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Let's be Patriotic and Smart

As I reflect on the past 6 months, one of the powerful experiences was being present at Nelson County High School as our National Guard unit based in Bardstown was sent off to Fort Dix, New Jersey. They have been in Iraq since January this year. I pray for them all each day.

Another encouraging experience in the past half year was an overnighter citizens advocacy effort in Frankfort during our 2007 Kentucky General Assembly. It is heartening to understand better how our legislature works and where citizens can be helpful in developing public policy that truly benefits the common good and human dignity.

At the moment of this writing, our General Assembly is literally in its final hours. But among the passed legislative items sent to our governor that he has signed is one that bears negatively on our National Guard family, friends and neighbors serving in Iraq.

After some further study, the speed limit on rural sections of our interstate highways will be raised to 70 miles per hour (mph). Problem: beyond the fact that a fair number of drivers will drive beyond this new limit, fuel efficiency decreases with speeds beyond 45 mph.

Now, amidst the myriad of reasons given, and changed, over the 5 years since our invasion of Iraq, the common denominator remains the attractiveness of the oil easily extractable once the fighting stops. Thus, our military is serving in that area because of our major national dependence on and apparent addiction to oil. Their limbs and lives are at risk, their lives and that of their families disrupted. Our response in Kentucky? Drive faster and use more of our addictive substance. Such makes no sense to me; in fact I experience anger at it all!

There are those who worry that less than 5% of the U.S. population is currently sacrificing for this war. We Kentuckians want to drive faster though.

Another fact about high road speeds: all accidents are more injurious to people and vehicles. Car insurance implications here?

Do we think we need to "save time" by driving faster? As my dear mother would say, when other important factors are at stake, "You have nothing but time, dear."

If Kentucky wants to lead on this matter, we could LOWER the speed limit to 55 mph and use our leadership and influence to persuade surrounding states to be patriotic and do likewise!

Please understand I contacted both Governor Fletcher and Representative Floyd about this during the 2007 General Assembly session. But the legislation passed and has been signed into law (and not just let become law without the governor's signature).

The former math teacher in me has trouble understanding why we educated people make such dumb decisions at times, not connecting important dots. In some strange way, selfishness seems more understandable. (Maybe I have a special sensitivity to intelligence, given how the Yiddish meaning of my family name is abused weekly in sitcoms; the German of it means "jewelry" though. There is a Schmuck Madonna in the Cathedral in Cologne, Germany; I have a brochure.)

Maybe the new reports coming from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change will grab our heads and hearts to greater patriotism—for country and Earth.

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The Catholic Conference of Kentucky (CCK) is an agency of the Catholic Bishops of Kentucky, established in 1968. It speaks for the Church in matters of public policy, serves as liaison to government and the legislature, and coordinates communications and activities between the church and secular agencies. There are 406,000 Catholics in the Commonwealth. The Bishops of the four dioceses of KY constitute CCK's Board of Directors.