences. In our society consumers have a choice. It is an individual decision. The choice is yours.

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Remember there is no charge for rendering a Thumbs Up. Thumbs Up are meant to give recognition for a positive person or event in the community. Also remember all Letters to the Editor must be signed.

Thumbs up to Joan Bolt for helping with the Knights of Columbus Free Throw contest held on Jan. 19. Called in.