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OUR VIEW



Missouri's Big Spring on the Current River is one of the largest springs in the United States. GLOBE FILE

Time to think like an Ozark spring

An editorial that appeared in a Missouri newspaper in 1926 recently crossed our path. It noted that with the building of roads, tourists were sure to flood into the Ozarks, and pleaded for help with a community cleanup day.

"If someone near town has an old well or ravine they wish filled up, we feel sure a plan could be worked out." A century later, we're no wiser.

Last month, some Southwest Missouri residents and company officials testified in Jefferson City on the need to make sure they can continue to spread a mystery sludge made from food-processing waste and who knows what else across the Ozarks, under the fraud that this is nothing but fertilizer.

The Ozarks has been on the downstream end of this kind of thinking for too long to take it at face value when the legislative-regulatory-corporate-ag complex tells us this will be fine.

It's astounding to us that at the same time we're talking about allowing this pollution to continue, although perhaps better regulated, we still don't have our heads around how Roaring River spring works. We still don't know how big the recharge basin is, how it interconnects underground with other springs, or even where the bottom is. Then again, ignorance allows us to charge full speed ahead with indifference.

Tom Aley, one of the country's foremost hydrologists and an expert on karst systems, including the Ozarks, has helped us understand that the Ozarks is a three-dimensional world, and protecting the two dimensions of water on the surface is inadequate; the challenge is that third dimension and understanding that what we put on the ground in one place will resurface even dozens of miles away, crossing underground sometimes even into a different watershed.

Aley years ago demonstrated that a dump near Dora in Ozark County was actually a natural sinkhole. It had been used as a trash site for many years, and one of the things he found within it was sludge that had been pumped out of septic systems. Everything that had been tossed into it traveled via this three-dimensional country to a popular spring a few miles away used for recreation.

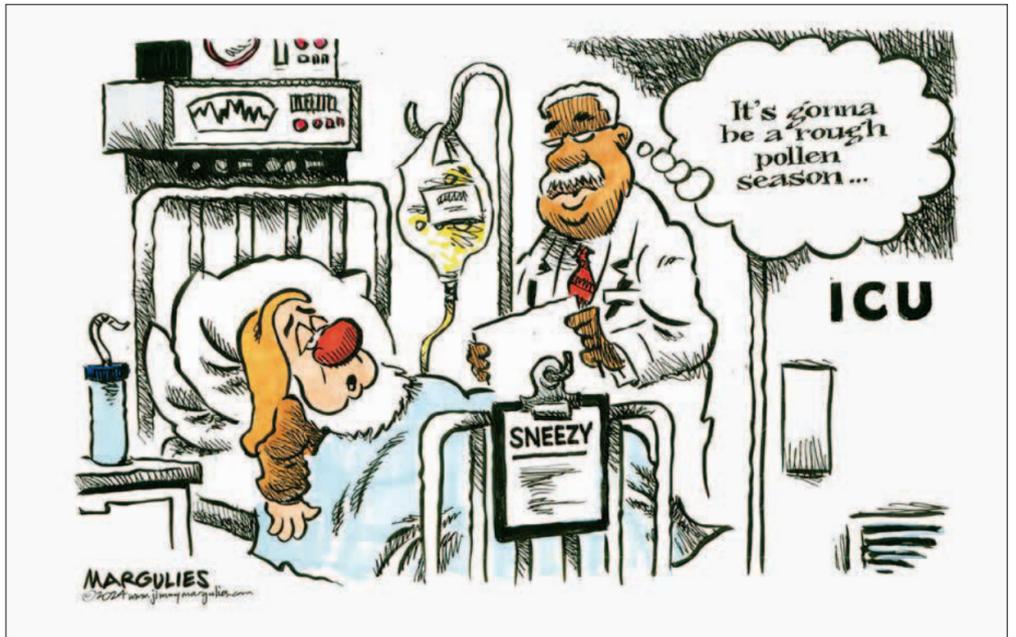
Tracer dyes he poured into a city manhole in Eureka Springs, Arkansas — a city with 60-plus springs — came out at Sweet Spring, where residents still went to fill water jugs with what they thought was pure Ozark spring water.

Tracer dyes others put into toilet holding tanks in one Ozark community showed up miles away in Boze Mill Spring on the Eleven Point.

There's a spring in the Ozarks that is part of a losing stream that makes its way underground to three separate river systems. A single misstep then at this spot can poison three spectacular Ozark rivers.

Conservationist (and Ozark lover) Aldo Leopold famously encouraged his generation to "think like a mountain," in his "Sand County Almanac."

In the Ozarks, we'd do well to think like an Ozark spring.



Kansas must act to save Ogallala aquifer

The Ogallala Aquifer Summit took place in Liberal, Kansas, last month. About 200 stakeholders gathered to hear discussions about the future of irrigated agriculture in those areas that overlay the Ogallala. Given publicity about the decline of the water levels in the Ogallala, one might have surmised that a consensus would be apparent about the severity of the decline and the reality that inaction is not a solution.



BEN PALEN

Columnist

Various white papers were presented from organizations in the states that overlay the Ogallala. Two results stood out when I reviewed the fine print. In one survey of 206 producers from throughout the Ogallala area, the report noted that "a majority of producers do not feel personally responsible for groundwater depletion and do not believe that they need to minimize or reduce their groundwater use." Further, in late 2023, a survey was done among 51 agriculture producers in the Oklahoma Panhandle. One of the conclusions from the survey was that only 60% of respondents believe that groundwater decline was a "serious problem."

One impression that an outside observer might draw from what I just noted is that some kind of alternate reality must be at play. The numbers do not lie. The decline of the Ogallala is well documented. How is one to save it when there are attitudes of doubt?

As a fifth-generation farmer, I have seen many changes in agriculture in my lifetime. What remains little changed, however, is an attitude of independence and resistance to outsiders making decisions that affect one's farm. My comment is not intended as some kind of personal criticism of farmers. Almost to a person, they have a love for the land and clear desire for self-determination.

All of this said, we are in a changing world. Ten years ago, there was little talk about climate change. Social, economic and environmental factors have transformed the landscape faced by most farmers. We live in a world where farm-level decisions cannot be made in a vacuum. Instead, we must consider their impact on the bigger picture.

The difficult reality is that continu-



The Arkansas River near the Santa Fe Trail crossing at Cimarron, Kansas, is a dry bed. The Ogallala aquifer groundwater levels in much of western Kansas started dropping in the 1950s as pumping increased, according to the Kansas Geological Survey. COURTESY | MAX MCCOY, KANSAS REFLECTOR

ing the status quo regarding use of the Ogallala is unsustainable.

There cannot be any doubt about that. When a large portion of the economy at local and state levels is built on premises that no longer mesh with reality, there are really only two types of solution. First, it can be top down, where change is imposed by higher levels of government. Second, it can come from a combination of local and state input. In other words, a collaborative effort. Even though someone living in Lawrence might think that what happens in Tribune does not have any impact, the reality is that it does. The entire state of Kansas will suffer if the Ogallala continues to decline.

Several of the white papers presented in Liberal suggested that the adoption of technology to measure, and manage, water has been slow in many areas. Anecdotal evidence from my own network in the High Plains region is in line with those studies.

That is astonishing. I suspect the reason is farmers are geared toward production, production, production. Of the many lessons learned over the years, one of the top five is that the highest crop yield does not automatically translate into the highest profit. What really matters is how efficient one can be with the available resources. What level of production yields the most sustainable result?

The mentality has to change.

In summary, acknowledging reality and making changes are tough when a pattern has prevailed for generations. To my way of thinking, there are some benchmarks along the path to preserving the Ogallala:

- **FINANCIAL INCENTIVES** from state and other government entities to use water-saving technology.

- **MANDATORY PARTICIPATION** in groundwater management districts, with penalties for over-pumping the aquifer (this is akin to the model in the North Plains Groundwater Management District in the Texas Panhandle).

- **FUNDING FROM** the federal government to retire X number of acres from irrigated production. This concept is already in use at a local level in the South Fork (of the Republican River) Focus Zone in northeastern Colorado.

- **PRIVATE INDUSTRY** participation to encourage farmers to change agronomic practices not only in the name of saving water, but for reducing carbon emissions from less use of fertilizer, fuel for pumping water, etc.

The attitude of "this is not my problem" must change. It will take a cooperative effort from farmers, governments, bankers and others.

Let's be candid. It will affect balance sheets, as land values will change. The adjustments can be rapid and dramatic or they can be more gradual and less harsh on all concerned. For the most part, farmers are in the business for the long haul. That same viewpoint should apply to finding the right balance of solutions for the decline of the Ogallala.

There is no time or water to waste. Change starts with looking in the mirror.

BEN PALEN is a Kansas native and a fifth-generation farmer and agriculture consultant in Colorado and Kansas.

INFO POLL

Q. Would a felony conviction in the hush-money trial that began Monday in New York make you less likely to vote for Donald Trump for president? Go to JOPLINGLOBE.COM to cast your vote.

Verse

'Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains.'

James 5:7



Proposal for Justice Center in Joplin is questionable

Before their decision this week to table — for now — the Justice Center that was to come for a vote Aug. 6, our City Council seemed to have no end of ways of raising



ROBERT SCOTT

Columnist

your taxes to spend on projects that are questionable. Consultants hired by the city always produce ways to spend big money and be involved in the projects they promote. Most questionable of all was the one coming up for vote in August that would have raised your total property tax bill by over 15%. That is the total bill including schools, county, etc. And if you are a landlord or business, it would be even higher.

This proposal amounted to over \$1,300 for every

man, woman and child in Joplin — \$5,200 for a family of four (\$67 million divided by 51,500 population).

And they have more and more projects possibly coming.

Alas, not just in D.C. or California is the tax-and-spend disease rampant. So let us hope the new City Council will bring a hard look to any new proposals and a careful consideration of needs and costs before burdening Joplin taxpayers with new property or other taxes. With our sales tax now at or over 10%, we are putting a strain on local business and adding more taxes is not an answer.

It is useful to compare Joplin with other like-size cities to see that our budget is out of control because of the tornado. Money flowed into Joplin out of generosity — some of it spent wisely and some not. But it got the spending spree going.

Before the tornado in May 2011, the budget for Joplin was \$86 million; adjusted

for inflation in 2024 dollars that would amount to \$122 million.

But the 2024 budget not including this giant project is \$181 million, or some 50% higher than pre-tornado. And that spending is not related to tornado reconstruction. Jeff City, with a population about 80% that of Joplin had a budget in 2010 of \$70 million. Adjusting for both inflation and the difference in population, that comes out to \$120 million in 2024 dollars.

So, in 2010 the budgets in Joplin and Jefferson City were virtually identical on a per-person basis — 51,000 Joplin and 43,000 Jefferson City. But for 2024, while Jeff City has managed to control its budget and even reduce it after inflation, Joplin's has exploded. Jeff City's budget for 2024 is only \$79 million or less than an inflated 2010, which would be \$100 million. So, Joplin's budget on an apples-to-apples basis is nearly double the budget of Jeff City.

Guess which city, in this taxpayer's opinion, is the better at handling their finances.

As for the proposal now thankfully on hold, I have yet to see why this is required, much less what it gives Joplin other than more taxes and making some people rich off the back of the average taxpayer.

We lived for decades with City Hall being in the same building as the jail, courthouse and fire station. And then City Hall was moved to the Newman Building where they have spread out over all five floors of the building. This left the rest of the old building for its current use. SFS in its review of public buildings in 2023 indicated this building is in "fair" condition, requiring only renovation.

Taxpayers need to consider carefully all the increased taxes the Joplin City Council proposes. I am more than prepared to back sensible and needed proj-

ects but not ones that waste money or fail to meet a real need. And if you think this is the last time they may be coming for your tax dollars, think again. Remember Memorial Hall, a project I hoped to support until I studied the proposal and found it wanting. Sadly, give them more and they will ask for even more.

A recent example of seemingly wasteful spending is in the area northwest of Murphy Road just off Main Street. When the city had trees donated after the tornado, they put a significant amount of those "free" trees not in areas affected by the tornado, but in Landreth Park and in this pocket park area down the hill from the new Dover Elementary School. This last week, they surrounded those trees with a heavy concentration of mulch extending some 10 feet out from each tree trunk. So, all those free trees continue to demand attention of Parks and Recreation at taxpayer cost. Between

watering, mulching and doing other work, these free trees demand significant park and recreation resources.

Free is often not free at all. I have no idea who is getting rich off all the spending, but I know it is not the average taxpayer in Joplin.

I urge all those with similar concerns to mine to vote accordingly on any future tax increases. Myself, I will await the outcome of the state audit underway to see the auditor's opinion on the various questions about city finances that have been raised (such as regarding the lease for the new library) before considering any new proposals from the city.

ROBERT SCOTT, an attorney and author, was operating vice president and senior counsel for Federated Department Stores (now Macy's) and a partner in Roberts, Fleishaker and Scott law firm in Joplin. Retired, he devotes himself to his writing, global investment banking and charitable activities.

A story of the soil and the soul

Hard work, passion, virtue and true grit earmark the American heartland. Anecdotes, generation-spanning farm families and crop innovations speak volumes. They are all children of agriculture.

Farming teaches faith in God, food cultivation, animal husbandry, the value of love, the richness



ARMSTRONG WILLIAMS

Columnist

of relationships and the growth of character. Farming offers time for reflection — an Aristotelian balance between nourishing and strengthening the physical body and deepening and improving our souls. From my earliest days, the farm was my classroom and nature was my teacher. I learned to treasure my parents, a work ethic, discipline and sacrifice. A diminishing number of Americans are denied that chance today. Engaging in routine daily farm tasks and providing care for the animals instilled accountability and highlighted the precariousness of life, illustrating how it can be either abruptly lost or extinguished over time. It further imparted the importance of nurturing your fate and the necessity of diligence and industry to accomplish your goals. I have never forgotten.

The farm also cultivates family togetherness, i.e., if we do not all hang together, we will all hang separately. My family of 10 has no bad blood. We have been intimate our entire lives, and that intimacy grows by the day. Our devotion to God and the lessons we imbibed on the farm unite us. It was under the vast, blue vault of heaven that I felt most connected to nature and in harmony with my family. It was an awesome spiritual experience and celebration of family.

Numerous references in the Bible establish a nexus between farming and God, thereby illustrating the interdependence of the nature of Earth and spiritual development. Within the Book of Genesis, God positions man in the

Garden of Eden with the instruction to tend to and maintain it. Since creation, humanity has been saddled with a responsibility to cultivate and maintain the land. It emphasizes the principle that you reap what you sow: "The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." This verse speaks to the law of harvest, a concept as true in the spiritual world as it is in the physical world of farming.

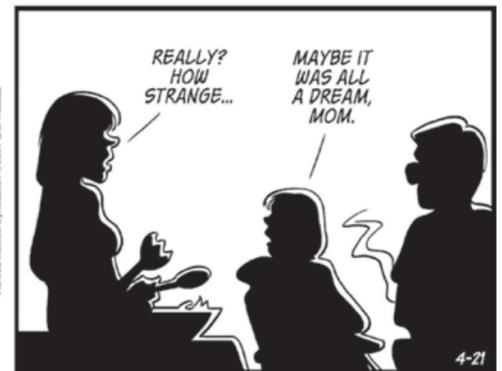
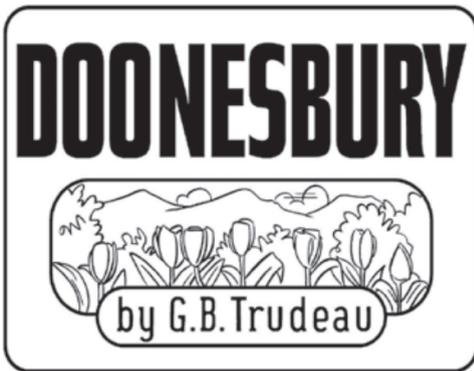
Farming imparts ethics and patience. It has been a privilege to have lived with the knowledge and skills I gained on the farm. It has made me a diligent professional and prosperous entrepreneur who knows how to innovate to overcome complex challenges. After learning how to manage a farm, everything else is as easy as pushing water downhill. Daily labor consists of harvesting crops, caring for livestock and waking up before the break of dawn. It means working in sweltering heat with no shower breaks. Nothing else compares.

Farm work puts life into proper perspective. All troubles are provisionally set aside. You derive solace from the woes of the world and discover tranquility, calm and the answers that have long been hidden.

The United States is forgetting the value of agriculture in all its moods and tenses. Processed food diminishes health. Farmland is gobbled up by the Chinese government. The number of American farmers is plunging. America is losing its signature identity.

To quote John Donne, "No man is an island, entire of itself." Our deliverance is in unity — E pluribus unum. Agriculture teaches the hard truth of necessary interdependence and collaboration with the elements and with others. But division has become America's watchword at our peril. Turning back to acclaiming agriculture is a necessary first step to alleviating our alarming divisiveness.

ARMSTRONG WILLIAMS is manager/sole owner of Howard Stirk Holdings I & II Broadcast Television Stations.



There's data to support claim of national media bias

On Nov. 10, 2016, the CBS News website published a commentary by Will Rahn, managing director, politics, CBS News Digital. It was titled: "The unbearable smugness of the press."



GEOFF CALDWELL

Columnist

The lead sentence: "The mood in the Washington press corps is bleak, and deservedly so." That was followed by an honest, objective critique: "It shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone that, with a few exceptions, we were all tacitly or explicitly #WithHer, which has led to a certain anguish in the face of Donald Trump's victory. More than that and more importantly, we also missed the story, after having spent months mocking the people

who had a better sense of what was going on.

"This is all symptomatic of modern journalism's great moral and intellectual failing: its unbearable smugness. Had Hillary Clinton won, there'd be a winking 'we did it' feeling in the press, a sense that we were brave and called Trump a liar and saved the republic."

The next day, the publisher of The New York Times, Arthur Sulzberger Jr., and his executive editor, Dean Baquet, signed a letter "To Our Readers, From the Publisher and Executive Editor" that went out via email to the paper's subscribers.

There was the usual Times aggrandized sense of self: "When the biggest political story of the year reached a dramatic and unexpected climax late Tuesday night, our newsroom turned on a dime and did what it has done for nearly two years — cover the 2016 election with agility and creativity."

But there were also the following laugh lines: "We believe we reported on both candidates fairly during the presidential campaign. You can rely on The New York Times to bring the same fairness, the same level of scrutiny, the same independence to our coverage of the new president and his team."

Two days later, the line "We believe we reported on both candidates fairly during the presidential campaign" disappeared. Since Nov. 13, 2016, only the edited version appears on the Times website without even a hint to the reader it has been edited from its original version.

That "rededication" Sulzberger and Baquet promised lasted less than 48 hours.

Still, there was hope that, in light of the debate that was the 2016 election coverage, there was an awakening happening. And an admission that the industry had truly lost its way and a

huge chunk of trust as well. That an opportunity had opened to correct itself and return to objective, properly sourced reporting. To regain that lost trust.

It might have actually happened if not for Clinton aides John Podesta and Robby Mook — aides who, thanks to the Jonathan Allen/Amie Parnes book "Shattered," we now know that within 24 hours of Clinton's defeat were already scheming to "engineer the case that the election wasn't entirely on the up-and-up."

And before Trump could even be inaugurated, Russian collusion fever had infected the national press and any hope of restoring objective, properly sourced journalism was vaporized before our eyes.

But lest you think this just another rambling from your local cranky conservative conspiracy nut, let me introduce you to professor Tim Groseclose, current holder

of the Adam Smith Chair at the Mercatus Center, George Mason University, and author of the book, "Left Turn, How Liberal Media Bias Distorts the American Mind."

The preface opens: "In at least one important way journalists are very different from the rest of us — they are more liberal. For instance, according to survey, in a typical presidential election Washington correspondents vote about 93-7 for the Democrat, while the rest of America votes about 50-50."

He asks the question: "What happens when our view of the world is filtered through the eyes, ears and minds of such a liberal group?"

And answers it: "As I demonstrate, using objective, social-scientific methods, the filtering prevents us from seeing the world as it actually is. Instead, we see only a distorted version of it. It is as if we see the world

through a glass — a glass that magnifies the facts that liberals want us to see and shrinks the facts that conservatives want us to see."

If that isn't the state of affairs today I don't know what is. Yet "Left Turn" was published in 2011. Yes, Groseclose was putting media bias under objective analysis 13 years ago — a time that had its issues but a time when this hyperpartisan menagerie of today wasn't even imaginable.

The book is still available via the internet as well as in Kindle format. It's an eye-opener no matter what side your political aisle. And when you're done, pass it along to someone else.

Or, better yet, mail it off to any of the national media outlets, "attn: newsroom." Lord knows they could use it.

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