

Two weeks before the Fourth of July, the Commissioner's Court in Crockett County, with only one commissioner dissenting, voted to allow the sale of fireworks in Ozona except aerial explosives. Across the border in Irion County, the commissioner's court voted unanimously not only to prohibit the sale of fireworks, but to forbid shooting fireworks.

Crockett County's edge was in size. The county composes three thousand square miles of dry grassland to one thousand square miles of dry grassland in Irion County. So Crockett had more space to shoot firecrackers and less reason to restrict every place except the sky, which seems endless in these cloudless days.

As the judge commented in the local newspaper: "This is still a free country. People have the right to enjoy the Fourth of July. I know it's hard and dry."

His honor must have been standing on the theory of "incendiaries privilege." Incendiaries privilege explains arsonists' (fire bugs') need to express themselves with flames. It is not widely known among laymen.

One example might be the case of a young chap going down the highway at Midland, Texas shooting Roman candles

from his car window into stands of dry grass in the right-of-way this spring. That kind of behavior is going to be in desperate need of incendiaries privilege for defense.

Let's change course before this goes too far. Herding woolies and hollow horns all your life on the 09 Divide in northeastern Crockett County does not give license to make up behavioral quirks to suit your arguments. Right now, I confess I don't know how if or when this country became free enough to allow the sale of fireworks with grass fires burning in the county, or whether such a thing exists as incendiaries privilege past my imagination.

By the time I was able to thank the one commissioner who stood against the sale of fireworks, the court met and voted to prohibit the sale of all fireworks in the county until 8 p.m. on the evening of the Fourth of July.

The original dissenter, Mr. Martinez, said he went to a grass fire the week before the first meeting. He helped by taking an injured firefighter home. "All the way back to town, the fireman, exhausted as he was, lamented he had to quit. I'd be surprised if his wife allowed him to continue to go to fires."

Mr. Martinez said further that he was uneasy being in the minority. "I started not to go to the called (second) meeting, the one where they voted against fireworks. But I

did because of the support I received from people and the interest by the local newspaper. I couldn't forget how bad that fireman hated to give up."

Please watch how this is going. The story has shifted to a chance to support the minority vote. A long time ago, on jury duty, we stayed up all night at the courthouse in Mertzon, trying to convince one juror he was wrong. At daylight, he finally gave in.

The issue was whether a will had been changed. The majority knew it had not. About five years later, one of the lawyers on the winning side confessed the will had been changed.

Further, please pick up in Mr. Martinez's quote "the interest by the local newspaper."

Critical to the judge's statement being true that this is a free country, one important reason this country is free is that newspapers exist to cover the meetings at courthouses and city halls. The lady running the sheet in Ozona knows how to report the news without including her opinion. She's a mighty good hand at putting out a fair and honest newspaper.

Horror stories are coming from the grass fires in other parts of the ranch country. The other morning early I called a pal up north of Sweetwater. He'd lost eight

sections to fire so bad that he and his wife had had to move in with friends until the electricity and water were restored at their headquarters.

They lost more grass and fences on another ranch where their son had steers sold to ship. The situation was so dire on the steer pasture that the cattle were going to have to be moved to a stockyard for water and hay. I didn't have the heart to tell him his country joining us on the south only received two-tenths of an inch when the two inches fell in Mertzon.

Whatever comes, he can take it. His 89 year-old mother is still running cattle. His grandfather ranched all over this country, and so did his father. Not much chance of a cure from a bad grass fire or a hard luck trip to a feed yard.

One thing for sure, that Martinez guy did his job, standing up for what he believed to be right.