

Farm Service office closings unnecessary

LETTER

To the Editor,
Recently returning from the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts convention in Wichita, I feel it is necessary for me to share my viewpoints and experience on the United States Department of Agriculture Service Center office closures.

I am certain it is fair to say that the consensus of the producers of ranch and farm land that were present in Wichita do not want to see any county Farm Service Agency or NRCS offices closed or merged.

Through legislative and administration research, I have come to find that some very unorthodox decision making has been going on. Monies allocated for conservation practices and administration have been reallocated to other states that have not done so well. Kansas ranks 6th in the nation for conservation applied to the ground. Why on earth would you try to fix something that isn't broke? Is this what you call taking from the efficient and giving to the less efficient? Do we not need more conservation rather than less? May of 2004 should answer that for you. I was taught and led to believe through time that agriculture was the backbone of this country; has that changed? Do other industries not depend on agriculture anymore?

This decision to reallocate conservation dollars was made by a man that goes by the title of Chief and the name of Bruce Knight. Since this decision, the president has decided to promote Mr. Knight to Undersecretary for Marketing and Regulatory programs. Arlen Lancaster has since then replaced him as Chief of NRCS. Mr. Lancaster said in a recent meeting in Salina that 150 miles to the nearest USDA service center was of no concern to him. How many of you producers would like to drive 150 miles every time you visit the center? It is estimated that the average producer visits the USDA service center five times a year.

Now let's put this in perspective for the average taxpayer. As Area 1 Representative of KACD, there are 18,870 producers in my 18-county area, which extends from Cheyenne County to Wallace to Russell to Smith and all in between. I don't like to deal hypothetically; however, if 18,870 of us drive half the distance of 150 miles, then drive home that would be 14,152,500 miles at the current IRS rate, that would come to \$6,297,862.50, (which, by the way, is more than the

NRCS budget was cut for 2008). If this were to happen, along with these dollars, how many other dollars would be spent from your current county in relation to saving miles for other trips? Respectfully so I am sure that you understand the situation producers are in right now.

There are 11 proposed USDA service center closures and many to follow. Just a few facts to throw into the dilemma are the USDA's budget is \$77.7 billion which is less than one-half of one percent of the federal budget. Less than 25 percent of that one-half percent of the federal budget is put into farm programs and conservation combined. More than 50 percent of USDA's budget goes to food and nutrition programs. Perhaps the new farm bill should be renamed the Food and Nutrition Bill. I have been told by many legislators that it is hard to sell agriculture to urban legislators before elections.

It looks to me like more than twice of the money in the farm bill goes to schools and welfare programs. Where are all the people on welfare — urban or rural? In my more recent conversations with legislators, they have told me that they have received a few communications from producers concerning this subject matter. It is obvious to me that if we don't all get involved with communicating to your legislators, state and federal, then when the economy turns sour, you will have absolutely no right to complain when you have to move to another area for a job.

It is a fact that USDA office closures will create a very large, negative impact on our communities. Farm program payments for this area alone come to over \$191 million which does not include loans, yield increases, and conservation practices. As USDA offices are closed across the state, services, population and money will decline at a progressively negative rate.

I urge all of us, whether we are directly involved in agriculture or not, to individually and through group efforts convey the importance of county offices as they now exist within our state.

Respectfully submitted,

Jon Starns
KACD Area 1 Representative
Brewster

'No Hunting' signs have a purpose

LETTER

To the Editor,
In response to the recent letter in *The Telegram* from Mr. Cox of Weatherford, Texas, about the "No Hunting/Trespassing" signs: they are for those who do not ask permission.

During sixty years of farm living, there have been many things in the past happen: gates left open, driving through fall crops not harvested, driving over newly planted wheat, and livestock scattered.

The greater share of hunters ask and it

is appreciated, and many return year after year. To those, "thank you and welcome."

Donna L. Hale
79-year resident
of Norton County

Remember... Friday is 'Thumbs Up' day

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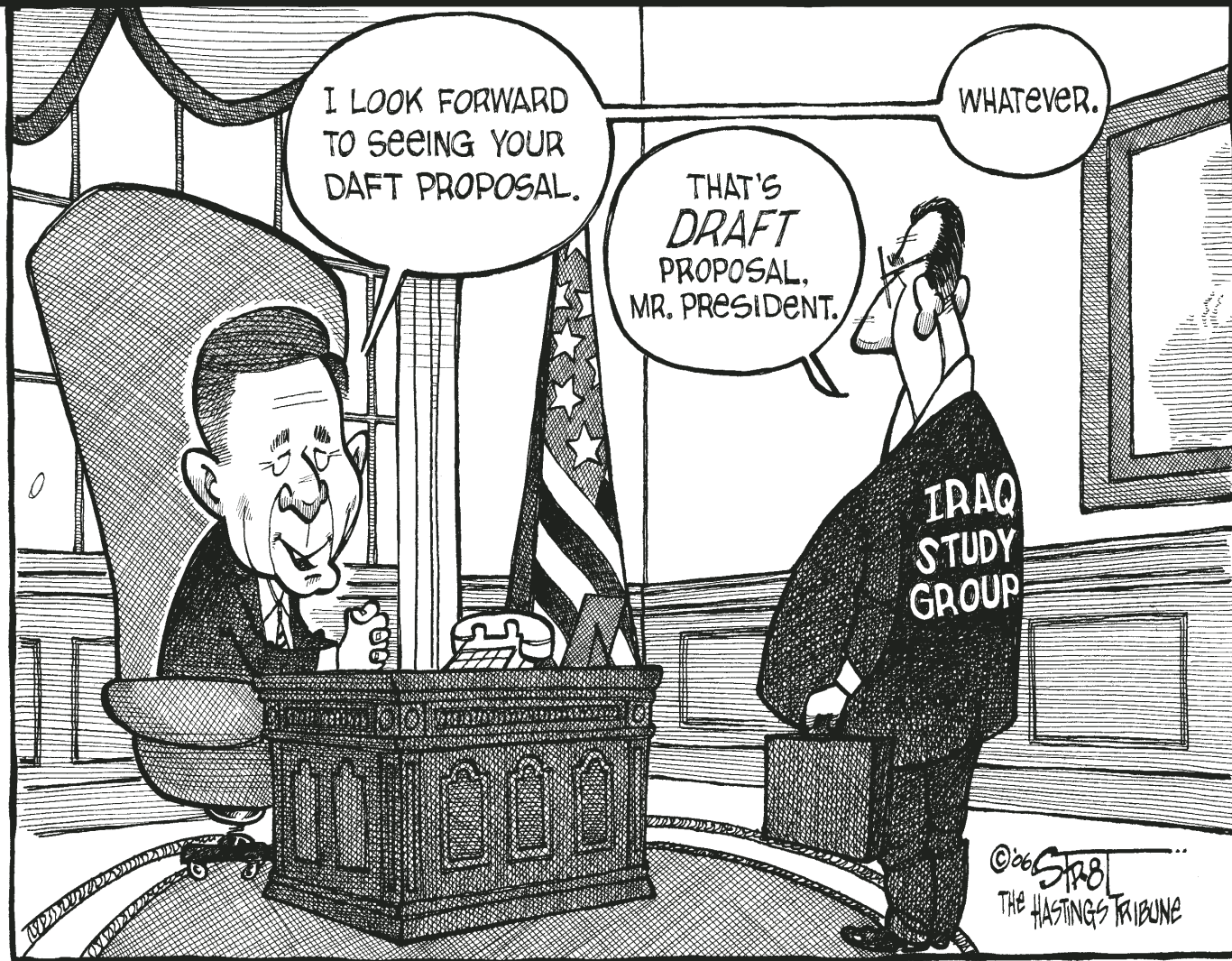
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Here's how to get out of Iraq quickly

LETTER

To the Editor,
"When the time comes, where is the exit?"

The editorial by Tom Dreiling (Friday, Dec. 1, *Norton Telegram*) raises an age-old question: Once into a war, how do we end it or get out of it?

Let's ask another question: How do we convince the big corporations and commercial interests that are making money hand over fist from the war to let us get out of it? Since they and our politicians are hand in glove on these things, it can be

hard to convince them about non-involvement.

A suggestion: Put a uniform on every politician from the president and his administration on down through every member of congress and give each one a gun. Then ship them over to Iraq and put them on the front lines and tell them to

bang away. How long do you think it would take for them to decide "the job is done" and come up with plenty of "exits" from the war and bring our troops home?

After all, they are supposed to be representing us, not the commercial interests. What better way for them to represent us than to actually become involved in the activities they think are OK for us?

Sincerely,
June Prout
Norton

The club's ready, but the house isn't

Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



I am a second generation member of The Liberty Star Club. Founded in 1934, it has always been what The Red Hat Society is now: a club dedicated to the sole purpose of having fun. Last year at the club's Christmas party, I committed to host the Christmas 2006 party at my house. That was the first of many deadlines we (I) set for ourselves to get the remodel done.

Well, here it is December and it's my month for "club." Any woman who has ever hosted a group of women at her house knows what that means.

It means pull out all the stops; drag out your best dishes; and clean like your life depended on it. Now, I would love to clean, but we're still dealing with sawdust here. This house is a construction zone.

I've got power tools, paint cans and saw horses in the front room. Real cleaning is an impossibility. Dusting is even questionable. Right now, I'm just worried about having places for everyone to sit. All I have in the front room is a recliner and a wobbly piano bench held together with furniture clamps.

Thank goodness my friends aren't the "snooty" kind. They'll just come in, dust off a box, a bucket or a chair and sit down. We always have so much fun together, the

decor is irrelevant.

Now, that Jim and I are actually in the house, I'm making priority lists. My first priority is to get drapes up. At the moment, we have a set of old white curtains stapled to a one-inch piece of wood about 8 feet long that is propped up on three screws in the wall above the front room windows.

I consider them dual purpose curtains. Not only do they cover the windows but I can quickly take them down and they double as a drop cloth while I paint.

-ob-

The cats (they're almost out of the kitchen stage) enjoy the house. It's a great adventure to them. This weekend I had taken a long, soaking bath in the Jacuzzi tub, and was ready for bed.

I sat down to read for awhile in the recliner when, what looked like a drowned

rat, jumped onto my lap. Closer inspection revealed it was Sammy the Siamese, soaked to the skin.

The tub was still draining and he must have been curious. He either slipped and fell in or leaped over the edge from the floor. Either way, he was one wet, shivering cat.

-ob-

I've been on the phone today with my oldest daughter, Halley, who called to tell me she passed her Texas real estate licensing test. She is affiliated with a Dallas firm and is ready to get out there and sell a house.

So, I'll make an unabashed plug for her. If you need to buy or sell a house in the Dallas metroplex, call Halley Roberson. She might not be the greatest real estate agent yet. But, I guarantee you she is the funniest agent you'll ever meet. I still think she should try stand-up comedy.

-ob-

A call from Jennifer, mother of baby Annie, informs us that Annie has discovered her toes and also rolls over by herself. By the time we see her again, she might very well be walking.

Oh, my, I wish time would slow down just a little. They don't stay babies long enough.

Getting a handle on the 'Big First'

Capitol Views

Rep. Jerry Moran

Last week in Topeka, I attended the annual conference of the Kansas Association of Counties. It was a good opportunity to visit with county commissioners and other local officials from across Kansas on issues including sales taxes, homeland security funding, Medicaid, and the ability to issue driver's licenses at the county level.

During the conference, Kansas Collaborative received the Midwestern Region Innovations Award from the Council of State Governments for its work to lower prescription drug costs for jails and health care programs in all 105 Kansas counties.

Organized by the state of Kansas, the Kansas Association of Counties and the League of Kansas Municipalities, this initiative saved Kansas taxpayers \$7 million. Kathleen Hamish-Doucet, manager of Kansas Collaborative, accepted the award presented by Lieutenant Governor-elect Mark Parkinson.

This is a great example of government officials coming together and finding ways to cut expenses locally to save tax-

payers money. This program will serve as a model to other states looking to cut costs for state and local governments.

I visited Junction City and joined veterans and representatives from the Department of Veterans Affairs to officially open a new community based outpatient clinic.

This clinic will provide routine health care, laboratory work, radiological views, prescription services and mental health services. This is the fifth clinic open Monday through Friday in our district. Other locations are Liberal, Dodge City, Hays and Salina.

These clinics bring VA health care services closer to veterans, which helps en-

sure reasonable and timely access to care.

I was in Hutchinson and was pleased to join the Hutchinson Rotary Club for their regular meeting. Mark Turgeon, Wichita State University's head basketball coach, was the speaker.

I spent time in Emporia at local businesses and visiting with area residents. I made stops at United Way, the Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Regional Development Association, Emporia School District office and City Hall.

I attended a dinner at the United Methodist Church in Plainville. This is the church I grew up in. Phelma Knight hosts this annual dinner for members of the church.

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