

River shouldn't get water from reservoirs

While it hasn't affected drought-stricken Western Kansas as much, federal efforts to maintain the flow of the Missouri River for barge traffic have sapped water levels in key reservoirs, costing Kansas businesses millions in tourism and recreation income.

The Army Corps of Engineers, which run the flood control reservoirs in eastern Kansas — and some in the west as well — says it's powerless to stop the diversion. Congress requires the Corps to maintain enough flow on the Missouri to allow navigation as far as Sioux City, Iowa, the agency says, and it has no choice in the matter.

"We don't have the option to decide not to do it one year or other years because of drought," said a Corps official quoted by the Associated Press.

That may be true, but it's all the more reason for Missouri River states to band together to fight this waste of our water. The Corps said it's required by law to keep the river up through the "navigation season," from April 1 to Dec. 1 — regardless of how that affects upstream reservoirs.

While the Missouri once was considered navigable well into Montana, today it's blocked by dams in South Dakota and northern Nebraska. (Though there are still a couple of draw bridges way up in Montana.)

The sandy, wandering Missouri was a tough river for old-time boat captains. The average life span of a riverboat was said to be only a couple of years. Then the corps narrowed and

deepened the river, allowing navigation at the cost of millions — and much environmental damage.

The deeper, faster water still raises issues for wildlife and sport fishing today, and makes the river much more dangerous for recreation.

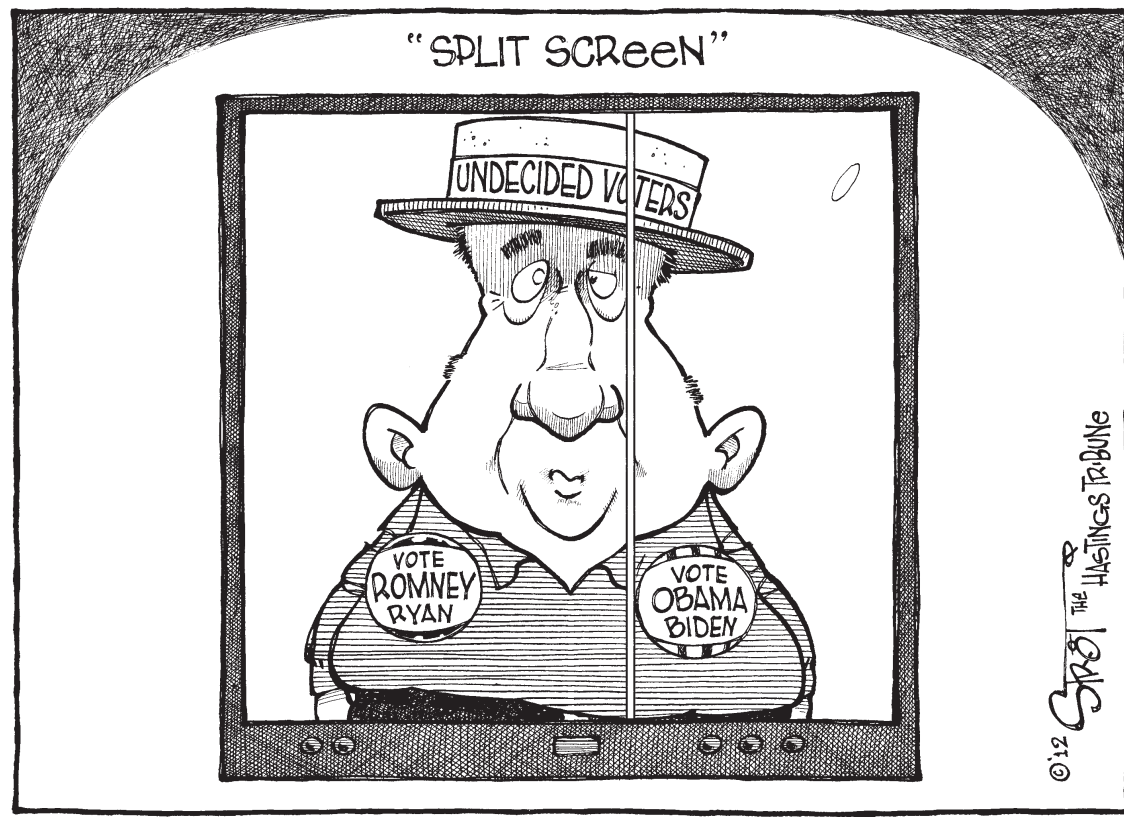
Barge traffic this year has been minimal. The AP reports that only about 200 barges reached Kansas City this year, compared to an estimated 40,000 that moved past St. Louis on the Mississippi. That's a 10th of what used the Missouri at the peak of barge traffic.

At the big eastern Kansas reservoirs — Tuttle Creek, Perry and Milford — the Corps has lowered lake levels three to six feet, leaving docks and boat ramps impaired or unusable. One new houseboat dock is said to have been damaged when it settled on rocks. Fishermen and others have trouble finding a place to put in.

All of this is costing Kansans money, and that's not fair to those who have invested in facilities at Kansas reservoirs or the towns that depend on this business. The effect on upstream states must be similar, all the way to Montana.

We know, in a dry year, lake levels are bound to fall. And those who built at Kansas lakes knew going in the Corps has a duty to keep the river up. But it's a question of overall economic good, and from here, it looks like we'd be better off to scuttle barge traffic and let the railroads handle the grain and coal a little farther east.

— Steve Haynes



She's hot and it's snowing

"It's snowing," Stephanie reported.

Snowing. I know snowing. That's when water drops from the sky in fluffy flakes. I seem to remember that happening last year.

Any kind of water dropping from the sky seems kind of incredible this year, but snowing really wasn't on my radar.

Mary and I were dripping sweat as we walked the three blocks from our hotel to the store to get her some eye drops. It was about 85 degrees with 90 percent humidity in Charleston, S.C. Not a pleasant fall day in the south.

But, then again, it obviously wasn't a pleasant day in Kansas, and the overnight freeze, that my ace reporter told me about had undoubtedly killed my garden.

Luckily, I had asked her to pick as many green tomatoes and other produce as she could the day before. She reported that I had two bags of tomatoes and peppers.

Thank you, thank you. I always go out the night before the first hard freeze and pick as much as I can. Then, I wrap the tomatoes in newsprint and put them in the basement. They aren't quite as good as fresh-off-the-vine, but they're worlds better than picked-green-in-Mexico-and-shipped tomatoes.

The report came back that fall had come to Kansas, and I knew that when I got home, I'd have to deal with one of my least favorite

garden chores — disposing of the slimy, dead vines which will now show every lovely tomato and pepper that were overlooked at last picking. These poor darlings will have already started to wither and shrivel, but still show the promise we all missed.

Oh well, it's gotta be done.

In the meanwhile, I moved from Charleston to Augusta, Ga., where both our daughters live. I figured that if you are three hours from children you only see two or three times a year, you'd better go visit.

Augusta was nicer than Charleston. Maybe the weather had changed or maybe it's just that much farther from the sea. The weather was cooler and less humid. A midday walk would still make you hot, tired and sweaty, but not a stroll to the store.

I helped youngest daughter weed her garden, which was down to about three green pepper plants and weeds.

Then, I helped oldest daughter pick a peck of peppers — really. That

child plants every kind of pepper that grows. We picked habaneros, jalapeños, cayennes, tabascos. She even had a few sweet bell peppers. The produce came in green, yellow, orange and bright red — beautiful colors. For contrast, she picked her eggplant. The kitchen counter was covered with vegetables

And she plans to pickle most of the peppers. Where is Peter Piper when we need him?

Unlike her sister's neat little garden by the edge of the house, oldest daughter's is a jungle in the backyard, and we had to take a whip and chair to even get in it.

After beating back the pepper plants, we turned to her grape vines, which we deforested, leaving on the approved central trunk and two branches on each side. She made a wreath out of the mound of discarded foliage.

Ah well, such is life. She gets a wreath and I get several bags of slimy vines.



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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Trip starts out with laughter

More than an hour before dawn, our little band of missionaries began our journey. An elder from the church prayed for our safety on the trip. On the way out of town, we stopped at one of the couples' homes to pick up some water.

As the wife exited the van, she stepped on an uneven curb and down she went with a painfully twisted ankle. After the injury was treated and we were reloaded in the van, one of our group said, "I think we better get our money back on David's prayer."

Anyway, that set the tone for the trip, and we haven't stopped laughing since.

We have an almost 16-year-old on the team, and she has been a joy. We knew she was a little apprehensive about taking off on this trip with so many "mature" people. We had learned her biggest fear was that, "They're just going to sing all the way."

So we had a little plan cooked up. After the ankle incident and we were back on the road, Melba said, "It sure is quiet in here."

To which I replied, "Well, we can't have that!"

In unison, we all began to sing, "Koom, bye ah, my Lord. Koom, bye ah, my Lord. Koom, bye ah, my Lord. Koom, bye ah." Then we cracked up again. I'm not sure Molly thought it was as funny as we did, but she was a really good sport about it.

My daughter Halley was to meet us at the first night's stop, a little church in a really little Texas town. We told her we would bring her an air mattress. It was pretty late when she got there, and we had already



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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blown up her single size, one level air mattress. Right beside it was our super deluxe, queen-size, multi-level air bed. She looked at our bed; looked back at hers and said, "Really? I mean, really. Do you think that's what Jesus would do?"

Forget the bed disparity. Halley can't comprehend that we're all ready to crash at 9:30 p.m. Normally, I can keep late hours with the best of them, but traveling in a van where you can't really get comfortable is tiring, and all any of us want to do is get some rest.

This column is being written the night before we cross the border, and I'm the only one still up. We're camped out in the lobby and fellowship hall of a church in Del Rio, Texas, and I'm in the secretary's office using her computer and Internet access. Modern technology is truly wonderful. Most of the time.

We'll taking a step back in time tomorrow when we cross the border. It doesn't take long to realize you're in a third-world country. Cell phones may or may not work. Not that we'll have time to use them much anyway.

I'll have a full report next week. Hasta la vista.

-ob-

While in the secretary's office, I checked my personal e-mail account and found an e-fanmail. I'm always surprised when someone tells me they read "OutBack" and doubly surprised when they say they enjoy it. One man from the little community where I grew up never missed an opportunity to tell me I'd never be the writer my mother was.

My letter came from a reader I inherited from my mother's column. Kathy said she had met my mom once and was impressed by her spunky personality and her collections.

Well, Kathy, she impressed a lot of us. There was and will always be only one Sunflower Sue. They broke the mold when they made her.

In the U.S.A.

"Where liberty dwells, there is my country."

— Benjamin Franklin, patriot, statesman
Jan. 17, 1706 - April 17, 1790

Vet money is being misspent

While we continue to see and hear stories about America's veterans receiving subpar medical care, the bureaucrats charged with overseeing the health needs of our brave men and women in uniform are apparently sparing no expense in taking care of themselves instead.

As a member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee I take very seriously our responsibility to provide oversight of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). So this summer when it came to light that the VA spent more than \$50,000 on a video featuring a General Patton impersonator, we demanded to know more. We feared it was just the tip of the iceberg.

Our own internal digging uncovered the first shock: at least \$2.5 million spent last year on the "National Veterans Golden Age Games" hosted at the luxurious Hilton Hawaiian Village in Honolulu.

While on paper the Golden Age Games seem like a noble cause to provide senior veterans with an Olympic-style sports competition, is it really a prudent use of our taxpayer resources and theirs to have held this event at one of the top - and most expensive - vacation destinations in 2011? Nope. With so many wounded warriors and homeless veterans, was it right for the VA to spend more than \$1 million on an event planner who works in Alaska? Of course not. Was it right to spend thousands of dollars on floral arrangements, polo shirts, and a Polynesian outrigger canoe exhibition? Doubt it.

How can these bureaucrats look our veterans in the eye and with straight faces when they are swiping the taxpayers' credit card like there is no tomorrow?

No doubt the cost of airfare and lodging was cost-prohibitive for



On the Potomac

By Rep. Tim Huelskamp
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many veterans who in the past traveled to centrally-located places like Leavenworth in 1997, Topeka in 2000, Des Moines in 2010, or St. Louis this summer. But, of course it was not cost-prohibitive for VA to send 178 employees.

In the meantime, we filed a congressional inquiry with the VA to get more information about the conferences. And then we waited. And waited. A few weeks later, the VA's Chief Financial Officer testified before our Committee and ultimately admitted that in 2011 VA spent \$100 million hard-earned taxpayer dollars on conferences - including \$80 million just for bureaucrat travel alone.

Finally, nearly a month after our initial request, the VA delivered a list of its 2011 conferences including details about the numbers of participants, the purported reasons for the conferences, and the admitted costs.

According to these data, the VA hosted 373 conferences in 2011 with a total cost of \$67 million. Top destinations included Texas, Nevada (Las Vegas), and Florida. About one-third of the total amount spent on conferences was spent in one of these states.

But also, perhaps even more shocking (but not surprising with this Administration) was that about \$5 million was spent on training unions on how to comply with the labor agreement they reached with

the VA. As part of the labor contract, the taxpayer-funded VA is required to pay for workers to learn more about the labor agreement. Who would have thought that these twenty-five five-day conferences would be held in such fun destinations as Atlantic City, Las Vegas, Nashville, and San Juan (Puerto Rico)?

As if it were not enough that the VA continues operations like this when our veterans are suffering, they are doing so amid Obama's trillion-dollar plus annual deficits and a massive \$16 trillion in debt. When American businesses were forced to tighten their belts, many did away with conferences and expensive travel for their employees. Washington, on the other hand, just kept spending — even when America's brave veterans should have been the higher, and certainly nobler priority.

From the Bible

Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

— Hebrews 6:1-2

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Men make field pleasing to the eye

To the Editor:

I have been walking around the track at the football field, trying to get some exercise. I had never thought about the amount of work it takes to keep the field attractive and ready for the games.

Terry Ream and his crew, Brian Simonsson and Dave Olson, really

Letter to the Editor

put a lot of effort into it. Take a good look the next time you're by there, then give these guys a pat on the back.

By the way, for anyone who

wants to walk, it's not crowded on the track.

Jerry L. Lohofener, Oberlin