

OPINION

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OMAHA DAILY HERALD FOUNDED 1865

OMAHA DAILY WORLD FOUNDED BY GILBERT M. HITCHCOCK, 1885

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SPEECH LIMITATIONS ABROAD

When speech is strangled

It's no secret that the First Amendment's free-speech guarantees are among this country's great blessings — and that residents in many other countries are not nearly so fortunate.

We noted here in 2008, for example, that Germany's constitution — called the Basic Law — says speech is subject to restriction if it insults what one scholar summed up as an individual's "personal honor." Under the German constitution, there is a hierarchy of rights, with the top spot being occupied by respect for a person's dignity.

Similarly, the national constitution in Canada as well as the British Human Rights Act of 1998 explicitly invite judges to balance speech rights against other societal interests, regardless of whether such interests are specified in law.

No, in most countries you'll be hard pressed to find as clear and as strong a call for speech rights as the U.S. Supreme Court commendably delivered in 1972. It asserted: "Government has no power to restrict expression because of its message, its ideas, its subject matter or its content."

That ruling involved a morally troubling case: The arrest by neo-Nazis to march and shout their anti-semitic insults in Skokie, Ill., home to many survivors of the Holocaust. Even those preening fascist wannabes, the court said in its sober-minded ruling, had the right under the Constitution to give expression to their political lunacy and vile rhetoric.

We mention this as background to an article last week in the Wall Street Journal on developments in Turkey. There, the prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has indulged in an incredible string of lawsuits intended to stifle political criticism and satire at in this country no one would think of suing over.

As the article explained: "The alleged offenders include a student theater troupe that does skits wearing long black hippie wigs; unemployed siblings who posted a song about Mr. Erdogan on the Internet; and a British teacher-cum-anti-Iraq war-activist-cum-rumormonger, who made a collage showing Mr. Erdogan's head on a dog."

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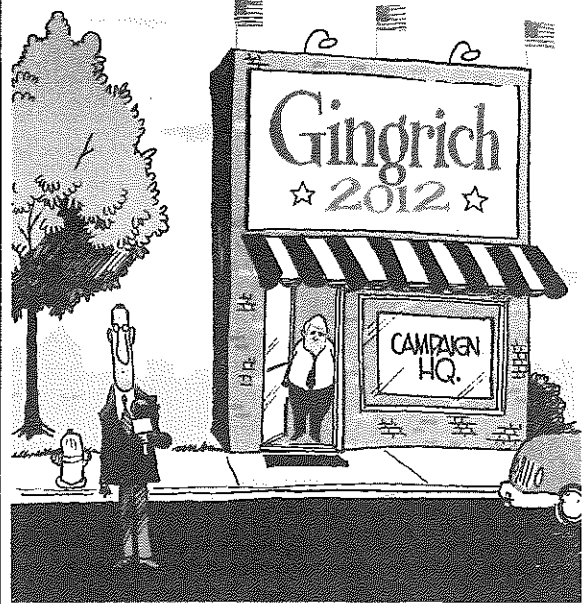
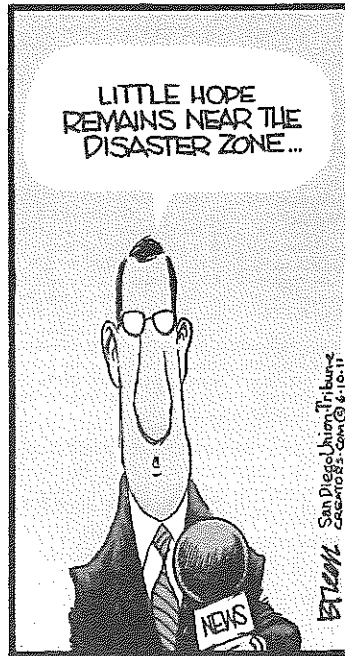
The man who depicted the prime minister's head on a dog, the Wall Street Journal reported, "was sentenced not to make pictures of Mr. Erdogan for five years, or face jail time. Having spent three days in a jail cell with two accused murderers after his arrest in the case, he decided not to go back. But he lost his job and now makes a living telling fortunes."

The brother and sister who mocked the prime minister through song were unemployed at the time and used the tune to criticize the government for the country's economic woes. Their song initially drew huge spate of video downloads, but then the prime minister sued and the siblings were each sentenced, incredibly, to 10 months in jail. They are appealing the sentence.

In this country, it's true that many Americans put so many restrictions on how venomous the language or how outlandish the claims they hurl against political figures they detest. The constant anger-fest can be wearying. Still, we can take pride that we live in a society that encourages and safeguards robust political debate, even to the point that national political figures are routinely mocked without fear of legal distribution against the critics.

Not so, unfortunately, in Turkey. But there's one real irony. Erdogan, the thin-skinned Turkish prime minister, puts few limits on his own rhetoric. He has referred to the main opposition leader as "a walking machine" as well as "shameless, immoral and low-down."

In response, the opposition leader says that — yes, you guessed it: He plans to sue.



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The Nebraska law granting that benefit doesn't require that they graduate from a Nebraska high school — only that they have attended a Nebraska high school and secured a GED certificate while living in Nebraska.

Many are in this country illegally because there are no provisions in the federal immigration law for which they qualify to apply for legal immigration status. The other provisions — like having lived in Nebraska for three years and applying for legal immigration status when possible — are really meaningless, since illegal aliens often lie about their true identities and where they have lived.

While the number of illegal immigrants taking part in Nebraska's program is small now, that may not always be the case. If more illegal immigrants relocated here from the southwestern part of the country, those numbers could certainly grow.

Tom Hammond, Omaha

Prefer smoke-free rental units

A June 7 fire at Shadow Ridge Apartments in La Vista was preventable. Smoking materials were to blame for displacing residents of 33 units. A smoke-free policy can help to

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Sue Casart, Bellevue

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When we think of all the oil products that have been leaking over the past century from cars, trucks, farm equipment and rail equipment and the oil and grease from onboard motors that washed into lakes and rivers, how can some people get so upset about the possibility of an oil leak in a highly monitored pipeline?

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After reading letters about the proposed TransCanada Keystone XL pipeline, I've made calls to senators, representatives, state legislators and the State Department, and nothing seems to be settled on the pipeline route through Nebraska.

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My observations are based on 40 years of experience in the oil and gas industry.

Bruce F. Everton, Kimball, Neb.
President/CEO, Everton Co.
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Palestinians also God's people

A June 9 letter on Israel was disturbing, albeit hardly surprising. Many Christians are so busy seeing Jews as God's people that they severely distort the history of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

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Three years ago, I had the opportunity to visit Israel/Palestine with a group of Christian clergy. We met with Christian, Jewish and Muslim groups working to find a peaceful solution to this ongoing conflict.

Palestinians are God's people, too. They are entitled to security, their own land — as was the original mandate in 1948 — and a place at the table, rather than under the heel of the Jewish state. Isn't it time?

The Rev. Mary Heron Dye
Glenwood, Iowa

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Is it really that difficult to drive responsibly in Omaha? For a large portion of motorists, the answer certainly appears to be "yes," judging from the shenanigans one sees on city streets. So, kudos to the Omaha police officers who carried out the two-week "Click It or Ticket" campaign that started on May 23. The effort not only resulted in 176 tickets for not properly buckling up (really, there's no excuse), but police also reported 919 incidents of speeding, 58 license violations, 132 problems with registration or insurance, 35 moving violations, one case of negligent or reckless driving, four drug violations, three warrants cleared and six other felonies or misdemeanors. That'll teach 'em.

It's been clear for a long time, of course, but the federal government doesn't operate like state governments. U.S. Sen. Joe Manchin, who until recently was governor of West Virginia, underscored that point the other day in expressing frustration that the Senate still hasn't produced a budget plan. Said Manchin: "In the states, you can't do this in the states — you've got to move." That's right, but this is just one of the many indulgences that Washington has gotten used to over the decades. Nonetheless, given the long-term fiscal pressures that lie ahead, Washington



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A June 7 fire at Shadow Ridge Apartments in La Vista was preventable. Smoking materials were to blame for displacing residents of 33 units. A smoke-free policy can help to minimize the risk of smoking-related fires.

Surveys indicate that 70 percent of people seeking rental housing in the metropolitan Omaha area prefer smoke-free buildings. A growing number of property owners and property management companies have realized this and implemented smoke-free policies.

Not only are smoke-free buildings attracting more potential tenants, but they also are adding benefits to the owners' bottom line while protecting the health and well-being of their tenants from the dangers of fire and exposure to secondhand smoke.

Mary Crosby, Omaha
Tobacco prevention specialist
PRIDE-Omaha Inc.

Respect life, don't destroy it

A June 6 news story on nonsurgical abortions reminded me of a lyric from the popular Bob Dylan song, "Blowin' in the Wind": "How many deaths will it take till he knows that too many people have died?"

Well, I don't believe the answer is "blowin' in the wind." Moral physicians, biologists and fetologists have part of the answer.

Life begins at conception and is a continuum. Each human being is to be respected and nurtured, not destroyed. Abortion is immoral. Abortion goes against natural law and divine law.

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What becomes of the sand, tar and solvents in crude oil after a refining process? Why are owners of this pipeline so adamant about getting it through? Couldn't an oil refinery be built in Canada? Trucks and railroads often haul refined fuel across the country.

After hearing about oil leaks on the existing pipeline and pumping stations, I believe common sense tells us that the pipeline should be re-routed away from the Sand Hills or abandoned altogether. Keep our Ogallala Aquifer water supply intact for future generations.

Stan Shavlik, Linwood, Neb.

Never seen a subsidy to oil firms

I object to the rhetoric about government subsidies to oil companies. A subsidy is a direct check from the government. In the oil and gas industry, there's no such thing.

The only energy companies that receive subsidies are green-energy companies that promote solar power, wind power and biofuels.

Businesses in every type of industry, from agriculture to construction, are allowed to take advantage of tax breaks by deducting many of their operating expenses. But when oil and gas companies write off expenses, it's suddenly called a subsidy.

written to an oil company. In fact, it's just the opposite. Oil companies continually write checks to the government in royalties and taxes. Tax credits are not the same as government subsidies, and oil and gas companies probably receive the least amount of tax credits of any other industry.

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At first, he played the denial role, which didn't work. So, he finally came out and admitted to sending the picture but said it was only as a joke. Who was he kidding? This is the wrong approach. Tiger Woods and Arnold Schwarzenegger eventually admitted to their marital wrongdoings.

Many people are mad at Weiner not for wanting to have an affair but because he wouldn't admit to it. Nobody was fooled.

Caleb Owens, Council Bluffs

Nothing new in today's scandal

Since biblical times, men have lusted after women, as has been reported about Rep. Anthony Weiner.

In modern times, many hot-blooded men see their wives as mothers, not as symbols. I was surprised when sex therapist Dr. Ruth Westheimer, who is my age (ne 83), was still advocating sex for older people. That's too modern for me — a Latvian immigrant to the United States in 1950.

As I observe life's absurdities going on around me, I realize that it's nothing new. Nebraska author Willa Cather observed, "same human stories repeat themselves over and over, as if they never happened before."

Eliza Ulpis, Orono

Some street work is never done

The Metropolitan Utilities District set to have been digging holes in the road south of 60th and Center Streets for 50 years. It's home it finds what it's looking for soon.