

Other Viewpoints

First Amendment not always pretty

First-Amendment rights are fine, apparently, unless what you say is so controversial no one wants to be associated with it.

At least that's what David Guth, an associate professor of journalism at the University of Kansas, found last week in the wake of the Navy Yard shootings in Washington.

Guth issued a "tweet" on the web service Twitter reacting to the 13 deaths: "Blood is on the hands of the #NRA. Next time, let it be YOUR sons and daughters."

Not much happened until a website called CampusReform.org posted a story on Thursday, but that sparked an angry reaction across the country. Soon, pro-gun members of the Kansas Legislature were called for the professor's job, if not his head.

At KU, his bosses were behind him – way back, it seemed. Chancellor Bernadette Gray-Little announced that Professor Guth had been placed on administrative leave pending review, in order "to prevent disruptions to the learning environment."

Higher ups at the state Board of Regents issued a statement expressing "disgust and offense" at the tweet and backing the chancellor. Ann Brill, dean of the School of Journalism, said, "Professor Guth's views do not represent our school and we do not advocate violence against any group or individuals...."

"While the First Amendment allows anyone to express an opinion, that privilege is not absolute and must be balanced with the rights of others. That's vital to civil discourse."

So much for freedom of speech, or academic freedom. Gun-rights groups began calling for the professor to be fired. A National Rifle Association spokesman was quoted as calling the tweet "hate speech."

"It is disgusting and deplorable," he said. "It has no place in our society."

Mr. Guth himself was calmer. "It got a conversation going," he told the Associated Press. "That's exactly what I wanted to do."

He said he agreed with the university's action in light of e-mailed threats he and others at KU had received.

"It's in the best interest and peace of mind of our students that I remove myself from the situation and let cooler heads prevail," he told the AP. "I know what I meant. Unfortunately, this is a topic that generates more heat than light."

Dave Guth is not the kind of guy who'd want to see anyone shot. His was a comment sent off in haste. He could have chosen his words more carefully. That's a pitfall of Twitter.

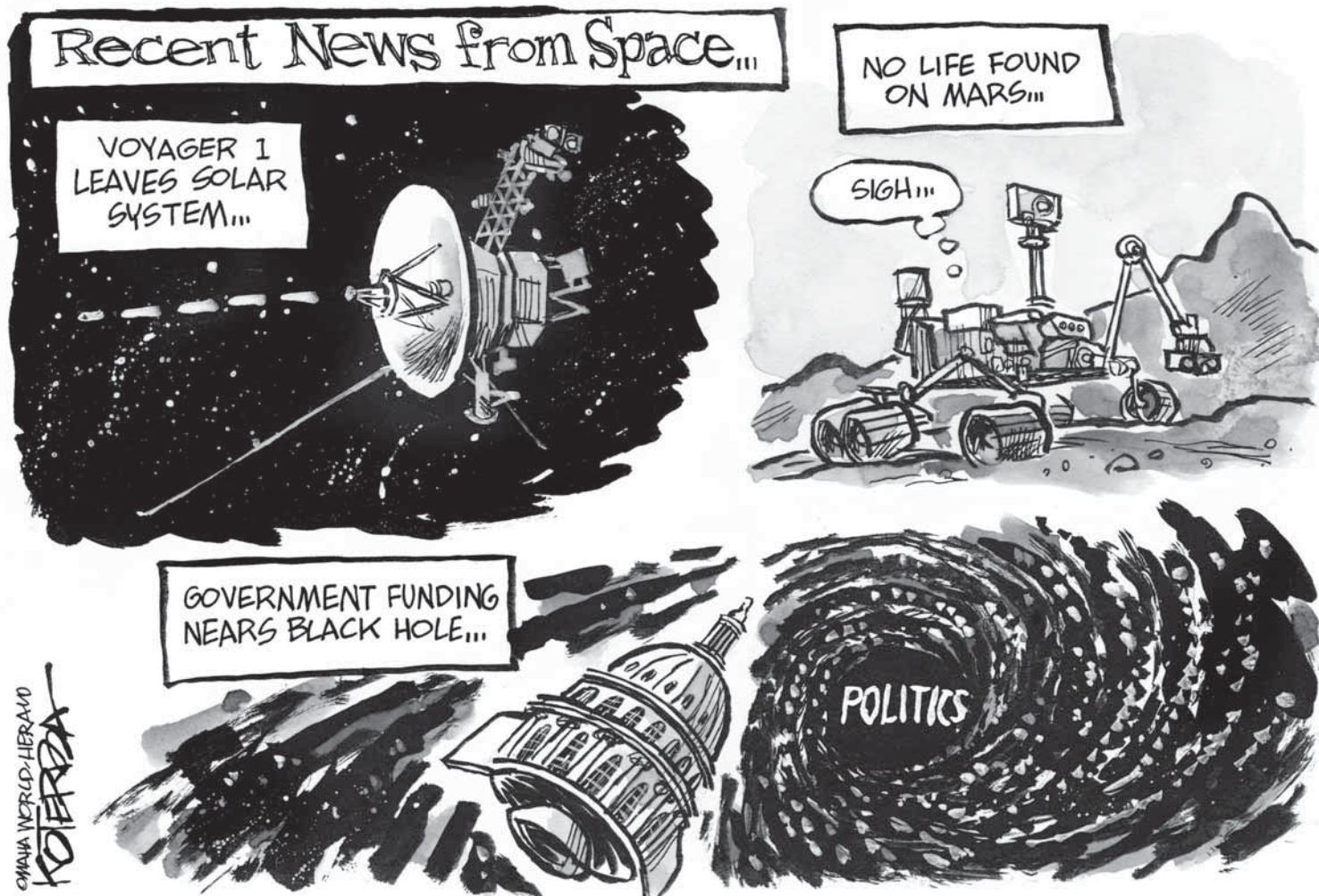
Many might agree with his argument that gun-rights groups would see things differently if some of these nut-case shootings involved someone they knew. It's not a sentiment this newspaper endorses, by the way, but is a legitimate argument.

The victim here, aside from Guth, is the First Amendment, and the free, open debate the Founders wanted to protect when they wrote "Congress shall make no law" abridging the right to free speech.

Those who love and protect the First know it can be lonely duty. The rights set out cover everyone, from the man next door to your minister to the teacher at your kid's school, you and us and all the rest, but that includes a lot of people many of us don't like, from pornographers to the Rev. Fred Phelps.

And if we mean it when we say we believe in free speech, then we have to defend all of them, not just pick and choose.

David Guth will find a lot of people in his corner, even if they don't buy his choice of words – or his ideas about the Second Amendment. – *Steve Haynes*



'Pumpkin' harvest a surprise treat

The tomatoes are late and small this year, but they've been interesting.

And it's not just me or just in Oberlin, where I live. It's all over the northwestern part of the state.

I've gone to shops, farmers' markets, groceries and just talked to people on the street. Those of us who are in the tomato-growing mode have been checking our vines all summer as we watered, fertilized and weeded. We didn't get many rewards until the end of August and the first part of September. Now the fruit of the vine – and I'm not talking grapes here – is coming along just fine, although people are still complaining about their tomatoes being smaller than usual.

Since we planted several cherry-type tomatoes, we weren't too concerned with smallness. The tiny orange variety we put in are just right for grab-and-go snacks, and we've been eating lots of them for quite a while.

The Early Girl variety produced a few tomatoes early on, then gave up for most of the summer when things got hot. Those vines are now turning out red tomatoes as if they knew their time was almost up. The tomatoes are smallish, but then Early Girls aren't ever large.

These are just smaller than usual, but we're getting a bunch of them, so what they lack in



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

size they're making up in numbers.

When we got back from Phoenix last week, the vines were loaded, and it took me most of an hour and a half to pick the tomatoes while Steve mowed the over-high lawn.

It took a long time to pick all the orange babies. Just finding all those little orange globs under that mass of greenery was a major chore. Then I had to pick the true cherry tomatoes. I didn't plant any, but a volunteer appeared in the side garden behind a hollyhock. I'm not in favor of killing anything unless there's a real good reason – like it's supper or it's poisonous – so I left it to grow if it could. It could, would and did, and is producing an amazing number of little red tomatoes.

The biggest surprise, however, was the pumpkins. I hadn't planted any pumpkins, but there they were under the mass of tomato vines. A closer inspection showed that they



CYNTHIA HAYNES/Oberlin Herald
Is it a pumpkin or is it a tomato? Only the gardener knows for sure.

were actually orange, pumpkin-shaped tomatoes. And it turned out that they were very tasty pumpkin-shaped tomatoes.

I'm not sure what variety they are, but they're fun, and when I put them next to a couple of small ornamental pumpkins, it was hard to determine which was which.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor'West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes@nwkans.com

Jail conditions seem unreasonable

To the Editor:

My name is Terrin Keith. I'm a Goodland resident and I'm currently in jail here in Thomas County on charges involving possession of methamphetamine, cocaine and heroin. I also have been charged with conspiracy to possess a narcotic drug, unlawful use of a communication facility and possession of drug paraphernalia, and all these charges currently pending.

I've been in here since June 30, when I was arrested. I have not had a court date since Aug. 13. I finally got a court date today and it's scheduled for Oct. 3. That's three months with no court date!

Something wrong with that picture, and yes I am a criminal I've been convicted before and sent to prison. The reason I'm writing to you is because I've heard and seen for my own eyes since I've been in now and in the past. I'm requesting a reporter with some brass to investigate these matters.

I've seen people getting pulled over and thrown in jail here for loads of marijuana, cocaine and methamphetamine. For instance, a guy got pulled over from California with four pounds of methamphetamine worth over \$100,000 out here. He went and got a lawyer (personally obtained), pays x amount of money and gets let go.

I also heard about some guys getting stopped with 400 pounds of marijuana. They paid x amount, got let go with six months' unsupervised probation and told not to come back through Kansas. I don't know the exact



Free Press Letter Drop

• Our readers sound off

names, but everything is public information at the courthouse, and it would take some investigation and research and some time to get an article on it.

The main thing I see and have experienced that, when it comes to selling and using drugs, the government, state and local law enforcement, don't seem to want to stop the flow or supply of these illegal drugs coming into and across the United States, because if they stop the supply, they wouldn't have victims like me, as I like to call it, who use the drugs to self medicate and have and addiction to these illegal narcotics.

I truly feel I am a victim of this corruption (and) misfeasance of a system they call the War on Drugs. If I wasn't from this area, I would get let go, but since I'm local, I'm the victim to keep the system running and keep the jails full and keep the money flowing.

This system destroys families and ruins individuals like me. I have a associate degree in telecommunications and had a good career.

And yet while the system ruins people's

lives, it lets the suppliers and distributors go with a slap on the wrist, and you know the suppliers pay big money to the lawyers. People like me – and I can speak for plenty other victims of this corrupt system – get court-appointed attorneys who go to dinner, play golf and go get drunk at the country club with the judges, district attorneys and other lawyers.

A court-appointed attorney doesn't want to fight for your allegedly legal rights under the Constitution because they don't want to ruin their friendships. In the end, they cop you out into taking a plea bargain because they are too lazy and don't want to do what a personally obtained lawyers can do.

I don't expect anything from this. I don't care if you use my name as a person who brought this to the public attention. Just show the public what is happening right before their eyes so that their kids don't become victims of this corruption.

I wish that the people who are suppose to protect and serve would be put on the spot about this corruption and the victims be recognized as well.

The bottom line to this corruption is MONEY! And that goes to prove there is something wrong with the justice system. Just think about all of the other counties in the United States that could be and probably are doing the same thing. There is a bigger picture to this problem, and it is being allowed for a reason.

Terrin Keith, Goodland
Resident of the Thomas County Jail

Write us

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topics which do not pertain to our area. Thank-yous from this area should be submitted to the Want Ad desk.

Letters will not be censored, but will be read and edited for form and style, clarity, length and legality. We will not publish attacks on private individuals or businesses not pertaining to a public issue.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



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