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No substitute for water

It might not be hotter than Hades, but it's plenty hot — and has been for weeks now. Some folks, miserable enough in temperatures that have reached 106 or more, needn't grumble that this isn't a record heat wave. The occasional daily record highs and the near record 106 somethings are warm enough, thank you.

Worse than the heat — no, the humidity — is the lack of rain. Heat waves are one thing — and as the French learned this summer — they can quickly go from unpleasant to deadly with a way to cool off. But even for people, animals and crops that take take extreme heat, there is no substitute for water.

There has been precious little of that lately. Though the area has received about 80 percent of normal annual rainfall to date — and rains earlier this year were both welcome and wonderful for the wheat crop — summer has been close to bone dry. We've had less than one-third of inch of rain in nearly four weeks.

Yes, 100-degree temperatures and protracted dry spells make for a fearsome combination. Lawns, even those with virtually unlimited access to city water, are turning brown all over town. But it's the shortage of rain more than the present heat that led the Riley County Commission on Monday to issue a bulletin.

It is formal acknowledgment of the seriousness of the situation by state authorities that allows farmers and ranchers in some locales to seek special permission to obtain water from Tottle Creek Lake. And it is the continuing drought that leads Riley County Commissioner Al Johnson to talk of establishing a new water district or expanding an existing one to help county farmers and ranchers whose wells have gone dry.

It is the drought that has pitted the large industry and other economic interests of the Missouri River against communities upstream that also lay claim to increasingly valuable lake water.

The heat wave is expected to ease later this week after noon high might not even reach the 90s. A break in the heat doubtless would make the Labor Day weekend more enjoyable for local residents.

No less important than cooler temperatures is the fact that the forecast also calls for at least a modest chance of rain. Cooler, wetter days sound ideal. Forced to choose, we'd prefer the precipitation. As much as we like cooler days, we simply need the rain.

Another view

Mexico moves backward on human rights reforms

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Vicente Fox made human rights a centerpiece of his presidential campaign three years ago, signaling its importance in Mexico's foreign policy and that abuses would not be tolerated at home. Jorge Castañeda, Fox's former minister, followed up and made Maricela Acosta, a respected, longtime advocate, his deputy for human rights. The three took steps unprecedented for Mexico, including creating the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in Sochi, Mexico, to look into human rights abuses.

So what is the world to think now that Castañeda resigns and his successor, Luis Ernesto Derbez, not only fired Acosta but also abolished her post?

Acosta will continue her work with public or private group likely enough to have her services. But Fox and Derbez need to take to lift the shadow they have cast over Mexico's reputation as a country that championed human rights. The loss of Acosta is unfortunate for a nation that recently was signing international human rights accords, opening the door to scrutiny by human rights groups and denouncing human rights violations in foreign countries.

Acosta's dismissal is especially ill timed considering that two respected groups have just issued separate scathing reports on human rights in Mexico. Last month, Human Rights Watch detailed the failures of the special prosecutor's office, set up in November 2001 to investigate and prosecute past abuses in Mexico. The watchdog group said the office had accomplished little and might lack the power and resources to tackle its assignment. Its investigations also have been undermined by an uncooperative military that, among other things, has limited access to declassified documents. Human Rights Watch rightly says Fox must take "immediate and decisive action" to get the office on track.

He and other Mexican officials also have their hands full with what Amnesty International says is the "pervasive failure of the authorities to address" a decade of killings and abductions of women in the state of Chihuahua, particularly in the border city of Juarez. The number of victims since 1983 is still undetermined; the Mexican attorney general's office has 300 women slain in Juarez, and Amnesty estimates the toll at 270. Though Mexican courts have convicted 70 murderers and linked them to these killings, Amnesty reports that "in the vast majority of these cases justice has not been done."

Indeed, Mexico has unfinished work not just on the Chihuahua killings and with the special prosecutor's office but in the whole area of human rights. It needs to get back to a progressive path.

Opinion

THE MANHATTAN MERCURY



"Are you sure this close encounter with Mars isn't another prank by Orson Welles?"

Rhodes, a powerful leader, was a regular guy

Jeff Chapman
Contributing Writer

John Rhodes Jr. was a lifelong Republican and the elder statesman of Arizona and some might say, of the entire Southwest. Rep. Rhodes was minority leader of the U.S. House of Representatives from 1973 to 1981, a time of great political turmoil with Vietnam, Watergate and the biggest crisis of all, he would say with a big smile, "the Carter years."

John Rhodes and his high school sweetheart, Betty, grew up in Council Grove and went through Kansas State University on their way to Harvard, Arizona and Washington, D.C. That the great-grandson of the Rhodeses on several occasions through Kansas State University. "We love Kansas State football, and Kansas will always be home to us," he would say, often turning to Betty for reassurance.

He was a powerful behind-the-scenes leader, but he was also a regular guy with a knack for understanding people.

It was an absolute pleasure to know him. He would never admit that behind the scenes he was a political animal, but I witnessed it. The "magic" was a series of conversations I had with John to get a gift to Kansas State. He had arranged for him to return to Kansas and meet with KSU President Jon Weiland. He made a contribution to the business school with "little fad," but he was just a regular guy who arrived in Manhattan that everything was smooth and scripted. I did quite a bit of homework for him on people he would meet and places he would visit. He would not mind a little fad of any kind. I had been involved with, but always say, "Jeff, we are just John and Betty, actually Betty and John," with a smile as big as

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Short take

A slap in the face of troops in danger

For an administration that claims to support our soldiers overseas, the recent past won't score well on the credibility index. First, the Pentagon said it wanted to roll back "imminent danger pay" by \$75 a month and "family separation allowance" by \$100 a month — a slap in the face to the 157,000 troops in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Then, in an attempt to cool the firestorm, the administration backed away from the proposal. Now, the White House says it wants to keep the provisions currently set to expire Sept. 30.

House and Senate measures awaiting Congress after the recess would do just that. The Senate bill, which would make the combat pay hikes permanent, should be passed, quickly, when Congress reconvenes.

But even the fact that the White House was considering a betrayal of our military like the combat pay rollback should send shivers down the back of the most ardent administration supporter.

The Massachusetts Press, Picoquillo

the Arizona Sky

John Rhodes served as the chairman for two Republican National Conventions, but Betty said people in Arizona remember him for something else. "It was there in 1966 that I met him in his book, 'Was There a 1966 secret of the 30 years in Congress, he responded to an inquiry about other congressional leaders such as Newt Gingrich by saying, 'No brand of leadership was more and unexciting compared to Newt's.'"

Betty Goldwater, who followed Rhodes into running for Congress in 1992, said of him: "If you don't care who gets the credit you can get a lot of things done. Consequently, John just sits back, pushes with his strength and things happen." President Gerald Ford said, "He wasn't flashy — but he got the job done."

On Aug. 7, 1974, what he often described as the "hottest day of my life," he, Sen. Goldwater and Sen. Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania met with President Nixon at Watergate in an imploding around. Nixon. They quietly told him that he did not have the votes to save himself from being forced from office.

Although they did not bluntly suggest that Nixon resign, they acknowledged he was the target of being impeached by the House and probably would be convicted in a Senate trial. The next day, Nixon announced his resignation on national television.

John Rhodes, who died Sunday at age 86, will be missed by Arizona and Kansas. He is a great example of how one can be successful by not being impeached by the House and probably would be convicted in a Senate trial. The next day, Nixon announced his resignation on national television.

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