

Other Viewpoints

Shots from air simply appalling

Which is more unbelievable: that a state trooper in Texas decided to stop a fleeing pickup by shooting at it from a helicopter, even though the truck was crammed with people, or that nothing in the official policies of the trooper's employer, the Texas Department of Public Safety, forbids such lethal recklessness?

Both statements are true, and two men are dead as a result. The shootings happened on Oct. 25 near rural La Joya, which is close to the border with Mexico. The trooper allegedly thought the truck was running drugs. It was carrying immigrant Guatemalans, including the two young men – Jose Leonardo Cojumar, 32, and Marcos Antonio Castro Estrada, 29 – who were hiding with several others under a blanket in the bed of the truck. The director of the Guatemalan Consulate in nearby McAllen, Alba Caceres, said Mr. Cojumar had entered the country to earn money to pay for surgery for his 11-year-old son.

As appalling as the shootings were, a state representative who leads the committee overseeing the Department of Public Safety insisted they were no big deal and not worth a hearing or policy review.

"It's unfortunate some people died," the lawmaker, Sid Miller, told the Associated Press, "but I guess the lesson is: don't be running from the law. So there will be no hearing."

Thankfully, others disagree. The prosecutor in Hidalgo County said he would seek a grand jury investigation. State officials are conducting inquiries and have asked the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division to do the same. And some state lawmakers want to rethink the agency's insanely permissive shooting-at-vehicles policy, bringing it into line with other states and the federal Border Patrol, which have stricter limits on when – and at what – officers may shoot.

Abolishing the policy is the least that should emerge from this outrage. As Texas State Rep. Lon Burnam said, "Neither human trafficking nor drug trafficking deserves the death penalty without a trial."

– *The New York Times, via the Associated Press*

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Partisan division neither new nor evil

Two myths we hear a lot about:

Myth 1, that the partisan division we see in Washington (or Topeka) is a phenomenon of the 21st century.

It's not. In our history, it's probably more the norm than the exception.

Bitter partisanship goes back to the Founding Fathers. Only George Washington enjoyed nearly universal respect and support, and he fell into the partisan trap after leaving office.

In the bitter campaign of 1800, Thomas Jefferson finally defeated John Adams after a tie in the Electoral College and a stalemate in the House of Representatives. It's said that Adams left the White House in the night so he would not have to greet his one-time friend.

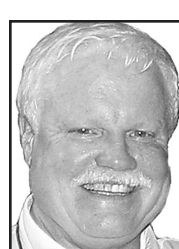
The two, both revered today among the Founding Fathers, had become bitter opponents through two long campaigns said to be filled with lies and slander. The only difference, it seems, is that today, lies and slander travel faster. Today, we have television and the Internet; then, they had the post office – on horseback.

American history is replete with tale after tale of partisanship, deadlock and woe. Finding times when the two major parties could work together may, in fact, be more difficult than finding times when they could not.

Myth 2, we would be better off if the parties got together and did something.

We would?

Problem is that they have done way too



Steve Haynes

• Along the Sappa

much.

Most of the time, we're better served when Congress does nothing.

Not today, though.

Having gotten us into the mess we are in, Congress needs to lead us out. That will require statesmanship, that most rare commodity. Not partisanship, the norm. And it will require long-term solutions, not the usual short-term patch.

The nation is about to be crushed under a mountain of debt. We cannot spend our way out of this crisis; that is the road to Greece.

We cannot tax our way out of it, either. That could lead to renewed recession, more unemployment, lower revenue and more deficits.

The federal government needs to learn to live within its means. Since it is borrowing right now roughly 40 cents of each dollar it spends, that is not going to be easy.

The budget needs to be cut until the government gets back to a sustainable level. Can't do that all at once, and it will require some judicious tax increases (Listening, Republicans?)

as well.

Cuts will have to be noticeable, though, and should include, where possible, whole programs. The government needs to stop trying to do everything and start focusing on its core mission. That includes Social Security, Medicare and other "entitlements." (Listening, Democrats? Senator Reid?)

While nearly everyone agrees that "something has to be done," nearly every voter benefits from one or more federal programs, tax breaks or entitlements. All will have to be on the block.

Forty percent deficits are not sustainable. This house of cards is going to collapse some day, and if we don't do something now, the crash will make 1929 look puny.

Can Congress and the president pull together to actually accomplish something?

Only if BOTH SIDES are willing to compromise and put together a package that will work. So far, both say they are willing to work on it, but the president has been quoted as saying the voters chose his way.

A narrow victory is not a mandate, however, and he has to deal with those Republicans the votes left in control of the House and still substantial in the Senate.

Still, you have to believe – and pray – that miracles are possible.

Steve Haynes is president of Nor'West Newspapers. When he has the time, he'd rather be reading a good book or casting a fly.

Veterans' battle continues at home

In recent months, our nation witnessed an intense campaign season. While elections and the campaigning that precede them are vitally important to our democracy, I can't help but be concerned that, amid the focus on endorsements, pundits and politics, we tend to lose sight of what is truly important.

The celebration of Veterans Day in the week following the election serves as a fitting reminder of where our priorities should be.

The service and sacrifice of our nation's veterans has protected the freedoms of our democracy and allowed us to live in the strongest, freest, greatest country in the world. Our service men and women don't sacrifice in the name of Republicans or Democrats; they put their lives at risk for the greater good and to ensure freedom and liberty for their children and grandchildren.

America's veterans have fought tyrants and terrorists to keep our country safe and secure. Yet even after they return home from war, veterans continue to fight battles. The unemployment rate for post-9/11 veterans remains at 10 percent – above the national average. Suicide rates are alarmingly high among them, accounting for one-fifth of all U.S. suicides.

Veterans in rural areas must travel long distances for health care they should be able to receive closer to home. And many must wait inordinately long periods of time for their benefits claims to be processed by the federal government.

Honoring those who served is about more than a single day – it is about keeping our promises to them. I serve on the Veterans Affairs Committee – first in the House of Representatives and now in the Senate – where I am committed to making certain our veterans have the services and resources they need to succeed.



U.S. Senator Jerry Moran

• Moran's Memo

To combat unemployment, I supported the Veterans Opportunity to Work to Hire Heroes Act passed last year. This bill offers tax incentives to businesses that hire veterans and expands veteran education and job training programs. I also sponsored the Military Commercial Driver's License Act, which that will improve the ability of veterans and service men and women to obtain commercial licenses, making them more employable once they return to civilian life.

For our rural veterans, I continue to champion Project ARCH (Access Received Closer to Home), an initiative I introduced to help veterans receive quality health care closer to home. It remains imperative that community-based outpatient clinics be properly staffed and equipped so veterans don't have to choose between living in the community they love and getting the quality care they deserve.

Washington must seek solutions to a truly life-or-death matter facing our veterans. Since 2001, more veterans have died by suicide than have been killed serving in Afghanistan. This year, the Army is averaging one suicide per day. Veterans struggling with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or Traumatic Brain Injury deserve help. That is why in September, the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee voted to move forward with S. 3340, the Mental Health Access to Care Act, designed to provide veterans with access to consistent, quality behavioral

health care.

No less concerning is the amount of time it takes for a veteran to begin receiving the benefits they were promised for their service. From disability compensation and pension benefits to education benefits and health appointments – even long-overdue medals – veterans who have sought the help of my office have waited more than one year to get answers. Making certain benefit claims are processed in a timely fashion continues to be one of my top priorities. I encourage any Kansan looking for assistance with Veterans Affairs issues to use my office's casework services by calling (785) 232-2605. You can also submit a casework request by visiting my website at www.moran.senate.gov.

It is a privilege to work on legislation that impacts the lives of veterans, and it is an even greater honor to meet them in person. Whether visiting with an Honor Flight veteran at the World War II Memorial, a Vietnam veteran at the local American Legion hall, a wounded warrior at Walter Reed Medical Center or a midshipman in the mess hall of the U.S. Naval Academy, I am always struck by the stories of their service – their courage, selflessness and belief in the values of our nation. Saying "thank you" never seems adequate.

The votes have been cast and the election is over, let us now follow the example of our veterans: work together, place the common good ahead of narrow interests and keep our promises. Together we can make certain the country they fought for remains strong for generations to come.

May God bless our servicemen and women, our veterans and the country we all love.

Jerry Moran of Hays is the junior U.S. senator from Kansas. To sign up for his weekly newsletter, go to moran.senate.gov.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

