

from other pens...

Clinton's war vote just won't go away

Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton isn't about to admit making a mistake. She's calling it President Bush's mistake.

At issue is her repeated comment on the presidential campaign trail that if she knew then what she knows now, she would not have voted to allow President Bush to invade Iraq.

She was confronted with this "war vote" again in a stop over the weekend in New Hampshire. She never did answer the question, just danced around it.

Sounds like she was for the war before she suddenly decided she was against it. Call it a convenient "adjustment." Sounds an awful lot like Sen. John Kerry's comment, "I voted for it, before I voted against it" in his failed attempt to win the White House in 2004.

Sen. Clinton is heading down the same path.

All voters want her to do is admit she made a mistake when she cast her vote to go to war. She's stubborn, though, and that just isn't going to happen.

Sen. Clinton doesn't radiate warmth as a candidate for the world's top job. Her smile is forced, hardly natural. If you look at her closely, you see a cold person. Her years as first lady just might turn out to be a liability, not an asset.

Leaders admit mistakes. It took President Bush a long time to finally start admitting some of his. If the New York senator wants to govern this nation, she better confront those mistakes now and move on. If not, she's not going to lead anybody except husband Bill.

Strange how difficult it is for some people to simply say, "I made a mistake." —Tom Dreiling

where to write

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U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 2202 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715; Fax (202) 225-5124 e-mail address — jerry.moran@mail.house.gov

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The Goodland Star-News

(USPS No. 222-460. ISSN 0893-0562)

Member: Kansas Press Association

Inland Press Association Colorado Press Association

National Newspaper Association

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Published every Tuesday and Friday except the days observed for New Year's Day and Christmas Day, at 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

Periodicals postage paid at Goodland, Kan. 67735; entered at the Goodland, Kan., Post Office under the Act of Congress of March 8, 1878.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Goodland Star-News, 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

TELEPHONE: (785) 899-2338. Editorial e-mail: star-news@nwkans.com. Advertising questions can be sent to: goodlandads@nwkans.com

The Goodland Star-News assumes no liability for mistakes or omissions in advertising or failure to publish beyond the actual cost of the ad.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: In Sherman County and adjacent counties: three months, \$29; six months, \$46; 12 months, \$81. Out of area, weekly mailing of two issues: three months, \$39; six months, \$54; 12 months, \$89 (All tax included). Mailed individually each day: (call for a price).

Incorporating:

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County Herald

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STAR

Founded by Eric and
Roxie Yonkey

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Mike Keefe THE DENVER POST 02/16/07



Getting to those frozen Christmas lights

I told you last time, part of my task while Cynthia was gone was to de-Christmas the house.

I didn't go whole hog. The lights outside are buried in snow, and it may be April before we can find all of them. I did coil the extension cords up in case we need them, so the outdoor lights are off.

Maybe this weekend, I'll take down the lights on the aspen tree, which is bare since the ice melted. The ones on the bushes are frozen in.

Inside, I hauled everything to the basement, where it waits someone smarter than I to pack it into the storage tubs. I'm not allowed.

And I left the big tree in the living room, lights ablaze, for Cynthia's return. (She finally got to it two weeks later. She likes the lights.)

Then I had to deal with the Christmas cards. They were everywhere. She stuck the first two dozen in a cute Santa card holder she bought. His beard is made up of steel coils that hold cards; it hangs on a door.

That filled up and she started standing them upright on the mantle. Then the table. Then the little table. By New Year's, the living room was pretty well papered in them, but they were still coming in.

Cynthia said to throw them away, and I will, but I had to skim through them one last time. They represent a pile of memories, our whole lives passing before our eyes.

Both of us still get cards from a few high school friends we've kept in touch with. I wish there were more. I suppose I could look some of the others up.



steve
haynes

• along the sappa

Then there are relatives. Cynthia has lots of those, cousins from both sides with kids and grandkids and even great-grandkids. I just have my older cousin Mary Lou, who had three boys and six grandkids and sends pictures of all of them.

Yeah, I'm a little jealous, but she is older. My brothers and sisters, their card skills are hit or miss.

Cynthia gets cards from all sides of her family, her dad's nieces and nephews, and on her mom's side, a couple of cousins, including George the general. I've never actually met him, but there's a book about his career.

We still get a fair number of cards from old colleagues and neighbors in Kansas City, though we've been gone for 26 years. We both had our first "real" jobs there and all three of our kids were born in Wyandotte County.

There's Marietta, in Philly now, who was on the copy desk when I started at *The Star*, and Bob, maybe the smartest bureau chief I worked for. Marietta's retired, but Bob and his wife raise free-range organic turkeys in Maine. No kidding.

From Colorado, we get cards from both places we lived, Creede, up in the mountains, and Monte Vista, out in the great San Luis Val-

ley. We still see a lot of our friends there in the summer, but some have retired and moved and we keep up with them only through the Christmas letters.

Then there are new friends in Oberlin, and friends from our travels to newspaper conventions. That list seems to be growing. This year, we got a batch of cards from Nebraska people we rode the submarine with.

There were fancy cards, homemade cards, kid-made cards, printed cards and personal cards. Jim, a big Missouri fan, always has a tiger on his. A couple of women do their own artwork every year. About a third include a letter, some a short note.

The saddest cards — though we've gotten a couple that brought tears just with the stories they told — but most years, the saddest are the ones you don't get.

Some card comes back, marked "unable to forward." Maybe they moved. Maybe you'll never hear.

There seem to be more of those every year.

I count the stack, more than 65 and I'm sure some fell by the wayside. There're the Diddies, who lived next door when I was growing up. One from the national office. A birthday card for one of us from the bank. Even a card from the accountants.

At Christmas, they're all priceless, at least until the letters are read and the decorations come down.

Then it's out the door. There'll be another batch next year.

And a couple I may hide away.

Spanking the diaper



will
durst

• raging moderate

I don't know if you've heard of this, but it's exactly the kind of news that compels perfectly sane people to throw their arms up in the air, bang their foreheads against brick walls, and devote the rest of their lives to eating raw cookie dough out of plastic tubs in the basement while watching Jessica Fletcher overturn police incompetence on the Biography Channel.

And what the hell is "Murder, She Wrote" doing on the Biography Channel in the first place? But that diatribe is best left for another day.

Today's harangue concerns Democratic California Assemblywoman Sally Lieber and her plan to introduce a bill to the Legislature ("hello bill," "hello Legislature") that will make spanking a crime if the child is 3 or younger, labeling it misdemeanor child abuse. That's right, "spank your offspring, go to jail" is about to become law. "Neglect to stroke a pony, pay a fine" is on the docket for next year. And the "Polyester Banky Ban"? Still stuck in conference.

Now don't get me wrong, I understand Ms. Lieber's motivation. As a card-carrying member of the Mommy Party, she is unable to control her insatiable urge to protect us from ourselves. And she's seriously anti-child abuse. But then again, aren't we all? And that's a good thing. But come on. Do we really need a law here? Aren't most slaps to the bottom more of a Pavlovian-response training exercise anyway? Throw a tantrum, get a smack. Repeat until salivation occurs. Besides, unless it's full, spanking a diaper is like dropping a dime on a pillow. And when full, it's an exercise neither the spanker or spankee is likely to forget. Or, more importantly, anxious to duplicate.

I'm curious as to exactly how the honorable assemblywoman proposes parents discipline their darling nippers in the event they toss the toaster into the tropical fish tank. Perhaps a squirt gun to the back of the head, like you use to keep cats off of furniture? Or temporary exile to a terrarium upholstered in a fetching array of bubble wrap? Or replacing

terrifying thing, so infractions of the decibel meter will be financially penalized via a complex geometric formula involving frequency and frequency.

Once you cross the cherub protection threshold, a gibberish translator to protect the little angel's fragile sense of self esteem — easily compromised by formalized language — seems to be a logical leap. And picking up a wee bairn and thrusting them up towards the ceiling with extended arms or riding them on one's shoulders? Flagrant reinforcement of an overwhelming sense of powerlessness.

All I'm saying here is, it's a slippery slope, Ms. Lieber. One that involves hunching way over and whispering and squirt guns and rampant sheep shearing and grown men sucking on nipples. And who wants that?

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