

Freedom of speech means defending the indefensible

Freedom of speech. We talk about it. We write about it. We point fingers at others we don't think are doing a good job. We discuss it endlessly. But it's really hard to get your mind around. Schools are struggling with how much leeway to give student newspapers. If the students' writing is subpar, will the teachers and administration be blamed? If the students write about some sensitive subject — abortion, homosexuality, AIDS, sexual abuse — will it embarrass their parents, their teachers, the administration, the government?

If the students write gross, vulgar things, use four-letter words and say things we would have gotten our mouths washed out with soap, will people be embarrassed, angry, disgusted? Probably, all of the above.

On the other hand, how do students learn what is acceptable? How do they learn that here in America, we believe in letting everyone express themselves?

Even when we don't agree with them? Even when what they say embarrasses, angers and disgusts us? We have few answers.

A young soldier from McCook died in Iraq. When he was buried, four members of the Rev. Fred Phelps' Westboro Baptist Church congregation from Topeka came to visit. Most of us know about Mr. Phelps and his church of hate.

While a family is burying a beloved son, he and his people will be in front of the church or cemetery carrying signs that say such things as "God Hates Fags." They claim deaths in

Iraq are part of God's vengeance on America for tolerating homosexuality.

At times like this, it's hard to defend Mr. Phelps' right to freedom of speech. But, that's what we do here.

We try to keep Mr. Phelps and his members away from the church doors or the cemetery walk, but we allow him to vent his rage and frustration with a government he feels supports homosexuality.

On a resent trip to Tunisia, in North Africa, we saw something different.

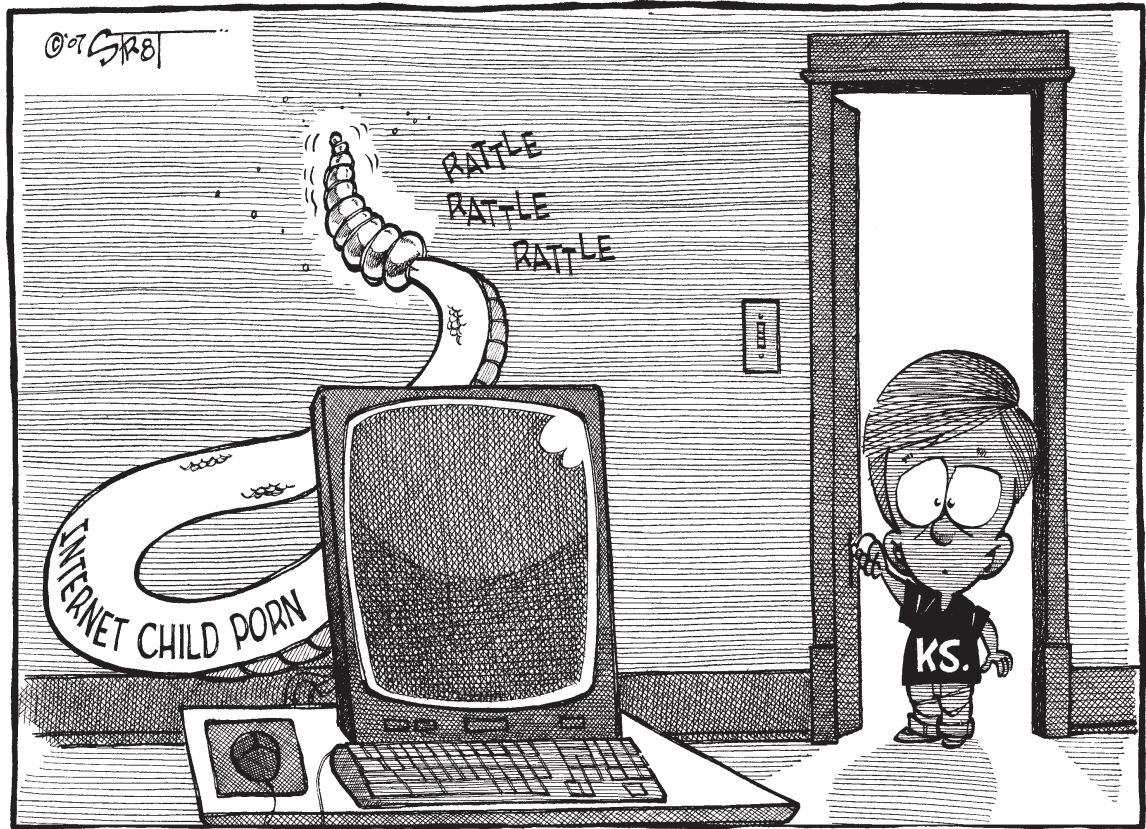
In its fight against fundamentalism that has caused so much heartache in the Islamic world, Tunisia doesn't allow the Fred Phelps of that country to organize or cause dissension.

At a university, we were told that the teachers and students don't talk or write about politics.

Seeing the trouble that fundamentalism has caused in Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and dozens of other countries, we can understand and somewhat agree with the Tunisians' stand.

But, we don't want that here. We want the freedom to say that President Bush is an idiot and Congress a bunch of puppets, if that's what we believe.

Maybe, freedom of speech isn't a one-size-fits-all idea, but, after 200 years of trying, the one we have is the best we've been able to come up with. We need to keep defending it, which means — hard as that is — allowing students to make fools of themselves sometimes — and the Fred Phelps of our world to have their say. — *Cynthia Haynes*



Meeting brings back memories

As we sat in the hotel in Denver and looked out at the sunshine, it was hard to imagine why we couldn't go home.

We attended the annual Colorado Press Association convention last week. We have done this every year since 1981, when we became publishers of *The Mineral County Miner* in Creede, Colo., population about 800.

Back in 1981, we were in our 30s and had three children ages 6, 3 and 6 months. We were young, fresh faced and eager to learn how to run our own newspaper.

We learned through the usual processes — mistakes, accidents and hard work. We asked a lot of people for help and learned a lot from seminars, watching how others did it and figuring that if this doesn't work, maybe that will.

By 1988, Steve was president of Colorado Press and we were publishing six newspapers.

In 1993, we sold out and left town, sort of. We left our newspapers, our home and our friends, but we didn't leave everything.

After settling in Kansas, we continued to attend press conventions in Denver, see old friends and spend time in Creede.

We still do all those things more than 13 years later. This year, we did



Open Season

By *Cynthia Haynes*
cahaynes@nwkansas.com

a bit more than usual.

One of the highlights of the Colorado Press convention is a visit with the governor at the executive mansion.

Over the years, we have visited with governors Dick Lamm, who ran as an independent for president some years ago, and Roy Romer, a good 'ol boy from Holly, Colo., population about 1,000. We moved during the second of Romer's three terms and completely missed Bill Owens' eight years in office.

But we got to see Gov. Bill Ritter on Thursday. He hasn't had a lot of experience in statewide office, but he was able to answer every question the reporters threw at him. We think he'll do. We hope so.

After lunching with the governor and a hundred other reporters and publishers, we had the opportunity to attend press sessions on the Internet, advertising, writing, legal

issues, postal problems and a job fair.

We talked to old friends and made a few new ones.

However, Saturday afternoon, when it was time to go home, we couldn't.

Both I-70 and U.S. 36 were closed from Denver to past home. In fact I-70 was closed all the way to Salina.

We heard that there was a 30-plus vehicle pile up near the Denver airport. Blowing snow and blinded drivers caused a rush-hour mess. Of course, at the Denver airport it always seems to be rush hour.

The hotel let us stay an extra day, so as the sun set over the peaks of the Front Range, I looked out over the city and thought how much I had enjoyed the visit and how much I was looking forward to my own bed, the cats, the dog and home.

Cities are nice to visit, but I wouldn't want to live in one again.

Funeral a celebration of life

Given the circumstances of our recent trip, you might think the mood would have been somber and sad. There were moments, of course, when none of us could help but shed tears at the loss of our brother Don.

The military honor guard, for one thing, brought a sense of pride to each one of us.

The flag-folding ceremony is symbolic and impressive.

We were all so touched when the young officer, on bended knee, presented the folded flag to my brother's daughter "on behalf of a grateful nation."

But, for the most part, our gathering was a celebration of Don's life. We laughed and talked and laughed some more.

At one point, I stood back and just listened. The conversation was like a dull roar. With 20 people in the room, there were 10 different conversations going on.

It was heartwarming to hear Don's friends and neighbors tell us what a great guy he was. One elderly woman told how Don fixed her air conditioner on the hottest day of the year.

"I don't know what I'm going to do without Don," she said.

He had good friends and good neighbors because he was one himself.

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Our trip home was not entirely uneventful. We were in Hays and needed to pick up a few things. Jim



Out Back

By *Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts*
cplotts@nwkansas.com

wanted to shop at a hardware store and I needed a few groceries.

We decided to divide and conquer. I dropped him off and drove across the street to pick up bread and milk.

On my return, the car began making a horrible noise and smoke rolled out from under the hood.

I was in the hardware store's parking lot, so I just shut the engine off and went in to find Jim.

He diagnosed the problem and went back into the store to buy a socket wrench. After much whanging and banging, the car would start but had no power steering.

Jim said we had to get to a car parts store down the street, but we couldn't run the car very long because it would overheat.

It was like driving a tank," I said. "My power!"

Long story short. Jim bought a new belt and fixed the car right there in the lot. My hero. We don't have air conditioning, but that can wait for another day.

What couldn't wait was the phone

call we received the next morning. The hardware store called; Jim had left his checkbook at the store.

Luckily, for us, Dick and Donna were still in Hays (attending the Class 3-2-1A state wrestling tournament) and they volunteered to pick it up.

They even delivered it to the house while we were at church Sunday morning.

That's our life; one seamless event blended into another. I think I'm ready for a non-eventful interlude.

From the Bible

And he looked up, and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury. And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites. And he said, Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all. . . .
Psalm 102: 1, 2

Bill could take workers' rights

One bill the new Democrat majority is pushing through Congress would take away employees' right to vote on whether or not to have a union.

It may sound kind of un-American, but the bill — known in a neat twist of Orwellian verbiage as the Employee Free Choice Act — is a top goal of Big Labor.

Why?

Because the changes under the bill would make it much easier for unions to coerce employees into approving a union. By eliminating open, secret-ballot elections, it also would take away whatever chance an employer has to fight unionization.

Under the new bill, if a union collects signed cards from a majority of the workers at a plant or office, the union would be approved. Today, if the union has cards from more than half the workers, the government will hold an election. Both union and management campaign.

What's the difference, you ask? Coercion.

If you've been through a union election, as I have, you know organizers put subtle pressure on their coworkers to go along. This can be



Along the Sappa

By *Steve Haynes*
schaynes@nwkansas.com

effective in getting them to sign a card, but inside the folds of the voting booth, many change their mind.

Workers who don't really want a union often sign cards for an election but have no intention of voting yes. They just want to please their friends and coworkers and get them off their backs.

This vote-switching really infuriates union organizers, who often lose an election after hearing promises of victory.

Under the new law, antiunion workers would be subject to peer pressure to go along and sign a union card. That would be their only chance to vote.

Workers deserve the right to decide on a union without coercion. They deserve the right to vote in secret, as we all do when election time rolls around.

Employers deserve the right to give their side before the decision to organize is made, not after all the votes are in.

Unions want to increase their power, and there's some evidence they need to, but this isn't the way to do it. The current law is fair and adequate. It protects everyone's rights.

Faced with a "card-check" organizing drive like the bill would provide, I don't think I would have changed my decision. But many I knew did sign cards, then vote no. My friends among the organizing committee, most of them looking for new jobs after the vote failed, showed me their counts.

That's OK, because the secret ballot allows workers to voice their true feelings. Doing away with that right really would be un-American.

Reader says Dems 'on right track'

To the Editor:

The congressional Democrat majority is on the right track with their First Hundred Hours list of goals. It would enhance the esteem of Republican leaders and others to get on board, instead of thumbing their noses at the recent elections, by trying to insert a line-item-veto for this president into ethics bill.

A rejuvenated new Congress could also create laws to bring more citizens into active American participation.

Letter to the Editor

New laws could forbid use of voter databases to select jurors, and there will be more registered voters; require public employees to pay into Social Security, and the system grows; re-affiliate with the International Criminal Court, even if it

means prohibiting the death penalty and enabling criminal prosecutions against Americans; and initiate a single-payer plan (government agency) for all American health care.

John Bauer
Martinez, Calif.

THE OBERLIN HERALD

Serving Oberlin and Decatur County since 1879

USPS 401-600

Phone: (785) 475-2206 Fax (785) 475-2800

170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749-2243

E-mail: oberlinherald@nwkansas.com

Published each Wednesday by Haynes Publishing Co., 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749. Periodicals mail postage paid at Oberlin, Kan. 67749.

Nor'West Newspapers

STAFF

- Steve Haynes editor
- Kimberly Davis managing editor
- Mary Lou Olson society editor
- Judy Jordan proofreader
- Carolyn Kelley-Plotts columnist
- Cynthia Haynes business manager
- David Bergling advertising manager
- Pat Cozad wantads/circulation
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Subscriptions: One year, \$33 (tax included) in Decatur, Norton, Rawlins, Sheridan, Thomas and Red Willow counties; \$38 (tax included) elsewhere in Kansas; \$42 elsewhere in the U.S. Foreign subscriptions, \$50-\$250 (in US dollars only) extra per year (except APO/FPO). POSTMASTER: Send change of address to 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749-2243.

Office hours: 8:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. Mon.-Fri. (Also open most Saturdays when someone is in.)

