

It's a Good Law, I Reckon

By Reg P. Wydeven
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When I was a kid, our family took a vacation to visit my dad's Marine Corps buddy, Jackson, in Nebraska. Jackson happened to own the J Bar J cattle ranch, where I got to live out every kid's dream: I rode a horse all week; I helped round up the cattle at night so they wouldn't be attacked by coyotes; I watched all the cattle get branded; and I played with the sheepdogs. The only way it could have been better was if I could have holstered a pair of six-shooters.

Several ranch hands lived there, but we hardly saw them. They were up and out in the fields at the crack of dawn, and they came back after the sun had set. They could all also eat more than Adam Richman, the guy from 'Man vs. Food.'

I was impressed by how hard they worked, and Jackson explained they live by the cowboy code, which is a set of unwritten rules for how a cowboy should live. In 2004, James Owen, a retired Wall Street investor from Texas, wrote down the unwritten rules in his book 'Cowboy Ethics.'

Dubbed the 'Code of the West,' Owen outlined several rules that cowboys live by, such as: live each day with courage; take pride in your work; always finish what you start; talk less and say more; and do what has to be done. The Code is held in such high regard that the Wyoming Legislature has introduced a bill to adopt the Code as a state law.

Last week, Senator Jim Anderson introduced the bill after reading Owen's book and seeing the December premier of a related video project, "The Code of the West: Alive and Well in Wyoming." According to Anderson, "There's a work ethic in all things that we do, particularly in government." The bill, which will soon be voted on by the full House of Representatives, is merely a symbolic gesture that carries no criminal penalties and is not meant to replace any actual civil codes.

Not to be outdone, California recently voted on a resolution that would also legislate ethical behavior. The resolution calls for a statewide "Cuss Free Week" that would occur each year during the first week of March. Assemblyman Anthony Portantino introduced the resolution after being inspired by McKay Hatch, a South Pasadena teenager who founded a No Cussing Club at his junior high school in 2007. Hatch's efforts to stamp out profanity have generated international attention, with 35,000 members joining the No Cussing Club's Web site.

Like Wyoming's Code of the West law, the Cuss Free Week is simply a guideline with no enforcement mechanism included. Unlike healthcare reform and other more controversial measures, these bills are expected to receive full bipartisan support.

Meanwhile, in New York City, Jon Asgeir Johannesson and his wife, a wealthy Icelandic couple, are being sued by Paramount Realty Group of America Corp. for installing an "ugly" IKEA kitchen into their 16th-floor apartment at the luxurious Gramercy Park Hotel. According to the lawsuit, Johannesson rented out the apartment for about \$300,000, but breached the Code of the West tenet of finishing what you start because he failed to make promised renovations on time. When he finally did make the renovations, the kitchen was allegedly unsuitable for such a lavish home.

The building's super was apparently so upset when he discovered the kitchen that he had to put \$5 in his swear jar.