

from our viewpoint...

## World reeling under disasters, violence

Western allies including The United States poured medical relief and help into Japan as that country continues to cope with the aftermath of an earthquake and tsunami causing horrific destruction and bringing the world face to face with a radiation disaster not seen on that island since 1945.

Efforts to cool down the damaged nuclear reactors at Fukushima, Japan, appear to be gaining ground, but concerns remain about the amount of radiation released over the past week. Two of the six reactors have been cooled down it was reported on Sunday with further efforts continuing on the others. At the same time radiation was being detected in plants and vegetables in villages near the plant.

The 9.0 magnitude earthquake spawned a tsunami sending waves miles inland along the northeast coast and was felt at Hawaii and along the California coast.

The death toll is more than 8,500, and is expected to continue to climb as rescue efforts continue with more than 12,000 listed as missing.

American military plans are bringing medical supplies and other supplies to help with the disaster. The Red Cross and other relief agencies are raising money to help and reportedly have raised more than 80 million so far with much more needed.

Meanwhile, not quite halfway around the world allies including The United States are enforcing a no-fly zone over Libya as the rebels try to continue their effort to oust Gen. Moammar Gadhafi.

The United States Navy has at least five warships including destroyers and a guided missile frigate off the coast and Saturday fired Tomahawk missiles against Gadhafi's air defenses to clear the skies and deny Gadhafi helicopters and planes to attack the rebels.

Long range American bombers dropped bombs on Sunday and Monday as part of the allied attack, and based on the reports the combined efforts heavily damaged Gadhafi's ability to stop the rebels with his air force and damaged his armored forces.

Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, said Sunday the American involvement will be limited, and the U.S. forces will step back and allow other allied nations to take the lead in keeping the skies clear.

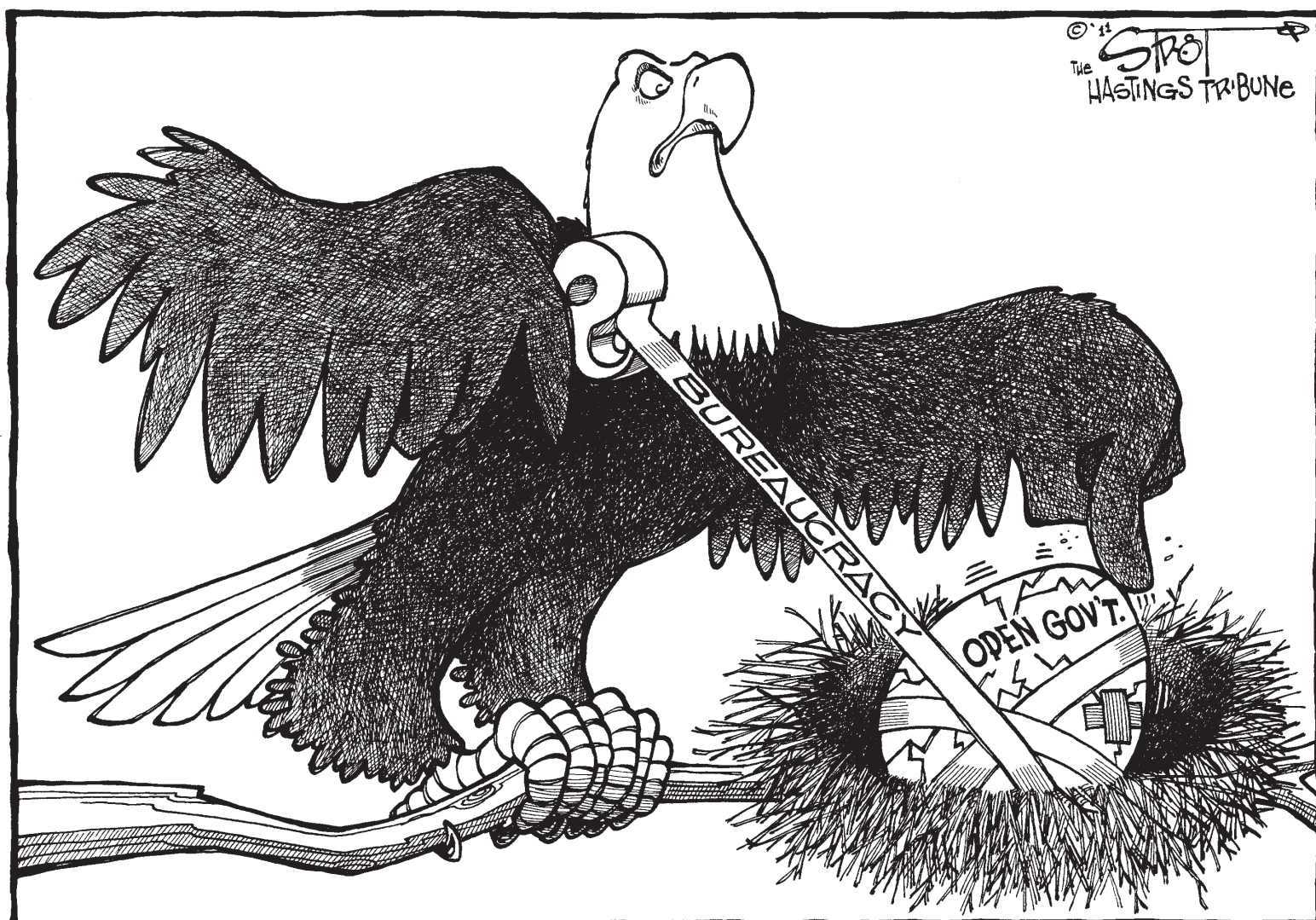
President Barack Obama said, traveling in Brazil and Latin America, said the United States would not put ground troops in Libya, but continued to say he thinks Gadhafi must leave.

The events seem a long way away from Goodland, but as with anything in the world today thin threads link our small community to the larger world. We know immediately after the earthquake we began trying to contact Japanese friends, who thankfully live miles south of the area of the quake and tsunami, and did get word they were all OK.

As the recovery efforts continue we will pray our friends stay safe, and the American people continue to help with the relief efforts.

We hope the violence in Libya will diminish and with a level playing field the rebels will continue in their efforts to bring freedom to their country.

The days ahead will continue to draw headlines about the changes in both locations. Behind the headlines are stories of heroism and sacrifice both in Japan and Libya and we will pray for these people. — Tom Betz



## I'm making new enemies

Today I will make 535 new enemies.

Guaranteed!  
I spend a lot of time watching C-SPAN and C-SPAN 2. Right now it's all about cuts in spending. Cut! Cut! Cut! You can almost hear the pig squeal.

The debate can be entertaining and educational. Yes, sometimes fierce, as it should be. But it allows both sides opportunities to nitpick one another's approach to death.

While I might buy into what one side is saying, my mind might change when I hear the other side. If you want it straight from the horse's mouth, folks, don't plan on your favorite cable news outlet to accurately provide you with that information, it just isn't going to happen. What your favorite cable news channel does is give you a picture of what they want you to think took place. Do yourself a favor, see it for yourself on C-SPAN!

What is taking place in the House of Representatives currently, is the new majority party's efforts to make good on campaign promises. And they (Republican/Tea Party) are succeeding quite well. Of course, what the House passes isn't always a done deal, it still faces the Senate where, incidentally, the Democrats have control. And when some of those measures eventually end up on the president's desk, all he needs to do is pull out his pen and veto the bill(s) not to his liking. Then an override of the veto enters the picture. But no matter what happens, those new members of Congress can go home and tell their constituents they carried out their promises. And that's big!

As I look over the members of the House (435) and the Senate (100), I often think we as their bosses ought to take an active role when it comes to their salary structure and the perks they enjoy, something not enjoyed by the vast majority of the American workforce.

Congress sets its own salary. Can you picture yourself walking into the office of your boss and telling him or her what your salary will be? And what perks you will toss in? Sure! Well, that's how Congress does it.



tom  
dreiling

• time out with td

What kind of money do those elected people who work for US under THEIR terms make? The rank and file House and Senate members are currently paid \$174,000 annually (thanks Google for the information). But there are exceptions. The Senate Majority Party Leader and the Minority Party Leader each make \$193,400 annually, ditto the House Majority Leader and Minority Leader. The Smoker of the House....., oops, I'm sorry, the Speaker of the House pockets \$223,500.

It is interesting to note 261 of the total 535 members of the House and Senate are millionaires. Maybe that's why it's so difficult for Congress to understand the needs, NEEDS, not wants of the middle class and those who are living in poverty.

Maybe what we need to do to bring them back down to earth, is exercise our muscle and move ourselves into a position where WE, the PEOPLE determine what they our employees get paid.

These elected representatives depart Washington on Friday and return on Monday, leaving only Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday to do the people's business. What kind of schedule is that? It's the one you and I tolerate because we don't have the guts to stand up and be counted. We can change all of that, you know.

Most of these elected hurry home on Friday so they can hold so-called "town hall meetings" back in their districts over the full weekend. Don't let them pull the wool over your eyes. Those "town hall meetings" are nothing more than campaign stops.

Maybe the answer is to put Congress on an hourly basis and issue them time cards to punch in and out. Corney? Maybe, but that would of-

fer some degree of accountability to the people who count most: US! Or how about simply cutting their pay (after all they are talking about cutting) to \$100,000! That sounds like a reasonable salary to this man of the Plains who wouldn't know how to even write a check for that amount. Can't you just hear the squealing coming from Capitol Hill?

Or maybe, just maybe, it's time to consider Term Limits! I've been an advocate for that since the early 1980s. The time is ripe!

For those wondering what the president and vice-president are paid, jot down these figures: \$400,000 and \$230,700, respectively.

Quick topic: "The Cost of Prescription Drugs. Why are they so high?" The answer: Advertising! Who pays for all that advertising? The same people standing in line for their prescriptions at the pharmacy. Bet you hadn't thought of that each time you saw one of those drugs on your television screen.

Today's thought. In many television commercials a voice-over will say, in essence, "Ask your doctor if (so and so drug) is right for you." So you ask your doctor and he says, "Yes." He writes a prescription and you take it to your pharmacy. They fill it, hand it back to you and you pay them. My question: Aren't you acting as a salesperson for that company when you ask your doctor, on their behalf, if it would be right for you to take (whatever the drug is)? Since most salespeople work on commission, the companies that push patients to sell their medication need to pony up. Right?

Space limitations didn't allow for the ever growing list of Snippets to appear. I'll use some of those in my next column.

Tom Dreiling is a retired journalist, now living in Aurora, Colo. He edited and published newspaper in Kansas and Wyoming during his 44-year career. E-mail is milehitom@hotmail.com

## Sunshine important to open government

Each year, a week is set aside to remind citizens how important transparency is in our participatory democracy.

Our country was founded on the principle government is of the people, by the people and for the people.

As Alexis de Tocqueville wrote in his middle 19th century classic, "Democracy in America," the system of self-government we chose for ourselves was unique because we relied on each other, rather than royalty, to chart the course for our nation.

Tocqueville was fascinated that in America, we elected "people like us" to make decisions on our behalf, but we decided for democratic rule to succeed, we had to be participants in our own governance.

Sunshine Week, March 13 through 19 this year, is a reminder to elected officials and to those they serve that for America's system of government to work, we have to have an informed citizenry. This requires unfettered access to the information necessary to keep us abreast of just what government is attempting to do on our behalf.

Sadly, while our political leaders often talk a good line when it comes to transparency, they often fall short when the rubber meets the road.

In Topeka, for instance, the city is embroiled in a controversy about the apparent theft of scrap metal from a city construction site. The scrap reportedly was sold and the money shared by a handful of city employees.

The city manager and his team decided to handle the incident as a personnel matter rather than a criminal one, even leaving the city council in the dark for six months. Had "trans-



from  
other pens

• commentary

parency" been the rule and not the exception, this controversy most likely would have been handled in a few days. It has continued to boil for six weeks and counting.

When the duly-elected city council members were blocked by city staff from getting access to documents about the theft, the council was forced to vote 9-0 to subpoena documents withheld for "personnel" reasons.

What is wrong with this picture? Each week, the attorney for the Kansas Press Association gets call after call from local newspaper staff writers and editors fighting roadblocks to information access thrown up by public officials. Whether it's access to agenda packets, minutes or notice of meetings or the abuse of executive sessions, transparency seems to be no more than a campaign pamphlet bullet point for some public officials.

On Thursday (March 17), a bill will be heard in the House Local Government Committee that would give cities, counties and school districts the "option" to name their own governmental website rather than their local newspaper as the official publication for public notices.

Never mind a third of Kansans don't have access to the internet. Never mind the internet has been proven time and again to be unreliable and susceptible to hacking and manipulation while printed newspapers are verifiable, permanent,

more likely to be seen and independent from government.

It's ironic (maybe appalling is a better word) this bill will be heard during National Sunshine Week. It illustrates that far too many of our elected officials don't understand why they alone should not be in control of public information.

Why is "sunshine" important? "Publicity," said Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, "is justly commended as a remedy for social and industrial diseases. Sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants, electric light the most efficient policeman."

Brandeis was right. If we are to remain a free nation and able to compete with the rest of the world in the 21st century, citizens must be well-informed. To be well-informed, government must operate in the light of day.

By Doug Anstaett, executive director of the Kansas Press Association.

### Letter Policy

The Goodland Star-News encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, and must include a telephone number and a signature. Unsigned letters will not be published. Form letters and letters deemed to be of no public interest or considered offensive will be rejected. We reserve the right to edit letters for length and good taste. We encourage letters, with address and phone numbers, by e-mail to: <star.news@nwkans.com>.

## The Goodland Star-News

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

Member: Kansas Press Association  
Inland Press Association Colorado Press Association  
National Newspaper Association  
e-mail: [star.news@nwkans.com](mailto:star.news@nwkans.com)

Steve Haynes, President  
Tom Betz, Editor  
Pat Schiefen, Society Editor



Jessica Corbin, Josh Harenberg, Anne Selfridge  
Advertising Department

Sheila Smith, Office Manager

### Nor'west Press

Richard Westfahl, General Manager  
Jim Bowker, Betty Morris, James Jackson,  
Lana Westfahl, Kris McCool, Stacy Brashear, Tracy Traxel,  
Gary Meyer, Judy McKnight

[nwkans.com](http://nwkans.com)

N.T. Betz, Director of Internet Services  
(nt.betz@nwkans.com)

Evan Barnum, Systems Admin.(support@nwkans.com)

Published every Tuesday and Friday except the days observed for New Year's Day, Memorial Day, July 4th, Labor Day, Thanksgiving 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](mailto:star-news@nwkans.com). Advertising questions can be sent to: [goodlandads@nwkans.com](mailto: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:

The Goodland Daily News  
1932-2003

The Sherman  
County Herald  
Founded by Thomas McCants  
1935-1989

THE SHERMAN COUNTY  
STAR  
Founded by Eric and  
Roxie Yonkey  
1994-2001

Nor'West Newspapers  
Haynes Publishing Company