

from our viewpoint...

Is our Constitution relevant today?

An essay in *Time* magazine asks if our 235-year-old Constitution is relevant today.

There's nothing new in the question; it's been asked off and on for more than 200 years.

The framers of the Constitution, so the questioning logic goes, knew nothing of airplanes, telecommunications, cell phones, modern medicine. The list is endless.

A century ago, the telegraph. You get the picture.

Of course, times have changed. The Constitution, in great measure, has not. Oh, it's been amended — we banned, then restored the liquor trade, granted civil rights to all, limited presidents to two terms, but never specified "equal rights" for women.

Overall, the changes have been relatively minor.

Changes in technology don't outmode a system of government. The Constitution sets out an elegant solution to the need for a national government while protecting both the citizens and the individual states that joined to form the Union from that government's power.

If not the Constitution, with its republican system and its balance among three co-equal branches of government, how should we be governed?

By some socialist, liberal dictatorship where those who know best tell the rest of us how to live? Oh, that system has been tried, hasn't it?

By instant electronic democracy? Government by Facebook? Sounds dangerous, unstable.

The Founding Fathers may have known little of railroads, steamships or the telephone. They did know the value of the printing press, essentially the Internet of their day, and they knew human nature.

They had fought to free the colonies from oppression by those across the sea who knew best, and understood the dangers of government granted excessive power. They gave us the framework of a system that could endure many dangers, but they left out the most precious part — our rights.

That omission was soon corrected by the addition of the first 10 Amendments, what we know as the Bill of Rights. And there, with a little tinkering, they gave us the most nearly perfect system of government known to man.

Today we look at the federal government and see that it's bloated, cumbersome, slow-moving, hard to deal with and still harder to change. Perhaps the problem isn't with the Constitution. Perhaps it's with the way it's interpreted and abused.

The framers never intended the government to be a tool for granting favors to big business interests or to social groups. They created a limited government, with limited powers and three branches to watch one another.

Time has, perhaps, corrupted that vision. It allowed the government to grow large, and at times, in its clumsy way, oppressive. Some say the system is no longer responsive to our needs. If that's the problem, though, it can be corrected.

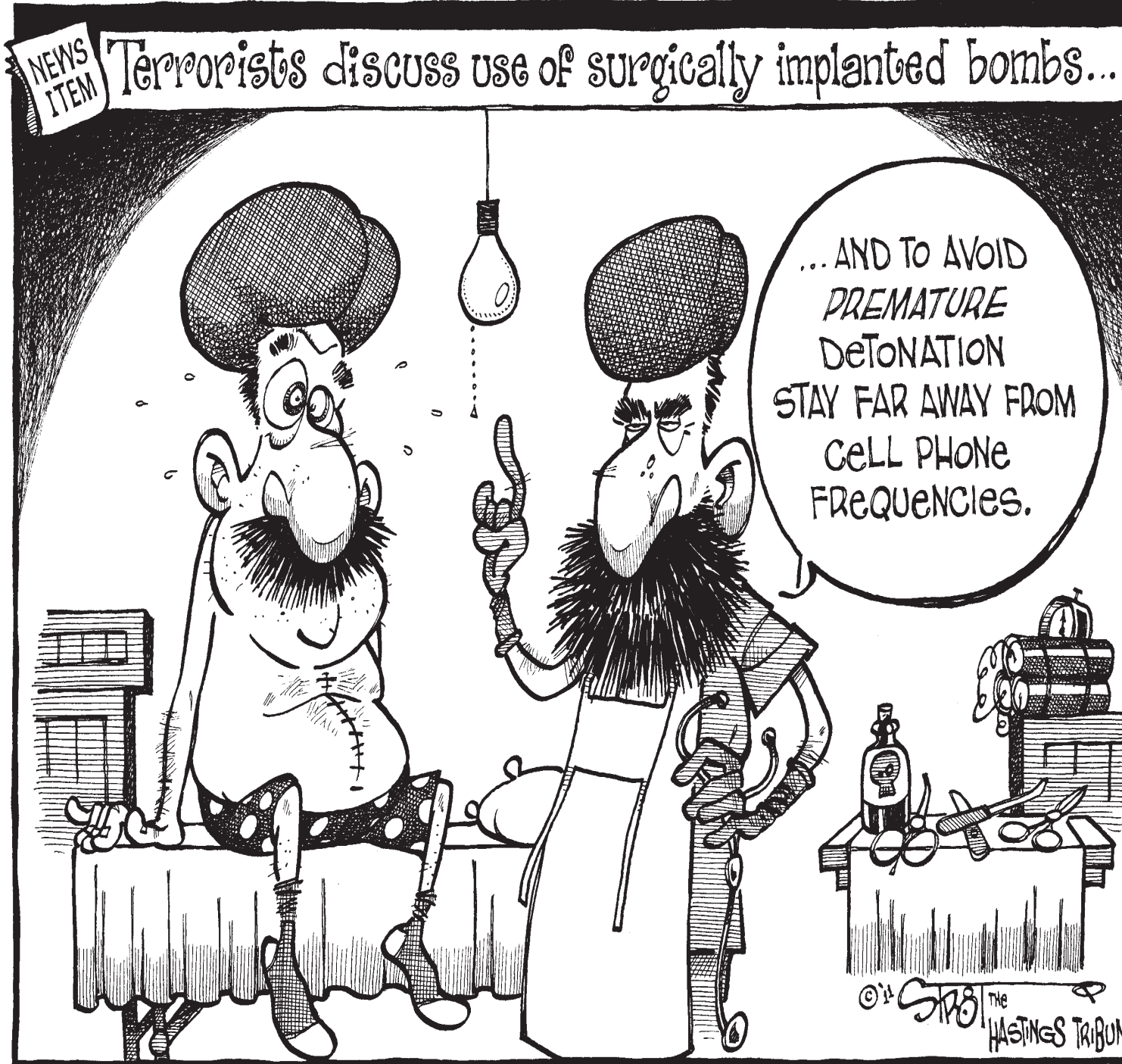
But the framework, the framework is as brilliant today as it was 200 years ago.

A new Constitution for the Internet era?

Can you imagine? If Congress wrote it today, instead of the spare and simple document we have, it'd run to thousands of pages, replete with earmarks for the politicians and tax breaks for corporations.

The First Amendment might be 45 pages, rather than 45 words, and mention each and every group that might claim a right or two.

Let's not take the chance. Let's keep the Constitution and dump those who want to subvert it. — *Steve Haynes*



These old people look like my friends

Who are all these old people and why do they look so much like my friends?

We were back in Colorado for the Fourth of July, among old friends and neighbors.

Sitting at a table in the cafe waiting for our breakfast to arrive, I noted several friends from years gone by.

Back in 1980, when we moved to the mountains, these were the town's young movers and shakers. They were the 20 and 30 somethings, ready to take over from the old fuddy duddies running the show.

Now my old friends have gray hair and a lot of wrinkles.

One, a photographer and painter who lives in Colorado in the summer and Lawrence in the winter, admitted that he's receiving Social Security. It's not much, he admitted, but it pays his health insurance, and for a self-employed painter, that's pretty great.

My neighbor, who has been retired from the Forest Service for years, told me he had turned 70 last year. Yipes. His kids and my kids were practically the same age. They attended school



cynthia haynes

• open season

together and played together in our adjoining back yards.

Now his daughter lives in Australia and his son works in construction in the town he's lived in almost his entire life.

Across the street, the old superintendent of schools and his wife, who worked part time for the post office and full time in her yard, divide their time between Colorado and Arizona.

So do the couple two doors down. He was lineman for Rural Electric and she's still a housewife.

I met the former lineman at a yard sale and he confided that he really doesn't miss the ice and cold of the 40-below winters in the mountains.

This is the same man who taught my daugh-

ters to play basketball and shepherded the county's small Mormon flock. Now he's retired and hasn't climbed a power pole in years.

I remember the evening that this same man waded through waist-deep snow to restring the power line that provided the only source of electricity for our community. He still looks as strong as an ox, but the bifocals and hearing aids are a sign of his age.

Back in the cafe, I spotted a shop owner and jewelry maker. Now her straight knee-length hair is graying and put up in a bun. Back when I first met her, she wore it down most of the time and it was coal black. Now the wild child is a matron and community leader.

How did all these people get so old. How come they aged but I've stayed a 30 something? So strange.

(No, you don't need to remind me that I too have many gray hairs and my children are all in their 30s. I'm busy avoiding mirrors and deluding myself, thank you very much.)

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A story out of Colby reminds me of one piece of solid advice that most people tend to ignore: Never leave your keys in the ignition.

Never, not for a second.

The story: down in Colby, a business had a company car it kept for running errands and the like. It was parked in the lot by the office, keys in the ignition, when a thief on the road from California spotted it.

The thief jumped in the car, leaving a pickup with California tags (later found to be stolen) in its place. Colby police noted that the swap was pretty easy to spot when they got there.

Which goes to show, even in a small town, it's not safe to leave the keys in the car.

That's not the end of the tale, though. In Salina later the same night, a visitor from Johnson County was pumping gas into a company car he was driving. When he turned to replace the nozzle, the car took off.

You guessed it: he'd left the keys in the ignition. After all, he was *right there*.

You may also have guessed by now that Salina police found that car stolen in Colby nearby in the truck stop's parking lot.

Guess the thief decided he wanted one with



steve haynes

• along the sappa

a full tank this time.

Even in Oberlin, cars sometimes disappear when they have keys in them. It was worse when the youth ranch was going strong, but cars still take off now and then.

In Kansas City one winter, a woman left her baby in the car while she ran into a convenience store "for just a second." She looked out to see the car leaving, and wound up with a lot of explaining to do, once the police found her baby.

An all-time classic case happened around Goodland a few years ago. A young man who apparently had gotten more into drugs than his classes at a Colorado college wrecked his car just over the state line, flipping into a nearby field.

A farmer happened along, stopping to see if the driver was all right. The sheriff arrived.

where to write

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Both were startled when the farmer's truck roared to life and took off for the freeway.

He'd left the keys in the truck, of course.

Out on I-70, the kid wrecked the pickup over on the Kansas side. People stopped to help. One of them, a guy hauling a boat home from the lake, looked up to see his rig, pickup, boat and all, taking off.

He'd left the keys in the ignition.

The boat flipped into a field on the first hard turn off I-70 and onto old U.S. 24, but the kid kept going, trailer and all, until he wrecked that truck, too, going the wrong way on the freeway. Only this time the highway patrol had him surrounded.

His last mistake, allegedly, was trying to reach into a trooper's car to take the keys. The trooper, it seemed, was still in the driver's seat.

The moral of the story is simple. There's no good time to leave the keys in the ignition. None.

If you want to keep your car, keep the keys with you, even if you are right there.

Period.

Letter Policy

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