

OPINION

THE HUTCHINSON NEWS

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EDITORIAL

Capitol offense

The First Amendment rights of a group gathering at a rally on the Capitol grounds last weekend in Topeka were severely and egregiously violated.

The group – roughly 25 people – gathered peacefully, was in compliance with the law and has no history of, or inclination toward, violent behavior. Still, this group that sought to assemble on public ground was stopped and told that its members could not bring American flags to place behind a podium, nor could they hand out small handheld flags like those often seen waving at patriotic-themed parades.

The reason, Capitol Police said, is that the wooden dowel rods that held the flags could be used as weapons. The police further explained that it is a standing policy and that similar flags are consistently, without exception, prohibited on the Capitol grounds.

Historical evidence, however, indicates otherwise. After the statement from Capitol Police, The Topeka Capital-Journal published several file photographs showing scores of people gathered peacefully on the Capitol grounds, holding their wood-staff-supported point-of-view placards and proudly waving their American flags.

The Department of Administration, a division of the governor's office and overseer of the Capitol Police, hasn't been able to produce a copy of its standing police policy to ban anything that conceivably could be used as a weapon – including even the smallest of wooden sticks.

When politicians and the government are so fearful that they relegate their own symbol of free-

dom to a weapon that can cause harm, it is a real cause for alarm. When we're so afraid that we're willing to stamp down a peaceful demonstrator's right to free speech and the right to carry an American flag in public, it is a legitimate reason to fear that the Constitution is in dire trouble.

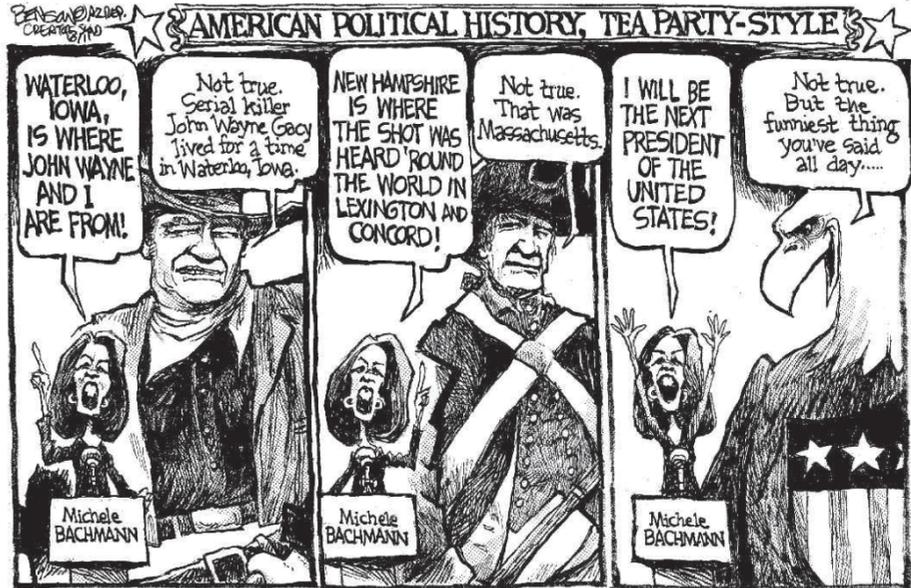
Fear is one thing, but in this instance the actions of the Capitol Police might not have had anything to do with fear but rather a selective determination of who is guaranteed free speech under the Constitution.

The group wronged this weekend was the Kansas Equality Coalition, a small group dedicated to defending the rights of gays and lesbians in Kansas. However, the group, and what it stands for, shouldn't matter nearly as much to Kansans as the blatant attempt to silence free speech.

Anti-abortion groups, anti-racism groups and veterans groups all have gathered on the Capitol grounds – with a robust showing of flags. A photo taken during Gov. Sam Brownback's inauguration shows hundreds of supporters, mere feet from the governor, holding potentially lethal signs and flags.

If the state's leaders hassled the KEC because they don't like the group's message, then Kansans who feel strongly about any issue – from abortion to taxes – should fear an administration that feels it can pick and choose who is or isn't American enough to carry a flag.

And if those leaders truly are fearful that a quarter-inch-diameter dowel rod can pose a threat to someone, that's just plain, well, gay.



COLUMNISTS

Reno Co. is witness to reality of change

Community columnist



Jessica Lucas

Change. It happens. It's inevitable. And it can be hard to manage.

You would think we would handle change better than we do, considering our daily lives are always in flux, but it seems nothing raises people's ire more than altering things they're used to having a certain way.

When I look at what's happening in Reno County, it's evident a lot of things are changing. The Buhler and Hutchinson school districts will welcome new superintendents into their districts today. My employer, Promise Regional Medical Center, has hired a new CEO, who will begin July 18.

The Hutchinson Recreation Commission may cease to exist as we've been accustomed. Haven's school district will no longer include a school in Mount Hope. Lincoln school in Hutchinson will operate differently than it has in the past.

And those are just a few examples of the changes happening in our community.

Staff and students alike are probably wondering how things may change under the direction of a new superintendent. The same is true at Promise Regional Medical Center. Everyone will have an opinion – whether an employee, a consumer or an unaffiliated outsider.

The school board members and community selection committee that oversaw the hiring for these three positions worked hard to ensure a good fit for the respective job was found. I trust they made

good choices and these organizations will benefit from the leadership and expertise each will bring to his or her role.

For those used to utilizing the services of the Recreation Commission, it's hard to imagine a different way of operations. Can community recreation meld into a Parks and Recreation City Department? Yes – but some things will probably be different than what we're accustomed to.

Is different bad? It doesn't have to be. With anything, I think we have to hope that as we alter ways of doing things, we – and those we elect or hire to carry out the work – examine our best and worst practices and refine/improve/cut what we need so we can provide better activities and services.

There are no doubt challenges facing the Mount Hope and Lincoln school communities. How does a community adapt to being without a school? Did the school board make the right decision in regard to Lincoln school?

We can make assumptions all day long, but the reality is we can only wait and see what happens and hope for the best in all the above scenarios. I admit, it's an

easier thing said than done.

Change is hard, often because of the fear it invokes. We don't know what to expect when we're facing change. The unknown can result in us imagining the worst possible scenarios.

But if we step back and look at those instances where we've feared change – whether at an institutional level or in our own private lives – I think we'd all be pleasantly surprised by the number of times the change we feared turned out to not be as uncomfortable as we expected.

As we move forward in Reno County, and frankly in order to keep moving forward, we have to expect and embrace that things will continue to change. Perhaps at a speed more quick than we're comfortable with.

The beauty of it is that things usually have a way of working out. We are all a work in progress, as are the businesses where we work and the organizations we serve. I'm hopeful that the coming months bring opportunities and improvements to all sectors of our county, but particularly in those areas where new leaders are emerging and new strategies are being employed.

And if things don't go as we hoped, I guess we can celebrate the fact that things will eventually change! It's just the way of the world.

Jessica Lucas is a Hutchinson transplant and director of development for Promise Regional Medical Foundation. She can be reached at jessicajc@gmail.com.

READER OPINIONS FROM HUTCHNEWS.COM

- Well said.
- Tell me who is going to lose their job and who is filing the lawsuit against the state. I want to see the tea party take up this cause – be at the front of the line on this one!
- Thank you. Give me a break! This was so “in your face.” The sad truth is our patriotism and our Constitution are under attack. My gosh, I hope none of those people in the group had an ink pen!
- Why so surprised? Did you forget that this is Kansas? Where a majority of the residents elected a homophobic governor? And just like always, the small number of Kansans, like myself, who think this is nonsense will be told by the rest of the state that if we don't like the governor or his policies or his suppression of First Amendment rights, we should just move. ...
- I want to throw up when I think of the hateful, mean-spirited people who are in control of Kansas government. Even though the rights of this group were violated, and brought to our attention, will it change anything? Not without some kind of expensive legal fight, and even then the chances are pretty good that this corrupt government would weasel out of any form of punishment or condemnation. ...
- Will the real God please stand up?
- So theoretically we can carry concealed guns (with a permit) to a rally, but Old Glory in plain sight is a no-no? What's wrong with this picture?
- Good summation of a bad deal. Our Capitol should be embarrassed.

WESTERN FRONT

PBS is best

Daniel Price feels we do not need PBS. After reading his column, I thought about what PBS brings us. First, there are the wonderful children's cartoons; “Arthur,” “Clifford the Big Red Dog,” “Curious George,” “Cailou,” and many others that teach children how to get along with other people, how to be honest, not lie and to help each other, and all the while they make the kids laugh.

Then there are the films made by Ken Burns. The wonderful series on the national parks, “The History of Baseball,” films of the lives of our presidents, programs on the history of our nation, “History Detectives,” nature films that bring us stories of the wild animals, and “Antiques Road Show.” Then there are the cooking shows, quilting, scrap-booking, how to do home repairs, grow a garden, films that take us to all parts of the world.

introduce us to artists from all over the world. David Foster brings to the stage wonderful singers, and they are all fully clothed. His Christmas shows are most inspiring.

Now, what do we get from cable and local stations? Cartoons that are mostly violent, space aliens with ray guns shooting each other; that really teaches the kids a lot. Seventy-five percent of the shows have sex as the theme. Inane reality shows. And the music – singers come on half-dressed, make obscene gestures, shake their rear ends. The performers in the background do about the same, and they do a little bit of singing.

Maybe cable could do some of these shows that PBS does, but they won't. Many people cannot afford to pay for cable.

Maybe we all should put more money into PBS and forget the cable.

DORIS BLEW
Stafford

JOIN THE DISCUSSION

The News encourages readers to share their opinions on this page and offers a number of ways to do so:

(1) Write a letter to the Western Front on any topic. Send to The News at 300 W. Second Ave., Hutchinson, KS, 67504-0190; fax to 620-662-4186 or e-mail to westernfront@hutchnews.com.

Letters should be limited to 500 words. Poems, consumer complaints, business testimonials and group-written letters will not be accepted. Please sign your name and provide your address and a phone num-

ber so we may call to verify the letter. We strive to publish letters within one week of verification.

Western Front letters are subject to editing for space considerations and libel concerns.

(2) Respond directly to a newspaper editorial by joining our online opinions blog. Go to www.hutchnews.com/editorialblogs and comment on any of our latest posts. A selection of constructive comments may be excerpted to go with opinions that are published in a later print edition of The News.

Convener in chief

This is a column about management styles. What sort of leader can get things done in an age of austerity?

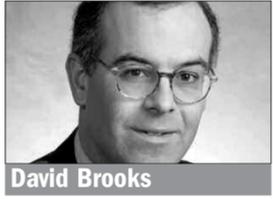
Our first case study is what you might call the Straight Up the Middle Approach. When Chris Christie ran for governor of New Jersey, he campaigned bluntly on the need to reduce the state's debt. After he was elected, he held 30 contentious town meetings with charts to explain how the debt would crush homeowners in each municipality.

Christie makes himself the center of the action and is always in the room. He sat down with Democratic leaders at meeting after meeting and hammered out compromises, detail after detail. The bipartisan pension reform bill Christie signed this month is controversial, but it is a huge step toward avoiding fiscal catastrophe. Christie, needless to say quotes Springsteen to describe his approach: “No retreat. No surrender.”

Our second case study exemplifies the Insurgent Approach. While campaigning to be mayor of Chicago, Rahm Emanuel also spoke bluntly about the tough steps he would take to reduce the city's \$650 million deficit.

But, in office, he hasn't led a single frontal assault. Instead, Emanuel has introduced a flurry of initiatives in all directions. He took away credit cards from many city officials. He's moved to lengthen the school day. He redeployed 650 cops from offices to the streets. He cut \$75 million from the 2011 budget. He induced United Airlines to bring 1,300 jobs.

At any given moment there seem to be six Mayor Emanuels announcing six initiatives. The measures to reduce spending are



David Brooks

submerged in a frenetic reinvigoration agenda.

The key for Emanuel is to know which fights to pick (making it more difficult for teachers to strike, for example), and sequencing those fights within broader narratives about city growth.

It's almost physical. Christie relies on power and mass. Emanuel relies on dexterity and speed. Both have begun their administrations in spectacular fashion.

The third case study is the most unexpected: President Barack Obama's Convening Approach. First, some context: In 1961, John F. Kennedy gave an inaugural address that did enormous damage to the country. It defined the modern president as an elevated, heroic leader who issues clarion calls in the manner of Henry V at Agincourt. Ever since that speech, presidents have felt compelled to live up to that grandiose image, and they have done enormous damage to themselves and the nation. That speech gave a generation an unrealistic, immature vision of the power of the presidency.

Obama has renounced that approach. Far from being a heroic quasi-Napoleon who runs the country from the Oval Office, Obama has been a delegator and a convener. He sets the agenda, sketches broad policy outlines and then summons some congressional chairmen to dominate the substance. This has been the approach with

the stimulus package, the health care law, the Waxman-Markey energy bill, the Dodd-Frank financial reform bill and, so far, the Biden commission on the budget.

As president, Obama has proved himself to be a very good Senate majority leader – convening committees to do the work and intervening at the end.

All his life, Obama has worked in nonhierarchical institutions – community groups, universities, legislatures – so maybe it is natural that he has a nonhierarchical style. He tends to see issues from several vantage points at once, so maybe it is natural that he favors a process that involves negotiating and fudging between different points of view.

The Obama style has advantages, but it has served his party poorly in the current budget fight. He has not educated the country about the debt challenge. He has not laid out a plan, aside from one vague, hyper-politicized speech. He has ceded the initiative to the Republicans, who have dominated the debate by establishing facts on the ground.

Now Obama is compelled to engage. If ever there was an issue that called for his complex, balancing approach, this is it. But, to reach an agreement, he will have to resolve the contradiction in his management style. He values negotiation but radiates disdain for large swathes of official Washington. If he can overcome his aloofness and work intimately with Republicans, he may be able to avert a catastrophe and establish a model for a more realistic, collegial presidency.

The former messiah will have to become a manager.

David Brooks is a columnist for The New York Times News Service.

Doonesbury Flashback

