

## State needs to help, not hinder, rural Kansas

When Gov. Kathleen Sebelius visited last week, it was pretty clear she did not have much of a handle on how the state affects rural Kansas.

She tried to say the right things, as state officials usually do when they come out here, but when people had tough questions, she didn't have much in the way of answers.

She's not the only one. Most people coming from the relatively prosperous belt along the state's freeways in eastern Kansas forget that 80 percent of the state does not share in their wealth.

Our counties are dying. Our people are leaving. Our Main Streets are folding up. Our schools are shrinking. Jobs flee, and no one wants to move here.

It's not just northwest Kansas. It's the northeast, the southeast, the north central, all over. Any county without an Interstate highway or a major state institution has a sick economy and a shrinking population base.

Towns are dying out here. Whole counties may be next.

Just what is the problem?

Hey, it's complicated. It's not even the state's fault, but the state is not doing much to help, and what little it does often is negated by — the state. The population decline has been going on for a century, fueled in part by federal farm policy and the economic trends for automation, consolidation and efficiency.

Those are immutable laws. We have to have something besides farming to survive.

Economic development officials come to rural Kansas often, and they always say the right things. They are here to help us.

Gov. Sebelius and her team have been on the bandwagon, but so have their predecessors.

Not much has happened.

The state comes in, tries to help attract business here. The effort is sincere. But while the economic development agencies attract a few jobs, other state agencies take jobs away.

The Highway Patrol closed all its small-town dispatch offices. No jobs were cut. No money saved to speak of. Some troopers would argue that service got worse, not better.

Jobs were shifted to Salina, a growing and prosperous town from places like Norton, which needed them far more.

Same with the Department of Social Services. Managers thought it inefficient to have offices scattered all over the state, so they closed most of them. No jobs were eliminated. No money saved.

Jobs were shifted to larger towns, and in the next round, will be shifted to still larger towns. The governor answered rather lamely that it was not meant to save money, just shift jobs around.

Exactly our point. Three people who used to work and live in Oberlin do not have jobs there. Offices were closed in St. Francis and Atwood and Norton's will soon be gone. Some of the people may be commuting from their homes here to a larger town, but as far as we are concerned, those jobs are gone.

That's the problem, governor. When it comes to helping rural Kansas, the state often is its own worst enemy. And ours.

A new entrepreneurial center is nice, but does anyone think a program in Wichita is going to help rural Kansas? Why not put it in Pratt?

Create a few jobs. Give us a loan program. Help business expand. Then the Revenue Department decides we need a fancy new sales tax scheme, and the cost drives jobs away.

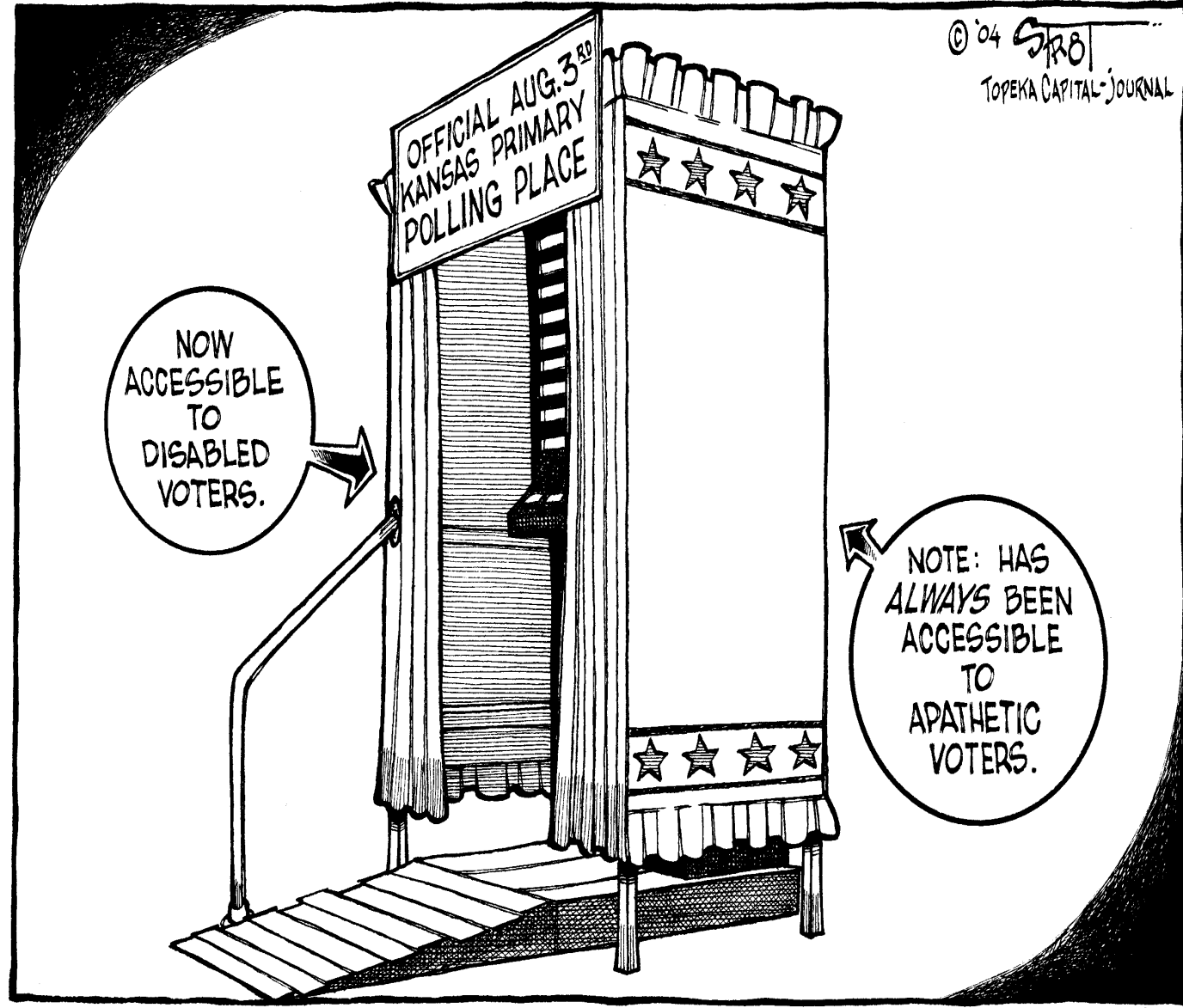
To save money, state department contract whole bureaus out of state, though the work could be done here. It's all in how you write the specs, isn't it? That's why our drivers' licenses are being made in Washington and our phone calls almost went to India.

Those are jobs that could be done in rural Kansas, and if the state is going to spend the money, why not spend it here?

Isn't it about time the state of Kansas got its act together and examined each move it makes in the light of how it affects our economy, as a state and especially, for the starving rural areas?

We think so. We'll have more to say next week.

— Steve Haynes



## Making perfect pie isn't always easy

I examined each one for imperfections, looking for wrinkles or dimples, checking to make sure they were plump and full.

Pies, silly. I'm talking about pies. It's county fair time, and I'm trying my luck in one of the neighboring counties to see if the open class judges there are any tougher than they are in my home county.

I've been up since four this morning, paring, slicing, rolling and crimping. There are three pies in the oven right now, one perched precariously on top of a small stainless steel bowl. Warm pies, in my opinion, make a better impression. And, if I've timed it right, these will come out of the oven at 7 a.m., which will make them just right for the judge to sample around 10.

But, just like a mother inspecting her newborn babe, I see a flaw. One got a little too close to the side of the oven and the crust is too brown. Oh, let's be honest, it's

### Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



burned. Not the entire crust, just one little spot, but enough to disqualify it. One of its sisters got too "bubbly" and syrup oozed out from between the crusts.

That leaves my hopes pinned on the last sister to come out of the oven. I'm setting the timer in three-minute increments. This is it. My last chance to achieve perfection.

Whenever I make pies, I remember my Grandma Davison. She had the knack of holding a pie on the fingers of her left hand while she deftly trimmed the excess crust with a knife in her right hand. She could

rotate the pie without ever setting it down. I remember being fascinated as she pinched the crust between her index finger and her thumb, making a perfect edge.

Her trademark, though, was the design on her crust. Two curved stalks of wheat were carved in the center of the top crust while it was still on the floured counter. A table knife, drawn across the crust in two arched lines made the stalks. A flip of the knife and five impressions of the tip down each side of the stalks made the wheat heads. It's a design I copy for my pies.

They are all three out of the oven now, and I have one keeper. The little cinnamon pinwheels I always make with the crust trimmings are baking as a little treat for the granddaughters who are still here. They probably won't last long.

Even though these may not be the prettiest pies I ever made, Jim doesn't seem to care. He just ate half of one of the losers for breakfast.

## Nothing compares to fresh veggies

We received fresh roasting ears (why do they call them roasting ears when we don't roast them?), cucumbers and tomatoes from neighbors — how wonderful.

It reminded me of my growing up years when my mother had one of the largest gardens in the country except for the Rundells who made a living from gardening.

It does make me appreciate the garden items we receive more because I know there is a lot of work involved, you don't just plant seed and then harvest. There is a great deal of work in between those two times to have a successful garden. I have seen some gardens that were just planted and then not tended and they do not yield much harvest.

My Dad built a "hot house" on the south side of one of the farm buildings and that's where my Mother would start the seedlings, including tomatoes, peppers and others.

My Dad would have had several more acres to farm if we would not have had so much of a vegetable garden and flowers, and as I helped hoe and water, I wished he were farming instead of us.

I have sometimes grown a small garden, but had all I wanted of large gardens.

People in those days were resourceful to fill their shelves for the winter without going to the grocery store.

First, came the peas, how I loved to eat them fresh from the garden.

We used to shell them by hand and later we had this wonderful attachment to the electric mixer you could put the peas through.

The peas had to be in ice water to work well with this system, it was easier to do them by hand, but more fun to see them snap open.

Some people tried the washing machine wringer, but my mother thought that wasted too much.

### Memories

Sonya Montgomery



We normally had enough peas to can 50 pints for the winter.

Do YOU have any idea how many peas you have to pick to fill 50 pints?

We often had small new potatoes mixed with the peas early in the season — how wonderful.

Fresh items included radishes, carrots, onions, and of course lots of tomatoes and beans.

We tithed on each vegetable, that was canned and in later years frozen. For every ten pints or quarts that my mother and the two of us girls prepared, one went to the preacher's family.

Lots of the fresh vegetables and fruits went to friends and neighbors.

I remember going to the garden to pull a carrot or two and pick a tomato or two and sit on the porch step with a salt shaker and eat those fresh out of the garden. What a treat.

We also picked raspberries, boysenberries, strawberries and probably some I am forgetting.

Early in the season we picked asparagus. Nothing you purchase today compares to the taste of those asparagus spears from the roots that had been there since my grandparents had planted them years before.

My Dad would plant cantaloupe, watermelon and corn away from the house, quite often in a runoff area.

When we had some rain, these crops did very well and again went to friends and neighbors, some years we sold some and

it was fun to see money come from all the hard work.

By the time fall came, our cellar was more than full of wonderful pints and quarts of everything you could can and, as I said earlier, when we finally had real electricity, the large freezers held their abundance of wonderful fruits and vegetables.

All of this work was done in the summer and the only air conditioning was hanging a wet sheet over the screen door to help cool and also to keep dust out of the house.

Yes, I said "real electricity", in a future column I will tell you about the low voltage electricity we had.

Mom always purchased 500 or more little chicks. They were so cute and I loved to feed them when they were small.

Then they began to grow and when you went in to the chicken house, they would fly around and stir up dust and it's no wonder.

We would begin to "dress" chickens (although it seemed more as if you undress them) for one of the stores in Norton.

We would take them early Thursday and Saturday mornings so people could purchase them.

Regulations would not allow that any longer, but I can tell you there were no chickens purchased that could compare to the cleanliness and flavor of my mother's.

With all of these wonderful memories, you would think I would be still growing large gardens and raising chickens, but time changes things.

I am sure that many of you have your garden stories and again I say "thank you" to everyone who still have gardens and share with their neighbors.

EDITORS NOTE: Dear Sonya, since you enjoy fresh vegetables so much, I've left you a couple of bags of zucchini. If you don't like zucchini, I suggest you lock your car next year.

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