

from our viewpoint...

Support Israel at the peace table

As the violence in Israel intensified, thoughts in this country turn to how the United States should involve itself.

The latest news on Wednesday included a bus bombing in Tel Aviv and Israeli air strikes against tunnels and bridges in Gaza, the Palestinian region within Israel that has been the focus of so much conflict over the years.

So, what should the United States, that staunch ally of Israel, do?

Given the state of the world today, the United States' course seems clear. We should continue to support Israel, but we should do so through diplomatic efforts aimed at both stopping the current violence and preventing a wider conflict.

If the Muslim nations surrounding Israel, namely Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and Iraq, were united and unfettered by internal disputes, they could overwhelm Israel. Thankfully, they are not. Syria is in the midst of a horrific civil war; Iraq is busy trying to establish itself post-U.S. occupation; Egypt is still reeling from the change in government from the Arab Spring. And if Israel, as is widely believed, has nuclear weapons, it would be inclined to use them if it was facing a massive invasion.

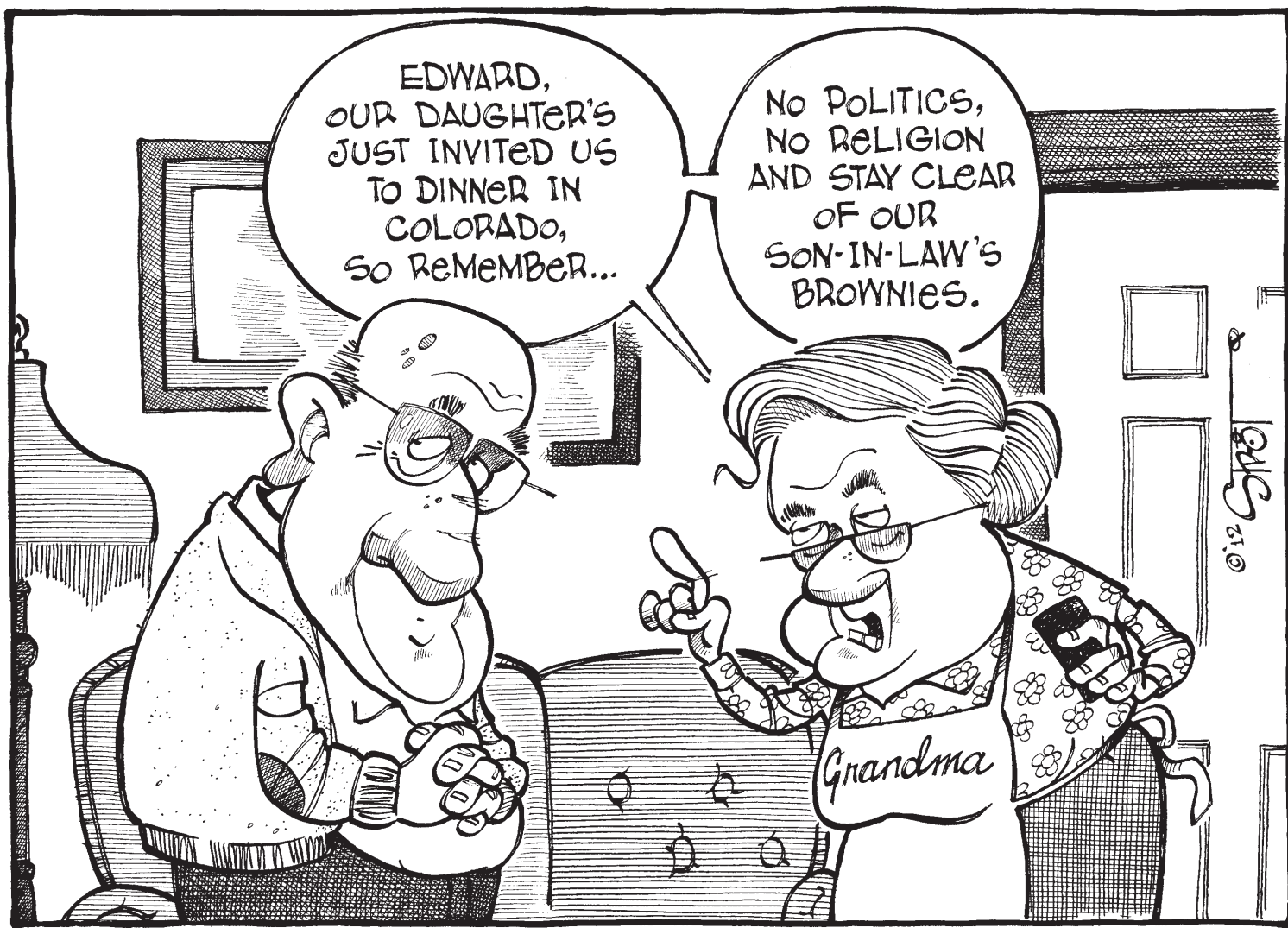
That is still the danger, though. That the violence in Israel could widen and draw in its neighbors and turn into a war between nations. Israel often shows no compunction about undertaking covert and overt strikes into neighboring countries if it feels threatened, as they demonstrated recently with air strikes in Syria. If the surrounding Muslim countries start talking about coming to the aid of their brethren inside Israel, we could very well see a real war begin. We can be assured that none of the countries involved would hesitate to strike first.

We should take several lessons from Egypt. The new Egyptian president, Mohamed Morsy, has been attempting to act as a broker to try and end the conflict. This is certainly a good thing, as it would be better to have a solution found by people in the region. However, Morsy's government is very friendly with Hamas, the militant group that controls Gaza and in his statements over the past week he has been noticeably anti-Israel. If the United States hopes to help negotiate a ceasefire, we should engage Morsy and help him to take a more neutral tone. For a supposed peace-broker to condemn one side or the other only hinders efforts.

The Israelis and the United Nations have both praised Morsy's efforts, however, so we hope he is helping make progress.

These diplomatic efforts will be difficult. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is so entrenched that we may never see a real resolution in our lifetime. But at the very least we should try to help end the fighting. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is heading to the Middle East, hopefully to do just that.

At the end of the day, it is far easier to prevent a war than to stop one already in progress. We should remain friends with Israel, as we always have, and a good friend knows when to pull someone back from a fight. —Kevin Bottrell



Drought conditions intensify

If the dry conditions we experienced in Ellis County on the opening weekend of pheasant season are any indication of what's to come, we're in for a lot of trouble. We walked several miles on Nov. 10 and 11 and drove across much of the county and into northern Ness County.

The winter wheat crop looked remarkably well. Fields sported a deep, rich green color. Stands were uniform and wheat heights varied from just peeking out of the rows to four or five inches tall.

The milo crop was a horse of a different color. While the fields were generally flush with stalks, the heads were buried and featured tiny heads ranging from three to five inches in length. The berries were nearly non-existent and about the size of a pin head if it were round instead of flat - about the size of a 9 shot in a quail load.

When harvested these micro heads floated through the combine and the machine couldn't do a good job of separating the berry from the rest of the chaff and dried milo leaves. Some of the heads went in the front end of the combine and left the back without any of the berries being separated out and augured up into the grain bin.

This wasn't just my observation, but that of Lance Russell, who was in the swing of milo harvest and also hosted our hunting party on his Ellis County land.

"What I'm cuttin' now is producing less than 10 bushel per acre," Russell told me. "Not a good year."

Instead of filling the combine bin, each and every round like he usually does during a decent harvest, it was taking Russell nearly six trips up and back in his field to fill the bin.

Yes, this state's worst drought in decades wasn't making life easy for Russell and his farming neighbors in western Kansas. This drought, well into its third year, has intensified in Kansas.

Last week's U.S. Drought Monitor update confirmed Kansas is in an "extreme" or "exceptional" drought - the two worst classifications. Much of our state rose roughly 6



Insight this week

• john schlageck

percentage points to 83.8 percent. This compares with Oklahoma where nearly 76 percent of the state to our south is mired in extreme or exceptional drought.

Sixty percent of our country in the lower 48 states is experiencing some degree of drought as of last week's U.S. Drought Monitor update.

While every hunting trip is a wonderful experience, the number of birds was at least 50 percent less than an average year. On Saturday, Nov. 10 the wind blew at a steady clip of 45 miles per hour out of the south, sometimes gusting close to 55 miles per hour.

By noon the temperature was pushing 80 degrees and I believe I heard on the weather that evening Hays had set or tied the old record of 81 degrees for the high temperature. Not ideal weather conditions for pheasant hunting or a growing wheat crop nearly half way through a dry November.

The forecast promised a chance of rain and about 4 p.m. it sprinkled for maybe one minute and then these few drops of water from on high zoomed to the north. No measurable precipitation in western Kansas, although some areas of eastern Kansas reported an inch of rain or better.

Sunday morning our hunting party rose before the roosters and surrounded a giant plum thicket where we fired some of our first shots at the wily roosters. We were lucky enough to bag three birds.

The temperature had dropped 55 degrees from the day before and the wind had shifted around to the northwest where it had slowed to about 35 miles per hour. The wind chill was cold and several of the hunters were bitterly complaining about the cold.

Still, we hunted well into midafternoon with

little more success. Our party was only seven strong and we didn't have enough blockers and the birds began flying out of the fields as soon as we stepped in.

Speaking of steps, did I tell you that with each step a plume of dust erupted from the powder-dry soil?

By the end of each day, our faces carried a thin layer of dust. While I showered both days and cleaned my ears with a wash cloth and Q-tips, it still took me three days to clean my ears.

My brother-in-law, Norbert, hunted in Sheridan County; he said their experience in northwestern Kansas was even less productive than ours around Hays. He estimated the bird count totaled approximately 15 to 25 percent of what it is in an average year.

Norb has hunted in Sheridan County for more than 40 years. He should have a pretty good idea of pheasant numbers.

In spite of the less-than-ideal hunting conditions, our group of hunters enjoyed our time in the fields and draws of northwestern Kansas. We appreciated the hospitality and the fine folks who allow us to hunt their land each season. We understand that hunting on private property is a real privilege and something not everyone has an opportunity to do.

That said, we also witnessed firsthand the drought conditions facing our nation's crop and livestock producers. We know without the blessing of rain from above, 2013 could bring continued drought, lack of abundant crops and tightening economic conditions for farmers and ranchers.

This Thanksgiving and throughout the holiday season, think about the blessings you enjoy. Think about the farmers and ranchers who face continued troubled times with this lingering lack of moisture. Offer a prayer on their behalf.

John Schlageck is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. Born and raised on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

Answer the call



tim huelskamp

• u.s. rep.

In many columns I discuss how today's decisions impact the next generation. But, the decisions that are made in the voting booth or in the halls of Congress pale in comparison to the decision of a family to adopt a child. The willingness of men and women to use the blessing of their family to become dads and moms for children in need is an amazing sacrifice -- as well as a sign of commitment to the most vulnerable and defenseless members of the next generation.

Although there are so many threats to the family as the foundation of society, the family still remains the most influential force in a child's life. Children in homes with actively involved parents are less likely to engage in risky behavior, are more likely to do well in school (and ultimately professionally), and are socially well-adjusted. These factors all have major implications for public policy. It is an investment in society to ensure that all children have loving, caring, and engaged moms and dads.

November is National Adoption Month, and we encourage all Kansans who have felt called to adoption to act. The number of finalized adoptions in Kansas has grown in the past two years: from 721 in fiscal year 2010 to 761 in 2011 and 777 in 2012. While the State of Kansas provides assistance for families to bring children into their homes, hundreds of children remain in the Kansas foster care system without "forever families." And, many lack a relative able to adopt them.

We have also been blessed with the opportunity to meet other families who have opened their homes to adoption. In September, we awarded the Meyer family of Salina with the Congressional "Angels in Adoption" award. Twenty-five years ago they never could have imagined having more than two children. But, they followed their hearts and have adopted eight children, several of which have special needs. They have served as foster parents to many other children. In their humility, the Meyers will admit they are not perfect; but, to their credit, they are in the eyes of their children.

Oftentimes a child enters the foster care system when a judge decides that his or her parents are unfit to care for that child. But, there are many birthparents out there who decide -- often before a child is even born -- to put their child up for adoption. What a tremendous and

beautiful sacrifice it is to put your child with a "forever family." There are many paths by which a child can join an adoptive parents' home, and we encourage Kansans to explore these options.

We know not every family can or is called to serve as an adoptive family, but there are things all can do to provide community for those families that do. There are nearly four dozen instances in the Bible of God calling on us to take care of widows and children. This is not a call to cede that responsibility to the government; no, this is a call for us to act personally for and with our neighbors.

For information about how your family can help a child in need, go to www.adoptkskids.org.

Tim Huelskamp represents the 1st Congressional District of Kansas.

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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

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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@nwkansan.com. Advertising questions can be sent to: goodlandads@nwkansan.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).

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