

Other Viewpoints



Biotech crops offer water-saving option

The lingering drought has a far-reaching toll, especially in the alarming drain on the region's irreplaceable source of water, the Ogallala Aquifer.

Farmers in this part of the country rely heavily on irrigation for crops – corn, in particular – that depend on water to grow and thrive.

So, hearing the latest on a new variety of corn that would demand less water no doubt piqued the interest of local and area farmers weary of battling arid conditions that prey on crops.

Seed giant Monsanto Co. has developed the first government-approved biotech crop designed to deal with drought. When combined with improved agricultural practices, the new corn could help farmers in drought-stricken Plains states where production without irrigation falls well below the national average.

Corn is a crop that requires significant water, and a proliferation of ethanol plants that utilize corn promises to consume even more of the aquifer's water supply. Drought-tolerant corn could help meet the sharp increase in demand for the grain used to make both food and fuel.

The corn genetically engineered to resist drought has been deemed safe by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. The department's goal is to streamline its process and cut in half the average of three years needed to approve biotech crops that would give farmers some encouraging options.

And time is of the essence. Natural recharge cannot keep up with the withdrawal of the Ogallala's groundwater for irrigation, ethanol and other uses. Not even close.

New crop varieties offer one strategy to save water. Recent legislation to encourage savings by water rights holders, and other steps toward better water conservation practices still are needed to save the aquifer.

Participants in a recent Ogallala Aquifer Project Conference in Garden City discussed ways to strike the proper balance in maintaining farm productivity – the engine of the regional economy – while saving the precious water supply.

While far from a cure-all for a problem that must be attacked from many angles, the new corn could bring some relief at a time every possible attempt to reduce water use would help.

— *The Garden City Telegram, via the Associated Press*

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THE PARTING GIFT.

Research helps farmers 'from the heart'

Phillips County farmer Doug Zillinger participated in one of the first-ever research studies to determine energy expenditure and heart rate responses achieved during common farming tasks. In case you're wondering, that's academia speak for how hard Zillinger worked and how fast his ticker beat while doing day-to-day work on the farm.

As part of the 30-minute test, Zillinger loaded 10 square bales onto a flatbed truck, dug post holes by hand, filled eight hopper boxes (meant to simulate loading a planter) with 50 pound bags of seed two times and shoveled 100 pounds of feed into a wheelbarrow during a three-minute period. In between each task, the Phillips County farmer took a brief rest while walking around the machine building two times.

Throughout these tasks, Zillinger was outfitted with a portable oxygen-consumption mask and a pack that was strapped to his back. Researchers from the Baylor Heart and Vascular Hospital in Dallas and Texas Woman's University in Denton recorded specific data on Zillinger's physical condition before, during and after the simulated farm activities. This event was on March 7 at the North Agronomy Farm at Kansas State University.

"The purpose of this study was to measure how high heart rates get during typical tasks that both farmers and ranchers would do on any given day," says Shannon Jordan, a K-State alumni and now a researcher at Texas Woman's University. "Along with this, we



John Schlageck

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measured energy expenditure to find out how high a 'workload' a person performing these tasks must be able to reach."

This will allow the Texas researchers to make specific guidelines to prepare farmers and ranchers for a safe return to their physically demanding work environment. These guidelines will be published in a scientific clinical journal so staff in cardiac rehab units will have reference criteria when trying to rehabilitate farmers and ranchers in cardiac rehab.

"Our goal is to help people get back in shape to return to work as opposed to having to hire extra workers on the farm or having to retire and sell the farm," Jordan explains.

To date, the Texas researchers have conducted three other occupational studies for firefighters, police officers and automotive technicians. And while the research is new, some trends are already emerging.

"With a bit of age and experience we're finding the older population is a bit more efficient at doing these tasks than the younger people," she says. "They seem to do it with a bit more ease and know the tricks of the trades."

Being chair of Kansas Farm Bureau's Promotion and Ag Education Committee, Zillinger traveled more than three hours to participate in the maiden voyage of this program for farmers and ranchers.

"Anything I can do to help those in our industry – that's why I'm here today," he says.

The Phillips County producer believes the tests were realistic and much like tasks farmers and stockmen would normally do in bite-sized units on the farm. He especially appreciated the helpful hints supplied at the end of the research project.

"They were things I already knew but so hard to do," Zillinger says.

The list included healthy eating habits to accompany the everyday manual labor on the farm like smaller portions at mealtime, eating less processed food, less sodium and eliminating carbonated beverages like sodas.

"I'm at the right age (near 60) to make these changes and have a long productive life ahead of me," Zillinger says. "My grandparents lived to be in their 80s, Dad's in his 80s, I sometimes wonder if I'll live that long – I've got to and it's up to me."

He hopes to help other ag producers become aware of this life-saving study and possibly incorporate it in his farm.

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm near Seguin, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

Personal faith above political statements

To the Editor:

I respond to the March 14 column by U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp, "Protection of Rights Applies to Everyone," in which Huelskamp accuses the Obama administration of going, "guns-a-blazing," against religion and the Constitution.

First, Huelskamp calls into question the sincerity of Secretary Kathleen Sebelius' Catholic faith. How dare he! Apparently, he has missed the part of the Bible that says, "Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls..." (Romans 14:4)

The statement of faith for a Catholic is the Nicene Creed (with the filioque), not the political agenda of the theocratic Republican party. The Creed contains no political statements. The Bible also is silent on the U.S. Constitution. Therefore, what is there to say that a Catholic must, or must not, have, or not have, any political ideology at all, let alone any specific political ideology? Certainly not Rep. Huelskamp and the Republican party.

Article 6 of the U.S. Constitution states: "No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office." Article 6 also declares that the Constitution itself, along with federal law pursuant to the Constitution and properly ratified treaties, make up the "Supreme Law of the Land," and not the Bible or any other religious text. Article 11 of the Tripoli Treaty of 1796, signed by President Thomas Jefferson after receiving unanimous Senate approval, states, "the government of the United States of American is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion."

In short: This is not, never has been and, in my opinion, never should be, a Christian nation. Religious testing is forbidden and unconstitutional. Rep. Huelskamp's religious testing



Free Press Letter Drop

• Our readers sound off

of Secretary Sebelius is a violation of the supreme law of the land. He should leave Sebelius' practice of Catholicism up to her, God and the Catholic church. It is the constitutional, as well as the biblical, action to take.

As for the requirement that "religious" employers, hospitals and universities provide insurance coverage for women's health-care services: Do those institutions employ from and provide services to the general public outside of their religious beliefs? Do they accept government money? Yes to all. Then they can, and should, provide coverage for all standard, legal medical procedures and services or make the answers to all the questions asked here to be "No." Hospitals and universities that solicit services from the public and accept government money are not churches and should not receive the exemptions of churches.

As for the lament that military chaplains have been gagged: Do they wear the uniform of the U.S.? Have they received commissions as officers? Do they collect the pay and benefits associated with their ranks? Yes. Then they can, and should, follow orders like any other soldier. Any chaplain who wishes to preach his politics from the pulpit should first resign his commission and move to a civilian pulpit.

Huelskamp and his fellow Republican theocrats are the ones who are assaulting the Con-

stitution and religious liberty, "Congress shall pass no law..." the First Amendment says. It doesn't need to if employers pass the law instead. Where is the concern for the religious liberty of the employee? What about the religious liberty of the soldier who desires to practice his or her faith without being bombarded by political speeches from the pulpit? Apparently, Huelskamp doesn't care about the individual soldier or employee.

Furthermore, what is there to prevent any employer from claiming affiliation with idiot faith healers and refusing to provide any type of medical coverage at all? Not only are Republican theocrats woefully ignorant of both the Bible they wish to impose (their interpretation of) upon others and the Constitution, which they are all too eager to shred, but they are incredibly short sighted as well.

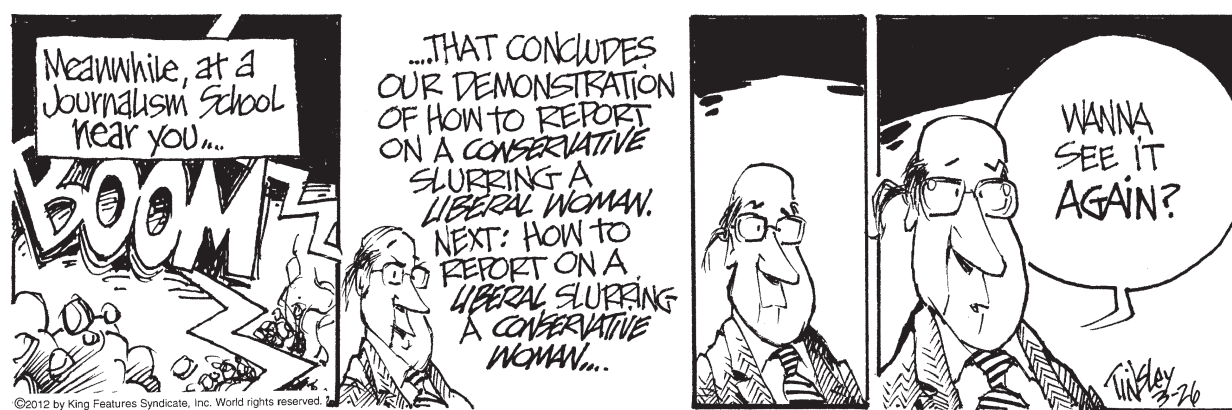
Space fails me to elaborate on many other Republican assaults on the Constitution and liberty, religious or otherwise. The bottom line though, is that Rep. Huelskamp, and other Republican theocrats are swift to speak of individual rights, liberties and freedoms, but only the ones that they think you should have (depending on who you are). They talk limitations of government power, but only the ones that they think there should be. They pervert the Gospel of Jesus Christ by attempting to reduce it from a life to be lived and a gift to be shared to a political agenda and a legislative mandate.

They display contempt and hatred for the Constitution as they attempt to replace it with (their interpretation of) the Bible. May they receive grace and mercy. May we, the people, have elected officials who actually support the Constitution and liberty.

Nicholas A.F. Robb, Colby

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



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