

Brain deficiency entered this week's prison mess

Let's see if I understand this correctly: the state budget needs to be trimmed so some brain deficient hot-shots came up with a brilliant idea: close some of the state's prisons! And one of those mentioned was the Norton Correctional Facility. If shutting down prisons is the solution to the state's budget problem, what happens if counties follow suit and close their jails to help ailing county budgets?

Watching this bizarre story unfold in the chambers of our State Senate and House of Representatives this week, brought me to conclude that apparently there are some people who have too much time on their hands. Or perhaps that thing in their heads is non functional.

Closing prisons?! Forget trying to sell Kansas as a great place to live and raise a family. Forget the fact large numbers of prisoners would be roaming our communities to satisfy our state's budget. Forget the fact "Home on the Range" would take a back seat to "Set Free" (to the tune of "Born Free") as our new state's song.

Kansas has been the laughing stock of the nation in the past, but this one surely would have had the L & L twins, Leno and Letterman, at the top of their game.

On the brighter side, it looks like we'll keep our prison open. That will save a couple hundred jobs — jobs held by Norton County folks and others from surrounding counties.

Next time some critter comes up with a similar solution to a budget problem, let's toss his fanny in the can so he can sort of get a feel for why we don't want those folks 'set free.'

A table of senior ladies in a restaurant was one laugh after another. The clincher, however, came from what looked like the oldest of the oldies who said, "Sure, there are mornings that I wake up grumpy, and some days I just let him sleep."

I didn't have a favorite in the Super Bowl. But when it looked like the Cardinals had the game in the bag in the closing two minutes, I was a Cardinals fan! Then when the Steelers stole the game away with that stunning TD catch in the end zone, I was a Steelers fan! That's the way to enjoy a game. No pressure. No stress. Just fun and excitement. And my wallet is still intact.

Let's see, the switch over to digital television, heralded for a year and a half to take place Feb. 17, apparently won't take place Feb. 17. The U.S. Senate this week approved a bill moving the date to June 12. Their concern was too many households weren't prepared for the Feb. 17 date. The House is now expected this week to take up the measure and they may set a September date. Huh?! Duh?! A classical example of how our boys and girls on Capitol Hill muddy things up. I am as confused as you are. What I fear most is when we turn on our television sets Feb. 17 to welcome the change to digital, we'll have a blank screen! Thanks, senators, thanks representatives — again, for nothing.

The water is getting hotter for Michael Phelps, the Olympic record-holding gold medalist and pot smoker. The incident in which he was pictured doing the marijuana thing occurred on a college campus in South Carolina. Authorities there are looking into filing criminal charges. I think he has boxed himself in, considering he also has a drunk driving record following him around. From fame to shame.

I offer up Tiger Woods, whose ride to fame went unblemished, as an example of how to handle fame at a young age. There was nothing, not even whispers of any wrong doing following him to the top of the golf world. Maybe it was Tiger's upbringing that helped him though those early challenges. He continues to be a role model.

Have a good evening! And when you pack up the family and head out to the place of worship of your choice this weekend, remember you'll be in the shadow of the ultimate Role Model.



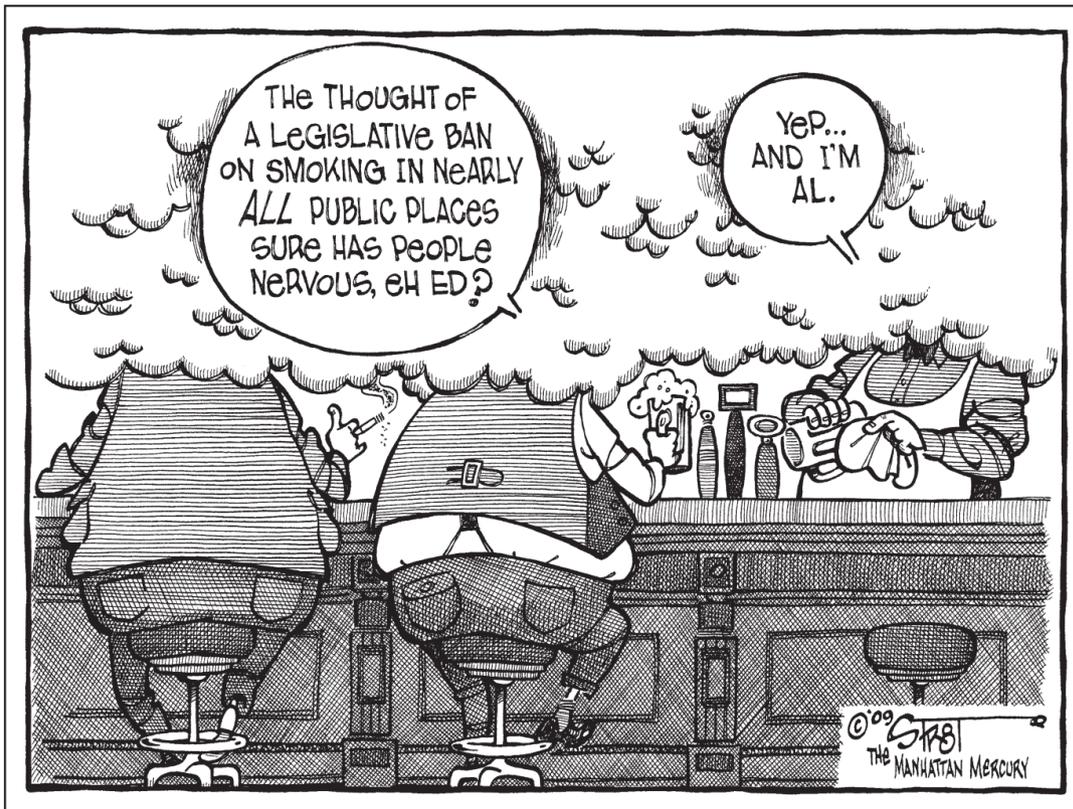
To... Doris Williams, and all concerned citizens, who feel that the Norton Cor-

rectional Facility is an important part of the Norton area and public safety of Kansas. (e-mail)

To... all of our spellers who advanced to the county competition. Good luck! (telephone)

To... Ed Witt, builder of the Pinewood Derby race track, and all helpers and participants, for making the derby a lot of fun and a big success. (e-mail)

Good Evening Norton
Tom Dreiling



They always seem to pick on rural areas

While the prison in Norton, with its nearly 270 state jobs, appears to have dodged the bullet for now, the fact that it was targeted for closing says a lot about how officials in Topeka think about rural Kansas.

It's not a pretty sight. Secretary of Corrections Roger Werholtz told employees he might have to close prisons in Norton, Winfield and Stockton to close the gap created by a proposed 3.9 percent budget cut.

That's two of four prison facilities in western Kansas and three of four in rural towns. No mention was made of cutting facilities in eastern, urban areas.

Losers would be rural counties where the state has converted old hospitals into prisons, as in Norton and Winfield, and built the honor camp at Stockton.

There are several ways you can look at the situation. Rural prisons suffer from their very distance from the bulk of their "customers," most of whom come from the state's cities. It can be expensive to haul them out and back, to administer far-flung enterprises, to deal with dispersed employees.

The Norton and Winfield prisons occu-

On the Prairie Dog
Steve Haynes



py recycled state hospital campuses, and the older buildings may drive up costs, but probably no more than at historic prisons in Lansing and Hutchinson.

The loss of 300 state jobs would be a drop in the bucket to Wichita or Kansas City, a bee sting for Salina, but a devastating blow to rural Norton, where jobs already are scarce.

You could argue that rural Kansas already has more state jobs than it deserves, in proportion to population. Most taxpayers today, after all, live in urban Kansas, not in rural areas. But one thing Kansas should do — for the sake of rural and urban counties alike — is try to help repopulate our rural counties. We need to do this both because it will help save the rural way of life in our state, and because rural Kansas can more easily absorb

growth than our already-burgeoning urban counties can.

A healthy rural economy helps urban taxpayers as well as rural folk, because a healthy economy out here means rural Kansas can pull its share of the load. We're not looking for subsidies; just a chance to live and work where the sky is blue, the land fertile and the people friendly.

The late Sen. Stan Clark started a movement to move state jobs out into rural towns rather than adding more and more office buildings in Topeka. He had the right idea. Disperse state workers, and there'll be no need for expensive improvements in the capital city.

His cause has been picked up by his successor, Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, who proposed rural offices in place of a new state office building. It's a good idea, but for now, we'd settle for the state leaving us with the jobs we have now.

We need them, and Topeka, Wichita and Hutchinson will hardly notice the difference. We'll talk about bigger steps when the economy looks better and the state could afford to renovate old schools and other buildings out here.

Our job? Help America succeed

MSNBC talk show host, Chris Matthews, made what some considered a gaffe immediately following the recent presidential elections by saying he intended to report everything about Obama in a favorable light in order that the Obama presidency be successful because, "that, s my job."

Some in the media picked up on this and pointed out that a reporter's job is to report. Since most of what Matthews does is commentary, I am willing to cut him a break. If anyone watching his show thought he was objective — well, they haven't watched his show.

As Obama's inauguration approached, we heard a lot about how there seemed to be a kinder, gentler attitude in Washington and the press. I'm fine with that also. Most of us probably wouldn't withstand the harsh judgment of public life long.

But I did have a few concerns about this kinder, gentler world. Are we to stop asking questions? What will happen when someone voices a contrary opinion?

I found out Rush Limbaugh has called out Obama. Obama in turn warned Republicans that nothing will get done if they listen to Limbaugh. I watched a "reporter" wring her hands and ask, "What happened to kinder, gentler politics?"

I yelled at the television, "It's called free speech."

Before this enlightening little news segment was over, the reporter also remembered free speech (or maybe she heard me)! Anyway good for her!

In 1996 Al Franken, possibly Minnesota's new United States Senator, wrote

Back Home
Nancy Hagman



a book called, "Rush Limbaugh is a Big Fat Idiot." I basically agreed with that premise so I bought the book. Franken is a comedian and former writer for Saturday Night Live.

The book turned out to be a collection of essays about various topics. As I recall only one had to do with Limbaugh. I don't remember what I thought about the essay. In fact I only remember one thing about the book: an essay about the Christian Sacrament of Communion.

Christian denominations have varying beliefs about Communion. Some believe the bread and wine become the flesh and blood of Christ. A friend, who was raised a Quaker, said they do not use the elements of bread and wine or grape juice at all, they only visualize them.

In a nutshell, Franken's take on Communion was: it is cannibalism. Franken is Jewish. I know very little about the Jewish faith.

When I consider the enormity of God I realize I know very little about any faith. I do recognize religious intolerance and prejudice and bigotry when I see it, however.

I was ashamed that I bought that book. I did so because I thought the title was

clever and irreverent. In retrospect I asked myself: is it clever or offensive to call people names? Is it irreverent or hateful to "satirize" a Sacrament of the faith of millions of people?

I sort of hid the book for a while, then I threw it away. To this day I'm not sure why I had such a strong reaction to it. I only know that keeping it seemed like perpetrating evil.

Only hope Franken has improved over the years. I cannot fathom why anyone would vote for him, maybe they don't realize.

Words can be very powerful. I like a joke, but we need to be very careful. We may never have the opportunity to correct a wrong impression.

Disagreeing with the President does not mean a person is hateful, racist or an enemy of the state. It means we are citizens exercising a right guaranteed in the Constitution. It's Franken's right. It's Limbaugh's right.

Don't like what someone says: throw their book away, change stations or turn off the radio or television.

Get on a soapbox. Write a letter to the editor. Run for office. Do it kindly and gently if possible but don't let anyone make you believe you don't have the right!

In our excitement to embrace change, our pride in having partially overcome a troubled record on Civil Rights, let's not overlook an important fact: Our job as Americans is not to help Barack Obama succeed. It is to help America succeed! (gneph@yahoo.com)

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