

from other pens...

What good are Congress' trips?

We often wonder what good it does for members of the U.S. Senate and House to travel to Iraq to "get a first-hand look" at the war.

When they do, it generally results in nothing more than hot air, with contradictions flying all over the place.

And we wonder if their presence isn't more of a bother than benefit to the men and women fighting this war.

We are sure if the people wearing the military uniform of this great nation were able to speak without fear of punishment, the senators and congressmen/women would get an earful. Among things they most certainly would hear would be, "What are you doing over here, looking over our shoulders? Go back to Washington and at least try to do something other than criticize our presence or try making things sound better than they are!"

It's supposed to sound comforting when a member of Congress goes before the cameras and tells us, as he or she puts it, "the truth of the matter." Catch words, don't be fooled by them. The truth of the matter is the lack of truth.

The troops on the ground take their orders from the brass, who take their orders from the commander-in-chief. The role of the senators and congressmen and women is to make sure they sensibly debate the issue in their quest to either shell out more money for the cause or withhold the greenbacks as a means of forcing a withdrawal.

There is so much to do on Capitol Hill, but so little being done. The focus, sadly, is on something that's going to happen in November 2008 — a year plus away. Truth be known (there's that word again), this Congress will go down as one of most unproductive in history.

They'll fight and bully one another these next 13 months while we sit on the sidelines with blinders and earplugs in place. We aren't helping the cause one bit.

Polls tell us what the country is thinking. We dispute many of the results. When was the last time a pollster called you for your take on the war in Iraq? Or on health care for everything that breathes? Or immigration reform? (whatever happened to that issue?). Or, or, or...!

Maybe we each need to send the following message (e-mail, regular mail, fax, telephone, whatever): "Dear Member of Congress, Go back to work, now! No more days off! No more vacations! Use us, your taxpayers, as examples of an honest day's work! Keep in mind that you work for us, we don't work for you! And we can pull the plug just like that!"

Then remind them if they don't heed the message there won't be any more messages for them to heed. The plug we'll pull will be available in November '08.

—Tom Dreiling, *The Norton Telegram*

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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, July 4th 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

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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).

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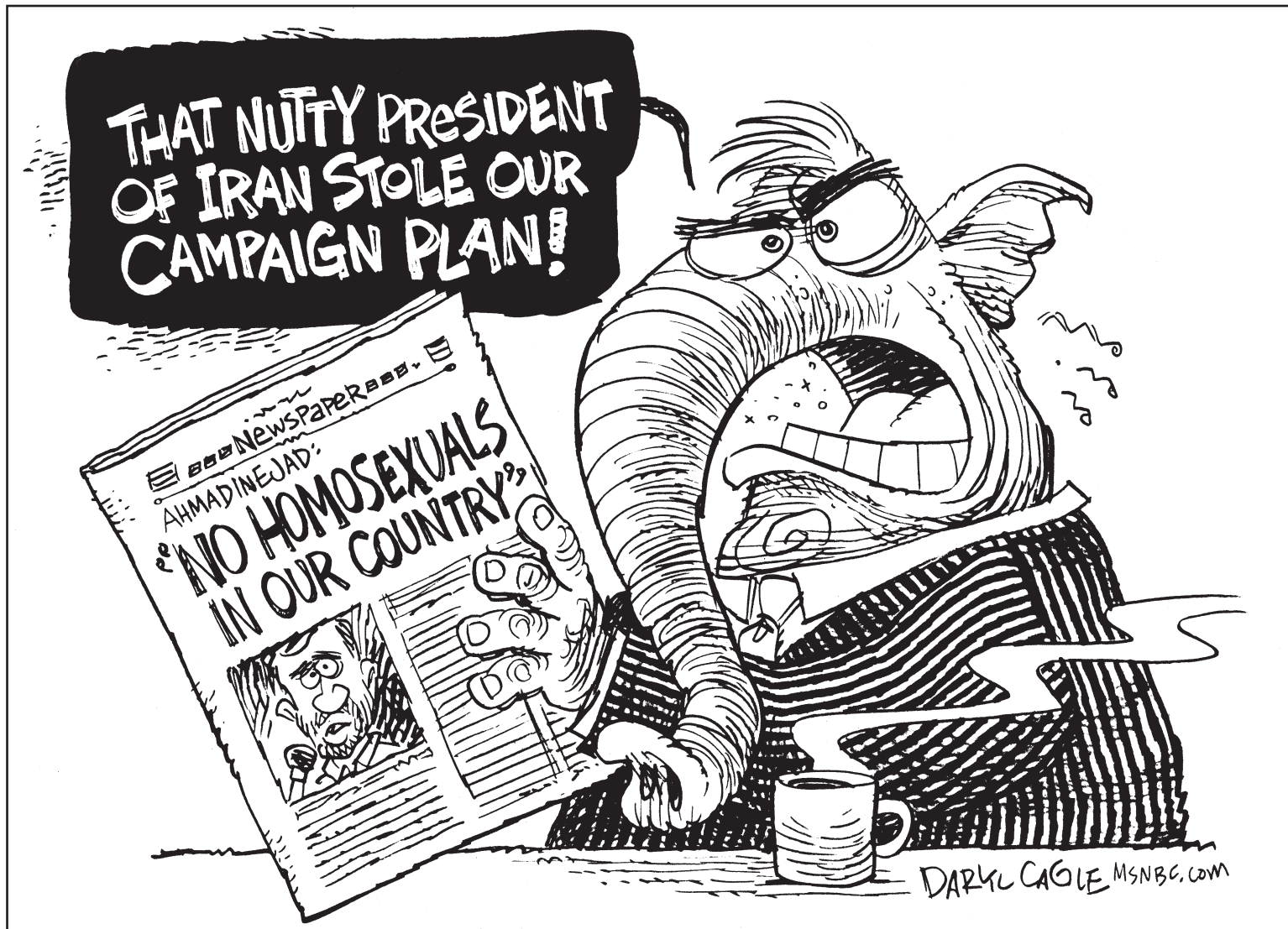
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Warm days, but the nights are cooler

The days are warm — hot sometimes — and the nights are getting cool.

Fall is here but summer isn't leaving without a fight.

The summer flowers, like rose moss and petunias, are blooming their little heads off. They know that this is the last hurrah. By sometime next month, the frost will sent them to sleep until midsummer 2008.

The squash is taking off in the garden and the tomatoes are producing better than they have all summer.

The zucchini we planted on the south side of the house have escaped the garden area and is trying to take over the side yard. Whenever Steve mows, I have to go ahead of him and hold up plants.

Our zucchini started out with lots of blossoms and not many veggies. Now, however, with cold weather around the corner, the zucchini is getting with the program and I'm getting more than I can use.

I've made zucchini bread and given two loaves to each of my three children. We've eaten a loaf. I took one to the office. Gave one to my sister-in-law and one to the hostess at a



**cynthia
haynes**

• open season

party. And still the zucchini cover the kitchen counter.

I'm now resorting to the old tried-and-true formula for getting rid of unwanted zucchini: I left several on the neighbor's doorstep and I'm checking for unlocked cars.

Getting rid of the tomatoes isn't a problem. There's always someone who wants tomatoes. We went out to dinner with some friends last week. The wife told our waitress that she was looking for tomatoes, as her plants had gotten diseased and weren't producing.

Later in the week, I visited my friend. Her kitchen counter was covered with tomatoes.

The waitress brought a bucket by the next day, she said. Then a neighbor down the street heard that she needed tomatoes and brought some by. Another friend donated more. Now she's serving her husband lettuce-and-tomato

salads three times a day and trying to figure out what to do with the rest.

In midsummer, Steve planted some spaghetti squash along the edge of the garden near the dog pen. His timing must have been great. The vines now cover the floor of the garden where the sweet corn grew. They have also taken over the fences between our yard and neighbors to the west and south and are climbing the top of the neighbor's shed.

The dog, who loves to pick and play with tomatoes, apparently isn't interested in squash — which is a good thing.

The squash plants have made the chain-link wall of her pen a green wall with beautiful yellow flowers. So far, we've picked two head-sized squash off the dog pen — one on the outside and one from the inside — and one squash that was trying to imitate a light yellow oval watermelon.

Yep, it's fall, but summer is going out kicking and screaming.

The flowers are great, the gardens are going nuts and the Rockies are winning.

I love this time of year.

On rudeness and Miss Manners

"What do you mean, Americans have gotten ruder?"

"Poll after poll has been showing it in recent years. Nearly 70 percent of respondents to an Associated Press poll said people are ruder than they were 20 or 30 years ago."

"Why would that be?"

"Lots of reasons. For starters, life is moving faster these days. Companies are employing technology that has dramatically increased the speed of change. This technology has enabled competition on a global scale and employees, fearing for their jobs, are working long and hard to keep up."

"Yeah, yeah."

"The pace at home is much faster, too. Many couples, having fallen into the big-mortgage trap, are both working. To afford large houses, they've moved farther out into the suburbs. They're perpetually sitting in traffic jams, rushing to pick the kids up from day care, and racing to get home to make dinner."

"It's a free country."

"Computers, video games and other gadgets are isolating people from each other. And many people are living far away from their extended families — living among people they are not deeply connected to."

"Sounds good to me. My family drives me nuts."

"Even modern architecture is promoting isolation. Look at the older homes built in the 1920s. Big glorious porches were on the front and the garages were in the back. Homes were designed to invite friends and family to stop in for a visit and some cold lemonade. Now the porch is hidden in the back and the garage is on the front — even our homes are rude to people."

"If you say so, pal."

"As a result of this desensitization and the stress of modern times, we're seeing more incidents of road rage, more people cutting in lines at the supermarket, fewer people holding the door open for strangers. I know I've been short with service people at times."

"Being rude with service people is the reason I get out of bed in the morning."

"What's most interesting is that folks are quick to see rudeness in others, but not in themselves. Only 13 percent said they'd used an obscene gesture while driving. And only 8 percent said they'd used a cell phone in a loud or annoying manner."

"I do both every day on my lunch break."

"It's certainly true that life is moving faster



**tom
purcell**

• commentary

and keeping up is more stressful, but that's no excuse. We all need to get back to the basics. Parents need to do a better job teaching their kids to have respect for others. Adults need to slow down and be more considerate of others."

"Why should we care?"

"Because a civil and mannerly existence is not just a more delightful way to live, but one that is essential to a well-functioning society. But don't ask me, ask Judith Martin."

"Judith Martin?"

"You know her better as Miss Manners. She says that good manners are the philosophical basis of civilization, that it's essential folks

have a common language of civil behavior that restrains their impulses."

"But impulsiveness is my favorite hobby."

"Martin says our legal system was originally intended to punish serious conflict involving the loss of life, limb or property, but the legal system is now forced to handle disputes that the proper use of etiquette used to prevent."

"I ain't following."

"She says that what used to be an insult is now called slander. What used to be meanness is now called hate speech. What used to be boorishness is now called sexual harassment. If the rules of civility and etiquette were stronger, fewer people would engage in actions that are now considered crimes."

"Slander, meanness and boorishness are illegal now? There goes the weekend."

Tom Purcell is a nationally syndicated humor columnist. For comments to Tom, please email him at Purcell@caglecartoons.com.

GUESS WHAT'S WORSE THAN METH?

