

Man's lawsuit teaches importance of the First

It took a lawsuit, but a Wichita-area suburb has admitted it did wrong by filing criminal charges against a citizen who put a sign in his yard critical of the city.

Who'd have thought that kind of thing still happens in America?

Still, it appears officials sometimes will violate the Constitution just because they can, just as some will violate open meetings or open records laws — just because they can.

It can be tough to be in government. You're open to criticism on all sides. Sometimes officials just get tired of dealing with people, especially if they're persistent and make themselves known.

That's apparently what happened in Valley Center, where the city attorney filed a little-used charge of criminal libel against a citizen who complained about a drainage problem in his yard.

The homeowner, Jarrod West, posted a sign June 25 that said "Dear Valley Center, I did not buy Lake Front Property! Fix this problem. This is what I pay taxes for. P.S. Joel, this means you!"

The "Joel" referred to City Administrator Joel Pile, the Associated Press reports.

City Attorney Barry Arbuckle sent West a letter questioning the factual accuracy of the yard sign, particularly Pile's personal responsibility for drainage problems, court records show. Fearing legal action, West removed the sign July 10.

However, eight days later, he was named in a criminal complaint alleging that the sign exposed the city administrator to "public contempt and ridicule ... tending to deprive him of the benefit of public confidence and

social acceptance."

Apparently, you can't fight City Hall.

The city later dismissed the complaint "without prejudice," meaning the charges could be refiled. The city attorney allegedly wouldn't promise otherwise, and Mr. West called in the American Civil Liberties Union. A suit was filed in federal District Court and a hearing set on an injunction.

It seems the First Amendment bars government from persecuting citizens for exercising their rights. Here's the text of what many consider the key part of the Bill of Rights:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

The suit alleged that Mr. West could not exercise free speech or petition the city government while subject to criminal charges. Apparently, the city saw the light. In a settlement agreement, it promised not to reinstate the charges, plus pay Mr. West \$2,000 in damages and \$6,000 for attorney's fees.

"The First Amendment's cardinal purpose is to prohibit government from prosecuting citizens for seditious libel," said Doug Bonney, the lawyer assigned to the case, "but that's exactly what Valley Center did.... That is an outrage."

We couldn't have said it better. The freedoms of the First, to worship, speak and publish as we wish and have our say with government, are priceless, not to be trampled by anyone.

Amen, and thank God for the ACLU.

— Steve Haynes

Home cooking not worth it?

I used to think I was born too late — that I would have made a good pioneer woman. Then I think of life without air conditioning or mascara, and I get over it.

However, living with Jim Plotts could be considered a "back-to-nature" experience. Saturday morning, I heard him rustling around in the kitchen. On inspection, I discovered he had brought in the largest of the decorative pumpkins we had artfully arranged in the front yard. There it was split in two, with Jim up to his elbows in pumpkin guts. He meticulously cleaned the seeds and declared they would be delicious if toasted. So, I melted a little butter on a cookie sheet, stirred the seeds around, sprinkled on a little salt and popped them in the oven. Thirty minutes later the seeds were a golden brown. He was right: the seeds were tasty, but almost impossible to remove from their shell. Hardly worth the effort.

But, wait. We're not done. He also raved about how his mother had made pumpkin pie from homegrown pumpkins. After all, how hard could it be to bake a pumpkin?

Well, I'll tell you how hard it is. It takes a long time to peel a pumpkin and even longer to bake it. I soon discovered, though, that pumpkin chunks cook very nicely in the microwave. Two hours and a gallon of pumpkin pulp later, it was all cooked.

Turns out pumpkins are about



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
quality-pro@webtv.net

90 percent water, so I got out the cheesecloth, lined a colander and began draining pumpkin juice. Mash, squeeze, drain. Mash, squeeze drain.

Progress was slow so I decided to cook the moisture out. Into the Crock Pot, sans the lid, to speed up the process. It still took hours, but it worked.

It's hard to believe, but that huge pumpkin only yielded six cups of usable pulp. I wasn't ready to commit to baking three pies but, I took a chance on one. After adding all the required sugar and spices, into the oven it went. An hour later it was pie. Jim declared it satisfactory, but just like the seeds, hardly worth the effort.

I did can the other four cups, so there are two more pies in Jim's future. But when he asked if I wanted to fix the other pumpkins he got "the look."

I am convinced that if pioneer women could have purchased canned pumpkin at the store, they would have. And, their family would have been no more the wiser.

Just like my frozen noodles, it would have been pawed off as homemade.

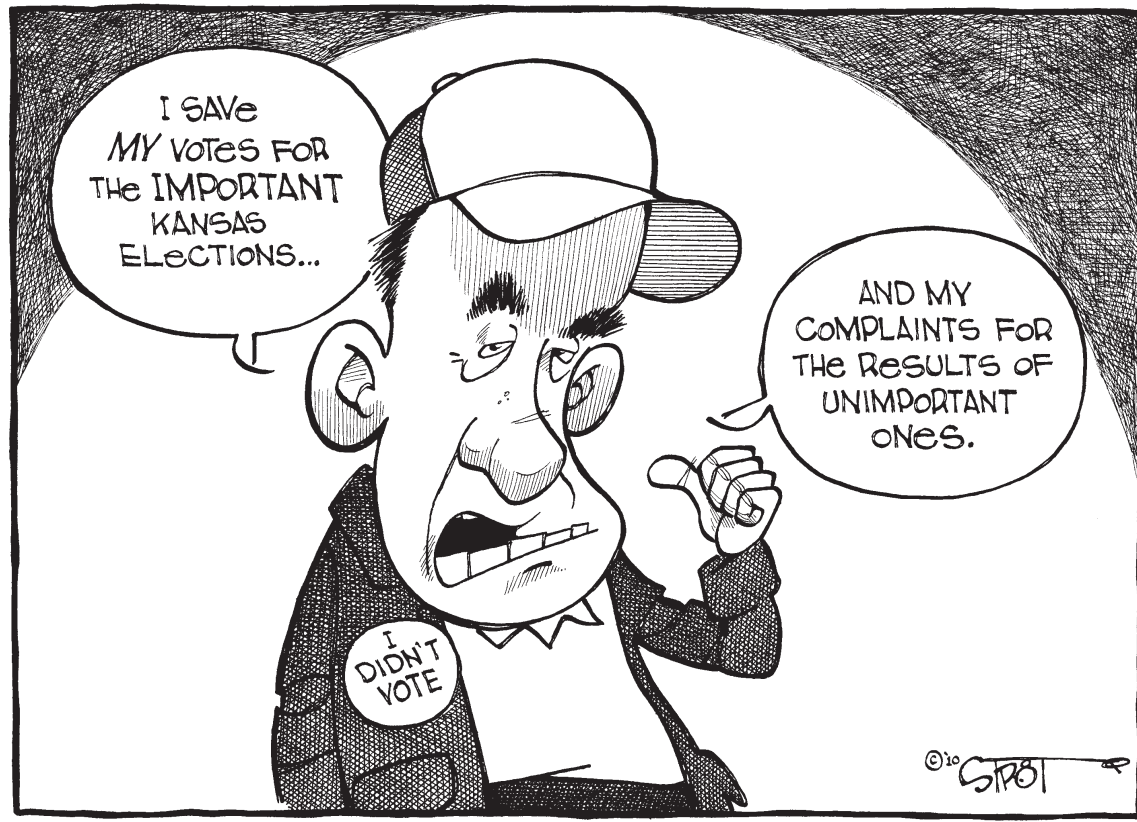
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Remember my declaration to make noodles? I don't have a report yet, because I'm waiting for the first day, cold enough to warrant chicken or beef 'n noodles. However, I did make them. I mixed, kneaded, rested, rolled, cut and dried. They are in the freezer, just waiting to be called into service.

My friend Bernadine called to offer a suggestion. She said her mother included pepper into the noodle dough. Made sense to me, so I added pepper.

-ob-

Illustrating the point of how a church should appeal to all types of people, the preacher compared the congregation to a Colorado dude ranch. He said the ranch had horses for all kinds of people. For slow people, they had slow horses. For fast people, they had fast horses. And for people who had never ridden a horse, they had horses that had never been ridden.



Broken drawer give up tools

The kitchen tool drawer broke. It just had too much weight for the size and shape of the drawer and the type of hardware holding it up.

It had done a wonderful job for years and years, but eventually there came the screw that broke its back, so to speak.

Of course, the drawer started out, like all such drawers, as a needed repository for tools.

But every time we had a fix-it project, more tools, more stuff, more leftovers were added. Then one day, as I was pulling it out, it just gave way. It would have fallen, except the cabinet under it was full of stuff. So there I was, holding a tool drawer half in and half out and half sitting on my electric skillet, two bird feeders and several empty jars.

It sat that way for a day or two, and then Steve and I pulled it out. Then it sat on the counter for another few weeks.

Finally, we decided we needed the counter space, and that drawer was doing nothing for the ambiance of the kitchen. We decided to transfer the tools to two smaller drawers, which mostly held food storage products like foil and plastic bags.

Of course, the two small drawers had to be cleared out and cleaned first. It's amazing the number of twisty ties a drawer can collect, especially when you consider that all the plastic bags today have zip-lock tops.



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
c.haynes@nwkans.com

That turned out to be the easy part of the project. The two drawers were relatively clean and only needed a quick swipe of a damp cloth to make them ready for their new inhabitants.

The tool drawer, however, was a slum — dirty, disgusting and full of odds and ends.

First I removed the real tools — hammer, screw drivers, pliers, wire cutters, branch cutters, wrenches and some round things that fit on the end of a long thingee that I'm sure is used for something.

So far, so good. Unfortunately, the drawer didn't look all that much emptier.

OK, next we'll remove the bottles and boxes. Let's see, we have six kinds of glue or glue-like substances — Gorilla Glue, Shoe Goo, Super Glue, pipe joint compound, all purpose cement and pipe thread compound.

There are four boxes of picture hangers; assorted wire nuts; eight rolls of tape, include Scotch tape, masking tape, black electrician's

tape, duct tape and a roll of red automotive lens-repair tape; and a package of stick pins

Then there are the screws, nuts, bolts, nails, washers and what-the-heck-is-this still covering the bottom of the drawer. A couple of empty pickle jars and two butter tubs rounded up most of that. I still don't know what to do with a half a piece of slightly used sand paper, three dust masks and several lengths of chain, wire and string.

After the drawer was empty, it was still dirtier than the dog after she's found a mud puddle. I washed and scrubbed. Steve put it outside in the sun to dry, and I bought some shelf paper.

All three drawers are now neat, organized and clean. It was a successful project.

Steve still needs to make repairs on my new food-storage-and-covering-products drawer, and I'm not sure what to do with this box of odds and ends. Which now includes three-quarters of a roll of shelf paper.

What did he mean, change?

The president's popularity is at an all-time low. His "approval index" in the polls dropped from plus 28 (78 percent favorable) two years ago to minus 15 (only 35 percent) last week. That probably wasn't what he had in mind when he talked about "change" during the campaign.

The president was in Mumbai, India, the city the British called Bombay last week. He stayed at the hotel attacked by terrorists last year, saying he meant to make a point. The terrorists said that, too.

With all the extra protection costs, some people were complaining it was costing taxpayers \$200 million a day to keep him over there. Others said it was well worth the cost.

The administration refused to say how much it cost to keep the chief on the road. Spokesmen said they couldn't talk about the amount spent because of "national security." Which at the White House is code for "re-election."

So far, no one has asked them what his carbon footprint is for the trip.

Back in Washington, the Republicans were measuring the Speaker's office for carpet. That probably wasn't what he had in mind for "change," either.

You do have to feel sorry for all those Democrats leaving the House, though, what with the unemployment stuck at 10 percent. How will they find jobs?

There's probably a federal program that will help them. With



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
s.haynes@nwkans.com

some retraining and an ethics class, they might be qualified to sell used cars.

Many will become lobbyists, of course. So you can forget about the ethics class.

Word is the Republicans are combing the new governors for candidates for the 2012 campaign. Maybe they can find one who travels light.

One benefit of change is that Nancy Pelosi will lose her Air Force jet and have to go back to flying first class.

The office wag asks what the Air Force will do with her jet. Someone else suggested sending it to Afghanistan. With her in it.

George W. Bush started out, like Mr. Obama, with approval ratings up in the plus 30 range. After 9/11, he hit plus 40. Later, after years of war and the recession coming on, he went as low as minus 40. So the president is catching up.

In fact, things are so bad at the White House, yesterday he got a sympathy card from GW.

Speaking of GW, did you see him throw the first pitch at the World

Series in Arlington? He tossed a strike to Nolan Ryan. Most celebrities can't even bounce one off the plate, but Mr. Bush did once own the Rangers.

Of course, someone will say it was just because he had his Dad there to give him advice.

Barbara Bush was in the stands, taking lots of pictures with her little camera. Just like a mom. Let's hope he washed behind his ears.

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That was fun. This form is called paragraphing, a series of quick, hopefully humorous comments that often play off of one another. It's little seen today, though columnists of another era used to crank out two or three a week. It's a lot harder than it looks. And a lot like writing a monologue for Jay Leno.

From the Bible

Hear the word of the Lord, ye children of Israel; for the Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land.

Hosea, 4:1

THE OBERLIN HERALD

Serving Oberlin and Decatur County since 1879

USPS 401-600

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

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

Steve and Cynthia Haynes, publishers
Kimberly Davis, assistant publisher

Official newspaper of Oberlin, Jennings, Norcat, Dresden and Decatur County. Member of the Kansas Press Association, National Newspaper Association, Colorado Press Association, Nebraska Press Association and Inland Press Association.

Subscriptions: One year, \$38 (tax included) in Decatur, Norton, Rawlins, Sheridan, Thomas and Red Willow counties; \$42 (tax included) elsewhere in Kansas; \$48 elsewhere in the U.S. Foreign subscriptions, \$50-\$250 (in U.S. 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.

Phone: (785) 475-2206 Fax (785) 475-2800
E-mail: oberlin.herald@nwkans.com

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