

## Mass consolidation will be bad for western Kansas

It's out in the open now. Eastern Kansas legislators want to close our schools. Not just the struggling "little" schools like Jennings, Brewster and Weskan. Under one plan on the table in Topeka, it's likely that every district in northwest Kansas, save one or two, would be forced to merge.

The legislators say, of course, that they don't want to close schools. It's all about cutting administrative expense, they say. Bull.

First, there's no way to save money by consolidating districts. Most have cut costs to the bone. Buildings still need principals. Someone still has to fill out the state and federal paperwork. Classes would still need teachers.

Jim Has, a research specialist with the Kansas Association of School Boards, put it well: "The only way to have substantial saving would be to close buildings."

One plan, by Rep. Candy Ruff, a Leavenworth Democrat, would cut to just one district in any county with fewer than 26,000 people, which is all of our counties. That would eliminate 122 of the state's 302 school districts.

Another, by Sen. Phil Journey, a Wichita-area Republican, would require merging all districts under 1,000 enrollment. In northwest Kansas, only a handful would survive.

And at first, perhaps, schools would remain open in county seat towns. Forget about the little ones — Brewster, Rexford, Weskan and the like. They'd be closed. Many are on the edge anyway.

But two things happen in school consolidations: The town with the votes gets the schools, no matter what promises are made at the outset. Ask people in McDonald. And since closing buildings is the only real way to save money, someday it'll happen. Students in St. Francis, Atwood, Oberlin, Sharon Springs, Hoxie and other smaller county seats will wind up being bused to "efficient" high schools in larger towns. Even those schools will have less money than they get today.

And people in the cities will neither notice nor care.

Their taxes won't go down, education won't be any better for anyone, but rural kids will spend hours on a bus every day of their school lives.

This is no joke, folks.

The Legislature is under the gun to do something about school finance. Eastern Kansas has the votes. Unless we start screaming now, our schools are toast.

People in Topeka, Johnson County and Wichita are stoking the fires.

It will be up to our legislators, our school leaders and our people to make a case for small schools. Let's hope we are up to it, because nothing could be more important to our survival out here on the Plains.

— Steve Haynes

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## New peeler really does the trick

Normally I don't get too excited about potato peelers, but that was before I tried a "freebie" I got the other day.

My local credit union has an annual dinner for its members and always gives a nice gift to each person attending. Last year it was a small tool kit, just right for the glovebox. This year it was a "gripper flipper" (you've seen them on television — you can pick up a dime or flip a hamburger with them), and this little, unassuming potato peeler.

After removing the plastic coverings from flipper and peeler, I stuck them into my utensil crock on the counter. My utensil crock on the stove holds items I use every day like spatulas, pancake turners, kitchen scissors and long-handled spoons. The crock on the counter is reserved for specialty tools like my mother's rolling pin, a potato masher, other sundry utensils, and the potato peeler.

Saturday we helped with a benefit soup supper for a couple here in Norcatour who recently had a house fire. I volunteered to make potato soup and beef stew. Normally, I don't bother to peel my potatoes for soups or stews, but Jim said, "I think they'd look better if they were peeled."

Now, I feel that way about carrots. I wouldn't think of putting an unpeeled carrot in my stew, but I don't have that

### Out Back Carolyn Plotts



same passion about unpeeled potatoes. I know cooks in other countries think we Americans are foolish for not using the peelers. And I'm sure most of the nutrients are in the peel or directly under it. I'm sorry, but unpeeled carrots just don't look right.

Starting on the carrots first, I decided to use my new peeler. Slip, strip, and it was peeled. One easy stroke and the peel came off clean the entire length of the carrot. About four turns in my hand had the entire vegetable cleaned and ready for the next. Hey... this was almost fun.

When Jim came into the kitchen to help peel 15 pounds of potatoes (yes, he did it voluntarily) he started with my old peeler. I suggested he might like to try the new one.

"Well, it's for sure I don't like this one," he said as he fought the peeler, trying to get the peeling out of the blade.

After picking up the new peeler and taking a few swipes on a potato he said,

"Now, that's more like it."  
So the "ayes" have it. We have a new potato peeler.

—ob—

The gospel group that Jim and I sing with entertained after the supper Saturday night and like Jim said, "We've had several requests, but we're gonna sing anyway."

He's always looking for new material and I try to help. This morning when I opened my e-mail, I thought I had found a real winner. A friend in Texas had sent me the lyrics for a song that I always thought had a certain "hidden" message. But, when I started singing it to Jim he gave me that you've-got-to-be-kidding look and said, "I don't think so."

It must all be in the perspective. I still think the "Mississippi Squirrel Revival" song would be a dandy. Maybe he had a problem with the verse about:

"All the way down to the Amen pew  
Where sat Sister Bertha Better-Than-You

Who'd been watching all the commotion with sadistic glee.

Oh, you should have seen the look in her eyes,

When that squirrel jumped her garters and crossed her thighs,

She jumped to her feet and said, "Lord have mercy on me."

Like I said, it's a hidden message.

## Prediction: everyone is going to win

### Back Home Nancy Hagman



Such weather we have been having! Trying to pack for a two-day trip is a challenge — one day it's freezing with a strong north wind and the next it's in the 60s!

I wish the PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) had showed up at my house one cold Sunday morning not long ago when we awoke to find the pipes had frozen. They would have found out where the farm wife ranks in relationship to the cows: A poor second!

"The old girls" as the cowherd is affectionately known couldn't wait but this old girl could. The hubby rushed out the door to feed them, promising to hurry back and get the pipes thawed. He got back about 3:30 a.m.

I am just as bad about my little pets. I keep a filtered water pitcher in the fridge but it was only about half full. I drank some but just could not stand to see the pets lick the ice in their bowl, so I gave them the rest. I would have run to town for bottled water if I'd had too!

I missed church and the potluck after. But I enjoyed being home with the TV. By 4:30 we had running water and we watched football — New England and the Indianapolis Colts. It was cold in Foxborough that day, too. Do you suppose their pipes froze?

New England is my team so I was happy with the results. I am predicting they will win the Super Bowl again.

I like to watch sports and listen to the Norton games and wrestling on the radio. Isn't it great that we have a local radio sta-

tion that broadcasts all the Blue Jay sports? Personally I enjoy listening to wrestling more than watching it because I need someone to explain it to me.

Here's another sports prediction: the Blue Jays wrestlers will repeat as State Champions.

The Mid-Continent League Basketball Tournament was also held that weekend! It was very exciting to see (or hear) the girls get back to Hays and win the championship. Daughter Elizabeth, who teaches at Smith Center, enjoyed the results of the final game quite a bit.

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She actually owns a polo shirt with a Redman on it so I am relieved she hasn't completely forgotten where she came from!

It was sad to see the boy's MCL Tournament streak come to an end — but they are still a quality team. A third prediction: they will qualify for the state tournament! Don't ask me where I get these ideas — I just have a feeling.

We have been watching some college basketball, too. KU is almost always a sure thing. The KSU men seem to be improving and the KSU women and WSU have been very successful!

My loyalty to KSU is such that I am going to pick them over KU but I don't have too much confidence in my choice.

If you are keeping track that is four predictions, I would be willing to take bets on the first three.

Seventy-five per cent wouldn't be too shabby! If they could do that well with the weather we'd be getting somewhere!

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