

VIEWPOINTS

What could be more American?

Wow. It's July. Not only that, by the time you read this on Friday, Independence Day 2013 will be history. Hopefully, this July 4 you devoted time to your family, and did traditional, American stuff. You know, fire up the grill. Break out the steaks, burgers and hot dogs.

Complain about the welfare recipients who are driving up the cost of food.

Ok, granted, if you're a reasonable, intelligent person, you likely realize that people who must rely on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to get by really aren't contributing to higher food costs.

There's just one problem. In this land of the free, where everyone has a right to express himself or herself, some of the loudest people are not very bright. Besides being a bit dim, they like to blame their problems on the least fortunate around us.

An example of this dim-wittedness comes from Texas.

Last month, when a trillion-dollar farm bill failed in the House of Representatives, after the GOP sought deeper cuts than Democrats would accept, Rep. Louie Gohmert (R-Texas) got to work telling a familiar story, one he said he'd heard many times from broken-hearted and angry constituents. Its protagonist is a hardworking Texan waiting in line at the grocery store. Someone's buying Alaskan king crab legs in front of him, and he's looking at them longingly, dreaming of the day he can afford such a luxury. Then the person buying them whips out his EBT — an Electronic Benefits Transfer card for food stamps.

"He looks at the king crab legs and looks at his ground meat and realizes," Gohmert said, "because he does pay income tax ... he is actually helping pay for the king crab legs when he can't pay for them for himself."

And that's how cash register resentment becomes crabby conservatism — the belief that your own struggles are tangled up in another person's safety net.

Gohmert's gripe is a tale that is at least 20 years old. In 1993, the Columbus Dispatch ran a letter to the editor lamenting a food stamp recipient buying "two bottles of wine, steak and a large bag of king crab legs." Since then, the crab complaint has recurred more than a dozen times in newspapers around the country, according to Arthur Delaney who writes for the Huffington Post.

I was reminded of this while scanning Associated Press stories this morning. One holiday-related article notes that this year, to host a Fourth of July picnic will cost about \$6 per person.

That's according to the American Farm Bureau Federation, which launched an informal price survey this year looking at the cost of hot dogs, cheeseburgers and other Independence Day fare.

"Five dollars a person for a special event cookout is affordable for most people," said John Anderson, chief deputy economist with the American Farm Bureau Federation. "We certainly know that there are people who struggle with affording food and other necessities, but in general, we're blessed with very affordable food in this country."

Anderson notes that the cost is a bit higher than last year. About 2 percent higher. And, it's not because poor people are abusing SNAP. "That's kind of normal price inflation, and ... I certainly think that we're in the ballpark of those normal price changes over the past year," he said.

But, hey. It's America. If you want to grouse about the price of food in the grocery store, you have that right. If you want to complain about how your tax dollars are used to feed poor people, go ahead. You have that right, too.

Try to remember a couple things, though. To qualify for nutrition assistance, you have to be poor. In just about every sense of the word. To be eligible for SNAP in South Dakota, a family of two can have a maximum gross annual income of \$1,640.

I would imagine that those numbers vary from state to state, just as the cost of living in Texas is likely different than the cost of living here.

You have the same freedom in our great country as Rep. Gohmert to not let facts get in the way of a good story. While firing up your grill, you can spin the tired yarn of government assistance recipients and crab legs.

Hopefully, however, as you celebrated July 4 with people you love, you took a moment to be thankful for not only the incredible gift of freedom we enjoy — no eligibility requirements needed — but also the responsibilities that go with it. Including looking out for others. Fairly and responsibly.

What could be more American than that?

PLAIN TALK POLL RESULTS

How much will you spend on fireworks as July 4 approaches?

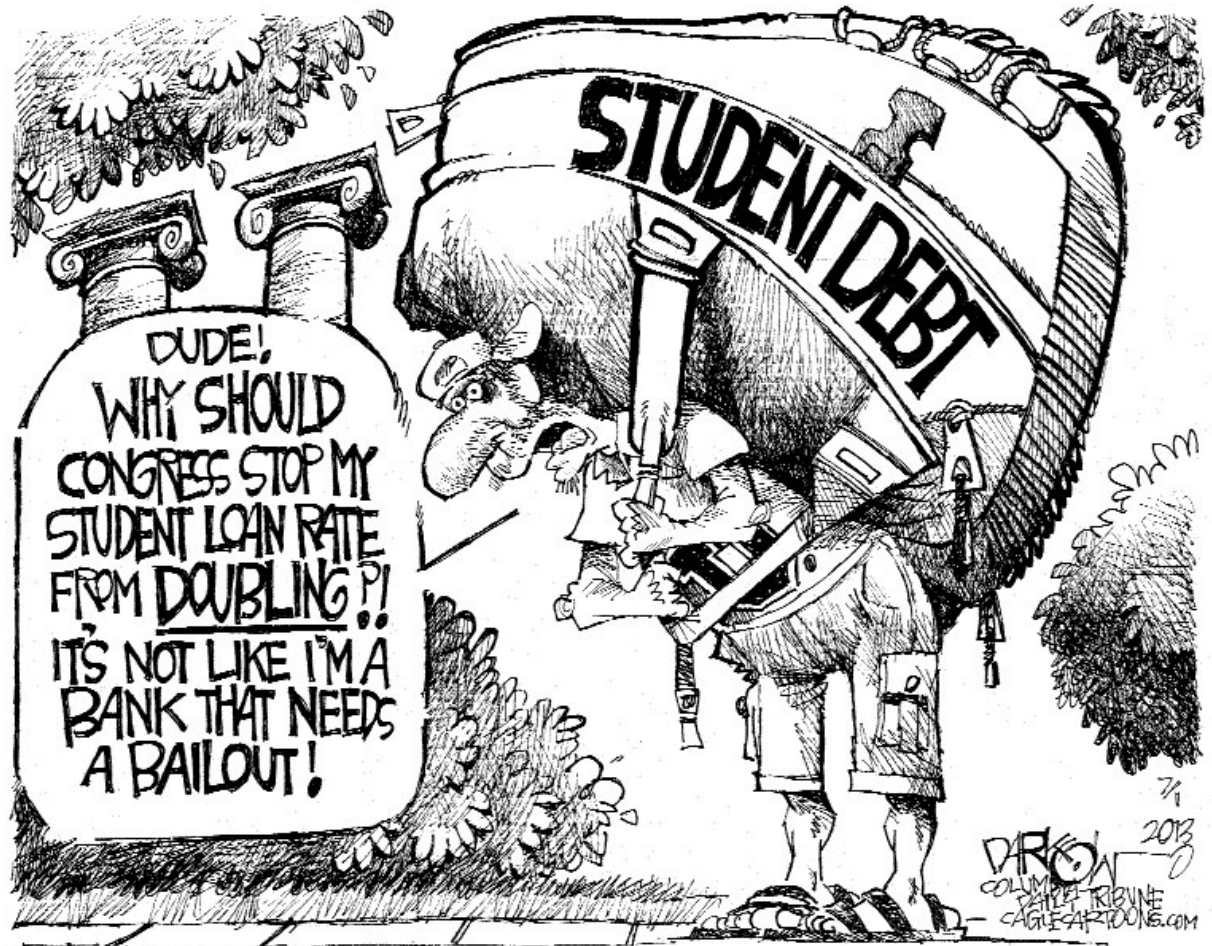
Nothing	49
Not more than \$50	9
Not more than \$100	3
More than \$100	2
Total Votes	63

To participate in the Plain Talk's weekly poll, log on to plaintalk.net.

BETWEEN THE LINES



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Just a 'little' problem in flight

My foremost anxiety over air travel is, of course, the plane crashing due to some sort of mechanical failure or ice on the wings, both of which I've experienced.

Quite a few years ago, my husband and I were on a prop jet from Minneapolis to Sioux City, which had reached a cruising altitude of 15,000 feet, when we heard a very loud knocking on heavy metal.

At first, we thought the flight attendant was closing the overhead compartments — one right after another, but that wasn't it, since we spotted her buckled down near the cockpit door.

Then, my husband sounded off with wide-eyed amazement, not a bit of fear detected in his voice, "Look at that ice on the wings."

Immediately panic stricken, I leaned forward and with complete dread looked out the window, hoping he was wrong, but he wasn't.

"Don't be so excited" I reprimanded. "Planes don't fly very well with ice on the wings, don't you know!"

Gasping for breath, I reached inside my purse for a pair of Rome-blessed rosaries Mom had given me many years prior, and then began to pray the "Hail Mary" like I wasn't a fallen away Catholic.

With the "Fasten Your Seat Belt" bell blaring synchronously with the flashing "Fasten Your Seat Belt" light, all I could think about was our two middle-school aged boys, who were back home, staying with friends, and our college-aged daughter. What if we didn't make it?

While other passengers began to stir over the situation, our sole flight

MY STORY YOUR STORY



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at our destination."

Just a "little" ice? As far as I was concerned, there's no such thing as a "little" ice on the wings.

Throughout that long nail-biting one-hour flight, ice chunks continued to let loose from the wings and smash against the plane's exterior.

After we finally landed safely and de-boarded in Sioux City, I swore we would never travel on the same flight without our children, nor would I fly on small planes — ever again.

That was nearly 20 years ago and I have kept my oath.

Another worry of mine is in-flight mechanical failure, like the time I was once on a 747 when all of the lights went out. It was one giant electrical malfunction at 35,000 feet on an aircraft that runs on jet fuel and e-lec-tri-city.

While the co-pilot moved about the plane inspecting electrical boxes, the captain's voice came over the loud speakers.

"This is your captain speaking, we're experiencing a little electrical

attendant announced calmly, "Ladies and gentlemen, please fasten your seat belts. And by the way," she added nonchalantly, "you may notice a little ice on the wings of our aircraft. Our captain tells us that shouldn't prevent us from arriving on time

issue and we're going to"

His casual, educational monologue was cleverly designed to keep our minds off the "little" problem at hand.

It went something like this...

"Some trivia for you folks — a fully loaded 747, like this one, uses 33,000 pounds during takeoff and while climbing to cruising altitude.

"During the first half of the flight, our aircraft consumed about 28,000 pounds of fuel per hour. The aircraft lightens as it burns fuel and at the end of the trip, the fuel consumption drops to about 21,000 pounds per hour."

All the while, I'm thinking, yeah, what about that "little" electrical problem your co-pilot can't seem to resolve? But I didn't want to make a scene. So I tried to keep listening to the captain while I kept one eye on the co-pilot.

The captain continued, "Descending and landing consumes the least amount of fuel, around 6,000 pounds.

"A reserve of 25,000 to 40,000 pounds is loaded to allow changing airports should it become necessary.

"So, to lighten our load, we'll be dumping some fuel along the way and will land safely in San Diego in about one hour and 30 minutes. Relax and enjoy the remainder of our flight."

By the time we landed, the lights never did come back on and that 747 was immediately grounded for repair.

To this day, I still marvel at the crew's composure and remain forever grateful for the captain's where-with-all to distract us with his jet fuel trivia.

SD EDITORIAL ROUNDUP

Argus Leader, Sioux Falls, June 26, 2013

Seek more equitable tax plan

The difficult work seems to be done, but the hard switch to more fairly tax farm and ranch land still looms in South Dakota.

In this case, "fair" means a tax increase for the ag sector. It's time to look at the full picture for farmers and fix the astronomical difference that exists between what they pay in property taxes and what others pay in taxes for their homes and businesses.

Here's some background: * Lawmakers rewrote rules for assessing the value of agriculture land in 2008. The change directed county assessors to stop using sale prices to determine taxable value.

Instead, a formula that included productivity, including yields and prices, would determine land values. The new law included limits, so despite farm income jumping, assessed values grew more slowly.

* In 2009, lawmakers locked in agriculture at 18.45 percent of the local share to pay for education. That move had the opposite outcome of what was intended.

Assessed property values grew, levies went down while businesses and homeowners

were paying higher tax rates because they were seeing little or no growth in property values.

* That leaves our state's agriculture land, worth \$61.1 billion, being taxed as if the value was \$27.1 billion, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the South Dakota Department of Revenue.

South Dakota has done the work to classify ag land differently, but it is time to acknowledge that landowners get a huge break. That needs to be reviewed.

We all know that ag is South Dakota's backbone industry, both economically and historically. Our entire state has benefited with stability during the recession, thanks to farmers. We also know there are good arguments on the other side of this issue.

But the reason for property taxes is to fund local government services, some of which are woefully short of money. Property taxes could help fix education funding, and myriad bad roads and bridges in our counties and townships.

Those are just two examples of the needs that would benefit everyone in the state.

We have the answers. We just need to implement the plans.

Even a small change would make a huge difference for the good of our state.

Rapid City Journal, Rapid City, June 27, 2013

Rally survey incentive all in fun

Know your customers. That's sound advice in any business.

As the Sturgis motorcycle rally becomes more like a business, the city of Sturgis wants to know more about the people who come to the city's annual event.

As anyone who has observed the rally for a number of years will tell you: Bikers come in all flavors, and few of them fit anyone's preconceived ideas of what a biker is.

The Sturgis City Council approved spending \$26,000 to survey rally-goers to dig a little deeper into who attends the most famous motorcycle event in the world.

Mainly the information the survey will gather will help the city's new sponsor agent, Legends Marketing, sell the rally to new sponsors. More sponsors will mean more revenue to the city to offset the cost of hosting the biggest motorcycle rally in the United States, if not the world.

Previous surveys have offered a commemorative rally pin to rally-goers who

provide information about themselves. This year, the city is considering having the survey-takers wear T-shirts that say, "Want a free drink? Ask me how."

Sturgis knows this much about their customers: They are (A) motorcycle enthusiasts, aka bikers, who, apparently, (B) like free beer.

Not every biker likes beer, but certainly those who agree to complete the survey will meet the attributes of (A) and (B).

The requirements of a scientific survey are that at least 1,600 people are interviewed. That's a lot of beer.

Let's face it, rally-goers have a lot more on their minds than taking part in a survey. The Sturgis rally is all in fun, or it wouldn't attract several hundred thousand people every year, so Sturgis can be forgiven if the incentive for completing their survey also is all in fun.

The incentive for agreeing to be surveyed may raise some eyebrows, but the reasons behind Sturgis interviewing as many rally-goers as possible is good marketing. Know who your customers are and potential rally sponsors will become more interested. It's a long-term benefit to the city to have this valuable information in hand.