

from our viewpoint...

Flag day beginning of 21-day salute

Summer has begun in earnest with lots of activities piling up for kids and adults, and the weather has been more summer-like with temperatures reaching near the century mark.

Tuesday is Flag Day, and the Elks Flag Day ceremony will be held at 9 a.m. in the courtroom of the Sherman County Courthouse with District Judge Scott Showalter the speaker.

Flag Day celebrates the adoption of the Stars and Stripes in 1777, now 234 years ago. The observance of the flag birthday began in 1885 and gained wide acceptance through the years.

Inspired by decades of state and local celebrations, Flag Day was officially established by a Proclamation of President Woodrow Wilson on May 30, 1916. Flag Day was celebrated in various communities for years after Wilson's proclamation. On Aug. 3, 1949, President Truman signed an Act of Congress designating June 14 of each year as National Flag Day.

For the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks the American Flag is a special symbol, and each year Elks lodges hold Flag Day ceremonies to honor that symbol and the country it represents.

Flag Day comes two weeks after the big Memorial Day celebrations and is 21 days to July 4, Independence Day.

More than 20 years ago a number of organizations including the American Legion, Daughters of the American Revolution and the Elks began promoting the 21-day salute to America and asking businesses to show their spirit by displaying the American flag each day between Flag Day and July 4.

For those who have served in the armed forces this time of year brings back many memories and patriotic feelings. Placing the flag out in front of a business is a point of pride, and displaying the flag in your window is a reminder of the American spirit.

Readers of The Goodland Star-News will find an American flag inside today's edition suitable to display in a window. The annual flag page is sponsored by area businesses to give everyone a chance to show their American pride and be part of the 21-day salute.

The Goodland Kiwanis Flag Project has the busiest part of their season between Memorial Day and July 4, and they include Flag Day as one of the days they put out the flags around town. This special project has grown to more than 620 flags, and people can sign up with a Kiwanis member to join this service.

Over the years the Goodland Elks have placed smaller American flags on lawns throughout the community.

Driving around town on these special days and seeing all the flags waving is great. It was wonderful of Kiwanis to honor the holiday spirit for the Run for the Wall riders when they came to town on their way to Washington for the Rolling Thunder celebration.

For people in Sherman County and visitors from the surrounding area and those who happen to be driving through, the Freedom Fest celebration on July 4 is one of the biggest events of the summer and with the great fireworks program to fill the skies it is a wonderful way to celebrate American Independence Day.

No matter which way you show your American pride we hope you will consider displaying the flag page in your window at work and at home. — Tom Betz



I like most animals, but one I really hate

I like snakes and lizards, toads and frogs, turtles and most bugs.

In fact, I've collected or kept most of the above as pets at one time or another during my life.

I'm not crazy about spiders, but I've been known to nab a perambulating tarantula if the occasion warranted it. (Youngest daughter once requested one for her biology classes.)

But, there is one bug that I just cannot abide. It gives me the creeps, and when I find one, I go berserk.

I hate ticks. I hate them, loathe them, despise them and really am not at all fond to be on the same planet with them. When I find one on me, I scream like a little girl and throw an absolute fit until the insect is not only off me, but safely, securely and very truly dead.

When we returned from a hike one time to find 16 ticks on us and the dog, I refused to go on that trail again during tick season. In fact, the trail is now known in our family as Tick Creek.

Not everyone is so squeamish about the



cynthia haynes

• open season

blood suckers, however.

One friend who calmly checks herself and her dog for ticks each day after walking in the high grass just discards the little monsters.

I prefer to squash them and then run them down the toilet.

Another friend found some use for the tiny insects.

Her son collects bugs for his entomology exhibit at the fair each year. No bug is safe around this kid. He collects all year and has his mother keep the specimens in the freezer until it's fair time.

When the dog came in with a huge, dark lump under her eye the other day, his mother calmly got a pair of tweezers to remove the

little sucker.

After a quick check of his bug book, the son came dancing in with a baby food jar.

"Be careful, Mom," he insisted.

"Don't worry, dear," she said. "This won't hurt the dog at all."

"No," he insisted, "be careful of the tick. I want it for my collection. I'll get an engorged one and then one that hasn't eaten. Won't that be cool?"

Ticks, he then informed her, are a whole new class for his exhibit. Ticks and mites, he said, occupy a class together.

His mother obligingly put the full tick in the jar and found another couple on the dog that hadn't had a chance for a good meal and added them, too.

While she was happy to help with the project, she said, there are some things she wasn't going to do,

"I'm not going to pin that thing for him," she said.

Amen, sister.

The truth about energy profits

America's largest oil and natural gas companies recently reported quarterly earnings, and as expected, profits were up. But the caricature of fat-cat energy executives lining their pockets at the expense of the everyman doesn't hold up to scrutiny.

ExxonMobil posted quarterly earnings of \$10.7 billion on Thursday, up 69 percent from last year. And on Wednesday, ConocoPhillips reported quarterly earnings of \$3 billion, reflecting an increase of 43 percent from a year ago. Impressive, but not shocking given the current price of crude oil.

No less predictable was the outrage voiced by politicians. President Obama called for new taxes on the oil industry, and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid promised to introduce legislation to that effect when Congress is back in session.

Talking tough when pump prices are high might be safe politically. After all, it's easy to get outraged while people struggle to fill their tanks. But we should consider some facts about the American energy industry before breaking out pitchforks or enacting knee-jerk policies.

Yes, pump prices are high, but companies like ExxonMobil and Chevron have as much control over the price of gasoline as they do the price of speeding tickets. The single biggest factor affecting pump prices is the cost of crude oil, which is set by global futures markets subject to the laws of supply and demand.

Right now the recovering global economy, Mideast turmoil, and declining dollar are driving up the price of crude. The truth is ExxonMobil can't control the price of a barrel of oil, but the higher price naturally results in higher revenues.



from other pens

• commentary

No one is asking drivers to shed a tear for gasoline stations forced to charge high prices at the pump. But equally unfair is the assumption that those high prices mean 24-hour champagne and limos for company executives. The U.S. oil and natural gas industry actually operates at lower margins than most American manufacturing.

In arguing for higher energy taxes, politicians cite that America's five largest oil and gas companies had a net income of \$484 billion from 2006 to 2010. What they don't tell you is those companies' profit margin during those years was 6.65 percent, below the U.S. manufacturing average.

Because of the large size of the industry, profits sound exorbitant when stated in absolute dollars. But those dollars are distributed to millions of ordinary Americans who are shareholders and plowed back into oil exploration and next-generation energy Research and Development.

The caricature of greedy oil company executives falls apart even further when one considers who owns most energy companies. Only 1.5 percent of oil and gas shares are owned by those companies' executives. Fifty-three percent of the shares are owned by mutual funds and individual investors. Twenty-seven percent are owned by pension funds, and 14 percent are held by IRAs. In other words, average investors, people who have begun saving

for retirement, and retirees benefit from their investments in energy companies—and these investments are paying off.

A new study examined the performance of oil and natural gas investments in the two largest public employee pension funds in four states—Michigan, Missouri, Ohio and Pennsylvania. The oil and gas investments had returns between 41 percent and 49 percent from 2005 through 2009, while the funds' non-oil and gas investments had returns between 10 percent and 17 percent. And the gains are not just enjoyed by a select few—these funds account for between 50 percent and 89 percent of the total membership and total assets of all public employee pension programs in these states.

The Obama administration's 2012 budget proposes almost \$90 billion in new taxes for the U.S. oil and natural gas industry. These taxes will hurt ordinary Americans and public employees, and the energy industry already pays one of the highest effective income tax rates in the country. About 44 percent of every dollar earned by oil and gas companies goes to income taxes, while retailers pay about 33 percent.

Caricatures shouldn't be the basis for government policy. In reality, energy profits have not been excessive compared to other industries, are plowed back into exploration, and benefit ordinary Americans. Congress and the Obama administration shouldn't impose higher taxes or other sanctions on the industry. Instead, they should eliminate barriers to oil production, helping consumers at the pump.

Lawrence J. McQuillan, PhD, is director of Business and Economic Studies at the Pacific Research Institute. Contact him at LMcQuillan@pacificresearch.org.

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e-mail: star.news@nwkansas.com

Steve Haynes, President

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Jessica Corbin and Anne Selfridge

Advertising Department

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Gary Meyer, Judy McKnight



nwkansas.com

N.T. Betz, Director of Internet Services

(nt.betz@nwkansas.com)

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

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State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol Building, Rm. 225-E, 300 SW 10th, Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785-296-7399; e-mail address — ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

Kansas Attorney General, 301 S.W. 10th, Lower Level, Topeka, KS 66612-1597 (785) 296-3751 Fax (785) 291-3699 TTY: (785) 291-3767

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