

from our viewpoint...

# Iraq problem ties up U.S. Senate

Watching the overnight debate in the U.S. Senate on the Iraq resolution was interesting for a few hours, but after awhile everything began to be a repeat.

As the hours wore on, the discussions got more pointed. Republicans accused the Democrats of playing some sort of Hollywood game with the long debate. Democrats countering that it was a serious debate and an opportunity to show the people how the Senate is attempting to thrash through a tough decision.

When the dust settled the next morning, the effort failed 52 to 47, and the Democrats had gained only one vote toward the 60 needed to force a floor vote on the non binding resolution.

That is right, all that debate and the Senate was not even voting on the Iraq issue, but rather to change the rules to allow the non binding Iraq resolution to be brought to the floor for more debate and a final vote.

Speakers from both sides argued that America should pull out of Iraq now and let the people their sort out their internal struggles. On the other side were arguments that an immediate pull out would be devastating not only to Iraq but the whole region and play into the hands of the terrorists.

Sen. Joe Lieberman of Connecticut, who won election as an independent but before that was the Democratic vice presidential candidate with Al Gore in 2004, was one of the speakers. Lieberman usually sides with the Democrats to give them the majority in the Senate, but on this procedural vote he voted with the Republicans.

In his speech, Lieberman said he was not going to vote to end the Republican filibuster because it has been a good way to keep the Congress from speeding headlong into some disastrous mistakes.

As to the war, Lieberman said a hasty withdraw is like deciding to accept defeat, and he did not want to see the country do that.

Lieberman read part of a National Intelligence Estimate on the terrorist threat to the U.S. released Tuesday. U.S. experts said an American pullout would be cataclysmic for the region, and would bolster the role of al-Qaida.

The threat to the U.S. from these extremists continues, Lieberman said, citing a key judgment of the intelligence estimate: "We judge the U.S. Homeland will face a persistent and evolving terrorist threat over the next three years. The main threat comes from Islamic terrorist groups and cells, especially al-Qaida, driven by their undiminished intent to attack the Homeland and a continued effort by these terrorist groups to adapt and improve their capabilities...."

"We assess al-Qaida will probably seek to leverage the contacts and capabilities of al-Qaida in Iraq, its most visible and capable affiliate, and the only one known to have expressed a desire to attack the Homeland. In addition, we assess that its association with al-Qaida in Iraq helps al-Qaida to energize the broader Sunni extremist community, raise resources, and to recruit and indoctrinate operatives, including for Homeland attacks."

Lieberman said when the right answer comes for getting out of Iraq, he'll support it, but at this time the terrorist threat is too large to take that chance.

It is not a question of whether we will get out of Iraq, he said, but when and how long will it take. We won the war and Saddam Hussein is dead, he noted, but that was the easy part.

The debate may have changed just one vote, but it showcased the tough and slow checks-and-balances process the framers of the Constitution created more than 200 years ago. — Tom Betz



# Did you know horny toads can swim?

I'd never been swimming with a horny toad. Have you?

Heck, I didn't even know a horny toad could swim.

They're lizards, you know. Not amphibians like real toads.

How did I get involved in this strange adventure? you ask.

It was Cynthia's fault. If there's a reptile involved, you usually blame Cynthia.

We were out at my family's place at the lake. We decided to go swimming, and I'd gone down to the dock to check things out when I spotted the horny toad, or horned frog, as they call 'em in Fort Worth. He was hunting bugs out at the end of the dock. At least, I guess that's what he was doing.

I called Cynthia down to see, because she really likes reptiles, most of them anyway.

When it comes to scaly, slithering, creepies, Cynthia is not your usual girl.

When we first met in college, she kept a snake in her apartment. Her roommates never were quite sure about this, but one of them had a collie that caused a lot more trouble.

She used to "borrow" mice from the labs at KU to feed it, the snake, I mean, not the collie.

Since we've been married, she's kept snakes now and then and often catches them just to play with. Harmless ones like bull snakes and garter snakes, anyway. Never a cobra or a rattler.



**steve haynes**

• along the sappa

Once, while touring a new ski area with the developer, she caught a garter snake and held it all during the tour. The poor guy kept eyeing that snake, though he didn't say anything. He was pretty polite about it.

When we were in South Dakota this year, most of the women wanted to go to the gold shops. Not Cynthia.

She wanted to go to Reptile Gardens, where they have all sorts of snakes and alligators and other scaly on display.

"We went there when I was a kid," she said. "I've been waiting to go back for years."

I didn't hear any of the other women at the meeting volunteering to go with her.

Back to the lake.

By the time she got down to the dock, the little horny toad was hiding behind a big rock they use to hold cane poles down, just in case a fish bites on one overnight. I lifted the rock and she got to pet him, sort of.

When confronted by something bigger than it is, a horny toad puffs itself up and makes itself as big and spiny as it can, hoping that what-

ever is about to eat it will be afraid of choking. Probably, that works most of the time except for dogs. A dog will eat about anything, trust me.

Anyway, we got in the lake and swam out to a raft anchored offshore. We were watching the horny toad explore the dock when he went over the side, and then fell in.

Cynthia was afraid he'd drown, but I saw him paddling furiously for shore.

She insisted that I check to be sure he made it. I found him under the boathouse, all puffed up, horns, tail and nose pointed to the sky.

I'd guess no horny toad in history ever drowned, but still, I scooped him up in my hand and carried him to the shore end of the dock. He sat quietly in my palm and, in fact, it was a little tough to get him to leave.

A minute later, he was gone.

So now you know a horny toad can swim. I never knew that.

One thing you might notice here is that Cynthia, while all concerned about the little lizard's health, was not the one to go to the rescue. 'Twas me that had to catch it and set it free in safety.

That happens with snakes, too. She may like reptiles, but she's not much on catching them for herself.

Some things, I guess, are still a man's work.

# Is the pen mightier than the plow?

"Farming looks mighty easy when your plow is a pencil and you're a thousand miles from a corn field."

President Eisenhower's words are a fitting reminder as Congress works to draft a farm bill that will have lasting effects on the livelihoods of the farmers and rural communities I represent. As the farm-bill debate takes shape in Washington, farmers across the country are working from dawn until dusk, harvesting the wheat that will soon be a loaf of bread on a table in New York or San Francisco.

The farm bill is a complex legislative package that funds everything from conservation practices to school lunches. In fact, the lion's share of the new bill, about 66 percent, would go to Food Stamps for Americans in need.

The last farm bill, drafted in 2002, put into place a safety net to support farmers when growing conditions or markets fail. Critics of that policy claim that too much money is being spent to support farmers. Yet these critics fail to mention that the farm program has come in about \$25 billion under budget since that bill was enacted five years ago. This leaves the Agriculture Committee with 42 percent less money to write the next commodity title.

Another fact omitted by critics of farm policy is that American farmers are supported at much lower levels than those in other countries around the world. In 2005, American farmers received around \$44 per acre, compared to European farmers at \$390 per acre and Japan at a whopping \$4,442. Couple the low support level with the foreign regulations and tariffs



**jerry moran**

• in Congress

imposed on U.S. commodities abroad, and it is easy to see why it is difficult for American farmers to compete in world markets.

The benefits of the farm bill are evident in the prices Americans pay at the grocery store — be it in Kensington, Md., or Kensington, Kan. In 2004, the average American spent about 7.9 percent of their budget on food, whereas Germany came in at 15.9 percent, Japan at 17.6 percent and India at 46.1 percent.

In addition to food and fiber, American farmers are also now being called on to help meet our country's energy needs. Farmers are doing what they can to decrease our reliance on foreign fuel. While striving for energy independence, we should not simultaneously act to increase our foreign sources of food by strip-

ping away this vital safety net in the Farm Bill.

In few other professions is one's very livelihood at the mercy of Mother Nature. Be it snow, freezes, floods, fire, tornadoes or drought, our farmers face serious obstacles in their quest to meet the everyday challenge of not only feeding and clothing their own families, but also feeding and clothing the families of millions around the world.

As farmers in Kansas harvest their wheat and begin to prepare for the next crop, we in our nation's capital are planting the seeds for the next generation of American farmers and working to provide stability to a risky profession so integral to our country. I can only hope that the farm bill we debate today does not simply write off the very future of American agriculture.

I will continue to be an advocate for agriculture policy that uses taxpayer dollars responsibly, is more free-market oriented and less trade distorting, allows producers to earn a reasonable living and helps to preserve the rural communities that we in Kansas call home.

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