

President fools networks and terrorists

It really shouldn't have come as a surprise, but it certainly fooled some of the biggest names in network news who so often hint of having an inside track to what's going on wherever.

So, these giants of the industry — the anchors of the evening television newscasts and the stars of cable television news shows — packed their bags and made their way to Baghdad to record the much-heralded turnover of power from U.S. occupiers to the Iraqi interim government.

This was supposed to take place Wednesday. But it didn't.

You see, President Bush had another surprise up his sleeve: the Iraq Sovereignty Document was signed by Ambassador L. Paul Bremer and turned over to Iraqi Prime Minister Iyad Allawi in a secret ceremony Monday morning.

It wasn't a "fooled you" stunt aimed at the media. It was, however, designed to catch the insurgents off guard as there was no doubt they would have engaged in a bloodbath of some kind had the ceremony taken place on the appointed date of June 30.

We are certain this was the plan all along: determine a date for the turnover, publicize that date, and beat that date to death so nobody would forget it.

It was a stroke of brilliance. And it worked beautifully.

Networks aired more debates than you could count among those who questioned the wisdom of turning over the reigns of government to Iraq on June 30 ("too early, not realistic," they would shout) versus those who were in support of the date ("Iraq is ready to assume that responsibility," they would counter). And on and on the debates would rage.

Bingo! There was no June 30.

So the "breaking news" planned for that date broke on June 28. How successful this turnover of limited power will be remains to be seen. It'll be a bumpy ride, no doubt. And we will still have our 130,000 military people on the ground.

Iraq will remain the No. 1 issue as Americans ponder a Bush White House lease extension or a John Kerry takeover.

With the race at a dead heat, the result of the Nov. 2 election will only offer satisfaction or disappointment — depending on what candidate you were backing.

— Tom A. Dreiling

Harvest is best, worst time

When we lived away for so many years, people would often ask if I was homesick during the holidays. I could truthfully say the holidays didn't bring on those sad feelings of being far from home.

No, for me it was harvest.

It was taking samples to the elevator and late nights waiting for the combine to finish a field.

It was seeing the lights of the combine coming closer to the road and wondering, "Is this the last time around?" (Seldom in those days was there more than one combine in a field).

Or the fear that the dark clouds looming in the western sky would bring just enough rain to halt the cutting or worse yet the clouds might contain the dreaded hail-storm finishing harvest for the year.

It was waiting for custom cutters to arrive; hoping they would get there in time i.e., before rain or before the wheat passed its prime.

Before we had the same custom cutters each year it involved my mother and me driving across the countryside in search of someone to cut the wheat. Or sometimes it was driving miles to get a part for a machine.

I'm here for harvest now, but the excitement and hope that accompanies harvest

Phase II Mary Kay Woodyard



was non-existent this year.

A drought impacts more than just the crop, it impacts the spirit as well. Much more than just wheat is lost when a good harvest doesn't happen.

Hope is lost and dreams remain dreams instead of becoming a reality.

When something is so intertwined with our livelihood as the weather, it is more than just a subject to talk about. It is business; and serious business at that.

One thing is for sure, farmers are a resilient lot and they will hang on as long as possible.

They know the weather seems to come in cycles and if they can outlast the weather, better times are literally on the horizon and with the recent rains, maybe they're now upon us.

Did I mention they're dreamers too?

The search for Senator Kerry's running mate continues...



Nancy has a little lamb and loves 'em

When I was a youth, my parents let me keep a few sheep. This was after a bad experience with a 4-H steer (let's just say we didn't bond).

So when Tricia decided that she wanted to have lambs this year for 4-H, I was all for it. Sheep are sweet docile animals; at least the ewes and wethers (the equivalent of a steer) are.

Rams get real mean. Of course, things have changed since I last had anything to do with a lamb. But the current love of her life (also known as Showtime) knows a lot about sheep and promised to fill in all the gaps.

I am not completely unobservant. I have noticed that they don't show lambs like they used to. For instance, we washed the woolly coats and tried to trim them so they looked like a square box. Now they shear the poor little things so they are running around practically naked.

Also all the lambs I had had short little legs. To show them you had to squat. The breed was Southdown, the emphasis on DOWN.

This breed must have fallen out of favor. Most of the sheep you see at shows now are long legged.

I wonder if the sheep-showing experience, way back when, is the reason my knees are bad? When things change it is often for the better.

Back Home Nancy Hagman



This past weekend I went to a sheep show with Tricia and Showtime. Believe me it might have been a first for me but it definitely wasn't his first time at the rodeo.

Confidence is a big asset to winners and there was plenty of that in our corner of the barn. Showtime is too old to show in 4-H shows but this was a prospect show and anyone under 21 could enter.

I ask a lot of questions, he has all the answers. Go to a big show and look in the show boxes. These guys can fix anything. These sheep have more grooming products than I have.

One of his lambs was the overall Grand Champion.

The judge said "It's like a beauty contest, when you have it you just know it."

At this event, Showtime proudly pointed out how he managed to get the gut off one of the lambs. She was the reserve champion in the lightweight class.

Quite frankly, I was in awe. His family has worked for years going to shows, buy-

ing, selling and breeding lambs, participating in judging contests, hiring out as show judges, running clinics and establishing a reputation as winners.

But, I guess, I never realized what a science there was to it.

First you have to be able to see the potential in the lambs almost from the day they are born. Then you have to know exactly what regimen to use to get them to fulfill that potential.

As for getting the potbelly off a lamb I'm thinking, "Huh, would that work for me?"

As I mentioned earlier, sheep are very docile. They are also not the smartest creatures in God's creation. But gee whiz, here I am, I think I am so smart and where has it gotten me?

Maybe sheep are simpler than humans, genetically, making it easier to manipulate them and make them show well (if you know how to do it).

Dolly, the first cloned animal, was a sheep, remember?

If you think on it very long you get into the whole theology question. How many times in the Bible was Jesus referred to as a Shepherd, his people as sheep?

All I was looking for was a fun weekend. And look what has happened.

Well, I did have fun.

Come see us at the fair and we'll get you into it, too!

State highway system doing well

Driving across the state on U.S. 36, I was struck by the fact that we are lucky indeed to have a sound state highway system.

In rural America today, we depend so much on our road system that it's hard to count the ways.

I had been to the U.S. Highway 36 Association meeting in Hanover, just north and west of Marysville, so I covered a fair stretch of the highway that day. In trips to Kansas City and Denver over the last couple of months, I'd driven it all, and I can report, U.S. 36 is in pretty good shape clear across the state.

The entire road has been resurfaced a couple of times in the 10 years I've been back in Kansas. Except for the stretch between Norton and Norcat, all of it now has at least three-foot paved shoulders, the current standard for moderate traffic volumes.

The state Department of Transportation has contracts set to widen and repave the narrow stretch in Norton County, which is the last of the 1930s-style road across the state on U.S. 36. Projects in the last few years have eliminated narrow stretches out by Herndon and near Washington.

That leaves us with a wide, smooth, safe road across the northern tier of Kansas counties. If you go to similar rural areas of nearby states, you won't find the same.

Missouri can't find enough money to keep its highways up. It has more expressways and other four-lane roads than we have, but it has neglected basic maintenance. So has Colorado, though our neighbors to the west are catching up.

On the Prairie Dog Steve Haynes



It wasn't always that way. I remember in the mid-1980s driving across Kansas after being gone for half a decade, and being shocked by the condition of the roads. In just a few years, they had fallen to pieces.

It took a courageous Mike Hayden as governor to put together a plan to get them back in shape. Some say the tax increases to fund the first Comprehensive Transportation Plan cost him his job. Whether that's true or not, the highway plan, and its successors, have worked.

Today, Kansas roads are in great shape.

We've added new routes, bypasses, interchanges and other improvements to the system. And the Legislature acted this year to ensure that the money will be there to finish the current 10-year plan.

That's all good news. It still leaves Kansas behind the curve in building expressways and freeways and creating some economic development, but even so, we can be thankful for the roads that we have.

At the U.S. 36 meeting, we heard reports from state highway engineers and talked about the association's goal, which is to get a four-lane road started west from St. Joseph across one of the most economically needy parts of the state.

The transportation department has started on the first eight to 10 miles west of the Missouri, but there is a lot of road left to improve.

Still, it's a start, and the rest of the route is either in top-notch shape, or the state has plans to repave it.

Smooth sailing on U.S. 36, that's the ticket.

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