

### It's disgusting, but allowed by free speech

It's hard to love the Rev. Fred Phelps and his offspring. They're all nuts, and not in an amusing or entertaining kind of way. The Phelps family and a few followers hang out at the Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, where they foment hatred, especially hatred of homosexuals.

God hates homosexuals, the Phelps say. They claim he's punishing America for harboring them by killing our soldiers in Iraq.

The family and the church have a long history of spreading this venom. They've staged rallies, marches, parades and demonstrations. They used to show up every day outside the home of the publisher of the *Topeka Capital-Journal* and once picketed a Kansas Press Association convention.

The press, they claim, pushes the homosexual agenda. And since God hates "fags," He must hate the press, too.

The attacks get personal. It's hard to take. No one likes dealing with Fred Phelps, but half his family seem to be lawyers (Fred himself is a disbarred lawyer, and at least two of his daughters have law licenses) and they sue over any attempt to block them.

Then a couple of years ago, this kooky clan got the idea that God was punishing the U.S. by killing our soldiers. They began picketing at the funerals of men and women killed in combat.

That's nice, isn't it?

Your son or daughter is killed in action in some God-forsaken foreign land, and a bunch of nutty demonstrators show up outside the funeral. It's hard to take. Disgusting.

And despite some attempts to curb the practice, it's perfectly legal. The church has a religious and political voice, both protected by the First Amendment to our Constitution.

Many would gladly take the Phelps' rights away, especially since they have been attacking war-battered families in their time of grief.

Maybe the most effective response, though, has come from an American Legion offshoot, the Patriot Guards, a group of motorcycle riders who station themselves between Phelps' rabble and the mourners at a funeral. The wackos get their say but the family is spared most of the indignity.

Is there something wrong with Americans that we allow this kind of behavior? Or something right? How can we let a small group of hatemongers spread venom at the funeral of a fallen soldier?

But if our troops fight to defend our freedoms, as we often say, doesn't that include the freedom of people like Fred Phelps to be nuts?

Even the American Civil Liberties Union, often criticized for backing whatever liberal cause comes down the pike, has defended Mr. Phelps and his decidedly unliberal behavior in the name of free speech.

That's the danger — and the genius — of our strong system of human rights. It includes the freedom to be obnoxious, the freedom to be wrong. But without the First Amendment guarantees of free speech and religion, our country would be far less than it is.

It's because our founding fathers had the foresight to protect our rights that we have the liberty we so cherish — that our troops defend — today.

The freedom to say unpopular things is part of that.

If liberty means putting up with Fred Phelps and his tribe, so be it. The Republic will survive, as it always has, and we're a better country because we allow everyone — even the nuts — to speak their piece.

— Steve Haynes

### Thumbs Up...

**To... Harold Shinn**, for your leadership in organizing the Patriot Guard for our community. Great job to all who participated. (hand-delivered)

**To... the Norton city** refuse collection department, for your kind consideration in turning the trash cans upside down on such a windy day. (called in)

**To... Principal Corey Roy and staff** at Eisenhower, for showing your students the pathway to achievement. Congratulations! (Telegram)

**To... Eisenhower's kindergarten class**, for those timely recipes! You all should open a restaurant. Bless you! (called in)

(To submit a name of names for this bi-weekly salute, e-mail [tomd@nwkansas.com](mailto:tomd@nwkansas.com), call either 877-3361 or 877-6908, fax 877-3732, mail to 215 S. Kansas Ave., Norton, or drop by the office. Thanks for your continuing input. -td)

### Agree? Disagree? Write a Letter to The Norton Telegram Editor

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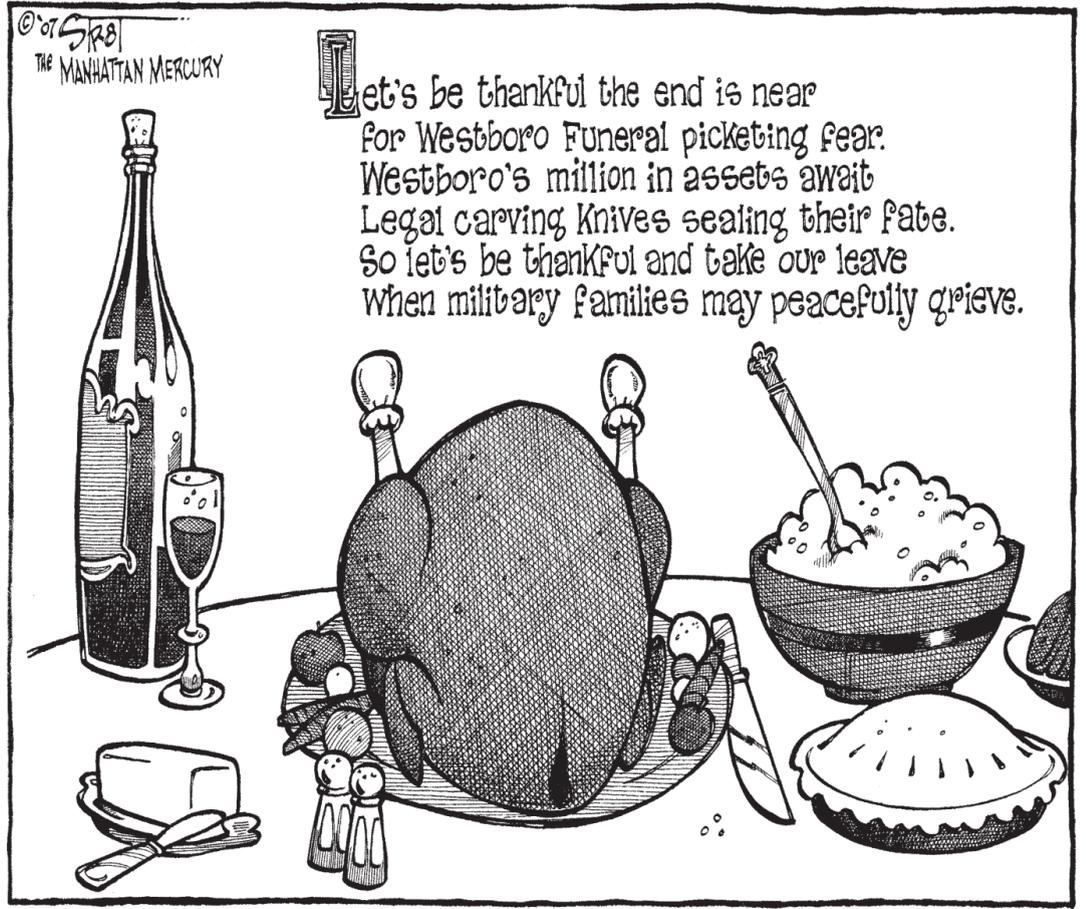
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### This is also the 'eating too much' season

It's over, that is, except for the continuing discomfort caused by an overabundance of turkey, dressing, mashed potatoes, gravy, cranberries, pumpkin pie, whipped topping, and whatever else was on the menu. It happens every Thanksgiving because this is the day diets are tossed out the window. After all, who is going to turn their back on a holiday that, experts agree, serves up the most delicious menu of all holidays? It's extremely hard to stop eating, but when you finally do, you know what follows: you start picking up leftovers. And speaking of leftovers, you will feast on those for several days after the holiday. Of course you will declare, "I'll never eat like that again" as you pop a Prilosec in your mouth. And then things eventually return to normal.

Normal, that is, until those two words are blurted out that again bring family and friends together at the dinner table: Merry Christmas!" And the eatathon resumes!

Know what? We never learn, do we? Of course not. The words, "human nature" quickly come to mind.

I don't know the source of this official drought information, but the word is that it's so dry in Georgia that the Baptists are starting to baptize by sprinkling; the Methodists are using wet-wipes; the Presbyterians are giving out rain-checks; and the Catholics are praying for the wine to turn back into water.

Boy, that's dry!

If a dog could talk, it would probably say, "A dog sweater? Helloooo. Haven't you noticed the fur?"

The sleight of hand, fake fetch throw. "You fooled me, a dog! Whoooo Hooooooo! What a proud moment for the top of the food chain."

Let's be thankful the end is near  
For Westboro Funeral picketing fear.  
Westboro's million in assets await  
Legal carving knives sealing their fate.  
So let's be thankful and take our leave  
When military families may peacefully grieve.

### Good Evening Norton Tom Dreiling



else take over the Wolverines football fortunes. He retired Monday. If you recall, he lost to Appalachian State in the season's opener, a real stinger! He closed the season with a loss to Ohio State, the fourth consecutive setback to the Ohio bunch. It was time. He did pin up 121 wins, five Big 10 titles and a national championship in his 13 seasons at Michigan.

Often I get e-mails from friends that encourage me to send their e-mails to 10 other friends and then back to them and see what happens in two hours, or two days, or next week, or whenever. I rarely reciprocate. We have been cautioned time and again not to do this. All it does is leave your e-mail address hanging out there in cyberspace for anyone to pick up, for whatever purpose. You don't want to do that no matter how innocent the e-mail might sound. It might also explain all your junk mail.

I think the perfect ticket would be Rudy and Hillary. That way we could dispense with both of them with one stroke.

They've got this big mouth on the ESPN College Game Day program (can't recall his name but his mouth runs a mile a minute), who said last weekend he can't see the Kansas Jayhawks in the #3 position (which was their ranking the day he was ranting). They haven't convinced him, he said, they deserve to be up there with those other programs. With the Jayhawks at #2 this week, I wonder what the mouth will roar about Saturday. The Game Day backdrop will be the KU-Missouri clash at Arrowhead Stadium in Kansas City.

I see where Michigan coach Lloyd Carr is getting out of the way to let someone

I was reading in the *Colby Free Press* this week where Fort Collins, Colo., will probably prohibit the use of red and green decorative lights this Christmas season by the city government, because those colors smack of a religious overtone. Lord forbid those red and green lights just might offend someone. What about the vast majority of people who will be offended by such an action by their governing body? When is this nonsense going to stop? Maybe what needs to be done is to decorate with black bulbs to mourn the loss of everything that at one time was so simple, so warm, so innocent, so meaningful. It all sounds like a bad dream. We need to wake up.

I wouldn't be surprised to hear Santa yell instructions to his reindeer this season using the following names: Rudy and Hilly and Mikey and Fredy; Mitty and Johnny and Baracky and Denny. Wouldn't that be a hoot!

Speaking of Santa, would he be a Republican or a Democrat? And why? E-mail me.

Have a good evening. And while you ponder Santa's political affiliation, remember there's a place to go this weekend where the central figure was neither. And you know who He is and where He's at. Go see Him.

### Book reading statistics interesting read

This week, when I was trying to find the number of books read annually in this country, I came across a variety of other reading habits. What I found not only was thought provoking, but made me thankful for a book club that expands my interest circle.

The article came from The Associated Press and described the reading habits of Americans. Although 3.1 billion books were sold last year, it was a small increase over the previous year. I'm not sure that tells anything because we pass books around so the sales are not all that relevant, but hopefully people surveyed provide a greater insight into Americans' reading habits.

In 2005, according to a Gallup Poll, people reported "starting" (which may or may not be the same as having read) five books per year. In 1999, people reported starting 10 per year, however in 1990 the reported number was six. Obviously, for a non-statistician like me it would be hard to draw any conclusions.

### Phase II Mary Kay Woodyard



A report by the National Endowment for the Arts conducted in 2002, stated "only 57 percent of American adults had read a book in 2002, a four percentage point drop in a decade". As one might expect the reasons were TV, movies and the Internet. Other findings profile who does or does not read, some of these are expected, some are not. For instance did you know:

- One third of men and one quarter of women did not read a single book during the year.
- Those who live in the West or Midwest "are more likely to have read at least one book in the past year."

- Southerners tend to read more religious books and romance novels than other areas.
  - Certain characteristics of non-readers include: older, less educated, minority, less religious and live in rural areas.
  - Religious book readers tend to be older, female, married, Southern, minority, live in rural areas, Republicans and conservatives.
  - Two-thirds of those surveyed said they read the Bible and other religious works and of course, my favorite...
  - Democrats and liberals "typically reading more books" than Republicans and conservatives.
- I really don't put much stock in statistics, but it is fun to study the trends. As I have said before, my brother-in-law's line, slightly altered for the season, "If you shoot in front of the turkey once, behind the turkey once, on the average the turkey is dead." Read a good book, eat a lot of turkey and have a peaceful and Happy Thanksgiving.