

Guest commentary Your rights and water rights

Will state government become more involved in limiting our state's valuable water resources? Will the existing Pawnee Valley Intensive Groundwater Use Control Area (IGUCA) be expanded into Hodgeman and Ness counties? Farmers, ranchers, landowners, businesses and other interested parties have lined up on both sides of this debate. This process, in many ways, could impact all.

If water-use cutbacks are implemented it could directly impact the bottom line for ag producers, landlord and the communities who benefit from irrigated production. On the other side, those experiencing difficulties in satisfying their water rights, as the result of excessive demand, could benefit from cutbacks of more junior water rights.

This week marks a continuation of the first phase of a hearing in Larned to determine the outcome of this issue. The meeting, initiated by the Chief Engineer, Division of Water Resources, began March 12. If Chief Engineer David Pope rules in favor of expanding the boundaries of the Pawnee Valley IGUCA, a second meeting would occur later this fall and focus on corrective controls.

In a Utopian world, everyone would benefit from an environment where streams always flow, wildlife is plentiful, the grass is always green, crops grow in abundance and trees touch the sky. Who wouldn't want to live in such a place?

Reality, on the other hand, doesn't always paint such a beautiful picture. As development of this water resource through irrigation has occurred, some diminishment of water has followed. There has been a huge economic benefit to farmers, ranchers, landowners, businesses, communities, regions and our state — all the result of development of this water resource.

Proponents to the IGUCA expansion primarily argue that static water levels are declining. They've also said this area is over-appropriated — too many irrigation wells. Some say water rights are not being satisfied — unequal. Still others believe the public interest is impacted because stream and wetland needs are not being met.

On the other side, opponents argue further development of this aquifer has been restricted. They also say cyclical fluctuations of the aquifer are the result of weather patterns (multi-year drought), not over pumping. They also believe stream flow contribution should be factored into any analysis conducted on the aquifer. They realize proper well design and construction is important and contend any analysis should include the entire drainage basin, not just a portion.

Ultimately the chief engineer will decide based upon the evidence. Implementation of a voluntary, incentive based water conservation program — such as the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) — could make that decision easier.

CREP is tailor made for situations like this. It would allow water-rights holders to be part of the solution and could help soften the blow caused by possible water right cutbacks. It could also ensure that agricultural producers and landowners water-resource rights are adequately protected. CREP is currently being debated in the legislature.

"It all boils down to protection of private property rights," says Kent Askren, Kansas Farm Bureau water resources specialist. "That's what a water right is."

Farmers, ranchers and landowners don't want to see their individual property rights diminished. On the other hand, they do not want to see this resource squandered. It has to be managed in a way that respects this valuable resource while still appreciating individual property rights.

If there should come a time when this resource becomes over developed, and there isn't enough water to go around, someone may have to limit water usage.

"We want to make sure that if such a scenario ever plays out, our water rights aren't compromised," Askren says. "We want to make certain they don't go to someone or something else who does not have that property right."

Expansion of the IGUCA is a huge issue. It's sometimes difficult for people to get their arms around and see the big picture.

The chief engineer will soon make a decision — it's his charge. All farmers, ranchers, landowners and communities in this proposed area may be impacted. It is time to provide input.

John Schlageck is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. Born and raised on a diversified farm in northwest Kansas, his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion



Quick fix for almost forgotten potluck

It dawned on me at about 8 a.m. Sunday that it was Fellowship Dinner day. What was I going to take to church for the potluck? Mom used to always make creamed peas and potatoes when she was in a pinch for time. Luckily, my husband buys in bulk when canned goods are on sale, so I had plenty of peas.

Cut up a few potatoes, boil 'til tender, dump in the peas, add butter, mix milk and corn starch, stir in and cook 'til thick, salt and pepper to taste. No problem. A quick and hearty dish that looks like you spent longer on it than you really did.

News Flash! Our daughter, Jennifer, called this morning to say, "She's crawling."

"She," in this case, is our seven-month old granddaughter, Aniston. Ani's world is about to get bigger. From now on she'll try to get to everything she sees.

Jennifer also said she has started pull-

Out Back Carolyn Plotts



ing herself up in her crib. It's just a matter of a few weeks before she's walking. Look out world, here she comes.

With daffodils and tulips blooming, it's official. Spring is here. Days are warming up. Nights are milder. The seasons change, once again.

All four of our daughters live in Texas where the seasons aren't so distinct. When I lived in Dallas, it seemed like we had a week of semi-winter weather during the early part of January. And, then it was back to summer again. I missed the seasons. I

love spring and I love fall. Perhaps because it's milder then.

I admit I could handle Texas winters. Especially after the brutal winter western Kansas just went through. But, if you don't experience the winter, how can you appreciate the spring?

My nephew, Kirk, gave me written permission to share about the old hillbilly farmer and his family who went to the big city. They were in a six-floor office building when they saw an old woman in a wheel chair enter a little room where the doors slid open and it had lights above the opening.

They watched as the doors closed and the numbers flashed 1-2-3-4-5-6. Then, the numbers counted back down, 6-5-4-3-2-1. The doors opened and a beautiful, blonde walked out.

The old hillbilly said to his son, "Quick, go git you maw."

Health care coverage priority one

There has been much in the news this week about the "C" word and all the accompanying implications. Elizabeth Edwards, the presidential candidate's wife, and Tony Snow, the White House press secretary, both revealed the recurrence of their cancers. Cancer is truly the equal opportunity attacker. Black, white, rich, poor, democrat or republican and insured or not insured.

Tony Snow, during his earlier bout with colon cancer, spoke of his gratitude for his doctors and fine medical treatment. Elizabeth Edwards introduced her doctor and spoke of the lifelong treatment she will receive for this "chronic" disease. I also am grateful for their insurance; and I am grateful for ours, but for 46.6 million Americans (8.3 million children)• this is a luxury they cannot afford. We often stereotype these individuals as unemployed and unmotivated, however, the truth is many work for established companies and others work two jobs.

Recently, I talked with a young couple with two small children. The father works for a company with many employees and a long history. As one of the lower paid

Phase II Mary Kay Woodyard



employees, if he were to insure his entire family through the company it would consume approximately 30 percent of his income and even then the coverage would be more reflective of a major medical policy than family coverage.

Fortunately, Kansas has a children's health care plan and this has helped to ease the burden for many young couples. In 1997, Congress appropriated funds to states for a federal/state partnership to enable children to have access to medical care. The result, in Kansas, is known as "HealthWave" a medical insurance program for Kansas youth ages 0-19. Qualifications include income guidelines, Kansas residency and U.S. citizenship. (Current legislative actions may result in

altered requirements).

One of its primary components is to reach the families who make too much for Medicaid, but still lack the funds to provide insurance for their children. With HealthWave, even families with a good salary can receive help and pay a premium calculated on a sliding scale. This plan meets the children's needs, but what happens with adults?

Fighting a serious illness is, in and of itself, a daunting task. I spoke recently with a former classmate who sometimes must choose between paying her supplemental health insurance premium or buying food. When one is faced with fear of bankruptcy over medical bills, or has to take whatever treatment offered and not have the option to choose doctors, hospitals or treatments it only compounds the problems.

In a country as wealthy as this, where the technology and knowledge are available to us, it seems only right to find a way for everyone to have healthcare coverage.

•www.cbpp.org/8-29-06health.htm
•www.kansashealthwave.org/hwqual.asp

Remember, Friday is Thumbs Up day

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Government shouldn't sanction religious holidays

To the Editor,
Mary Kay....I'm not picking on you! You simply provide some interesting and stimulating conversation.

I've recently come to believe that Christian holidays should NOT be sanctioned and made into national holidays by our federal government. Now, I know that this thought flies in the face of most conservative Christians that are on a quest to bring our nation "back to God." Well, that's kinda the point. As I've realized that we live in a pluralistic society, by God's choice (the wheat and the tears), and not a theocracy like Old Testament Israel, again by God's choice....that religious holidays should not be sanctioned by the

government.

Christian holidays belong to the church, not the world. National holidays belong to a nation at large. By all means, let's have our Labor Days, and Presidents Day, etc. But leave Easter, Christmas and the various Saints Days to the church. And of course, other religions ought to have their holidays to celebrate also. Now, I understand that it may not be quite so easy to implement. Employers can

simply be required by law to allow personnel to choose three known religious holidays in which to celebrate and take the day off.

I call this the "desecularization of religious festivals." Now while I believe that the conservative Christian segment will disapprove for their ideological reasons, corporate America will not have it either. By gosh....how much profit does it make yearly just on Christmas alone? Heaven forbid that religious holidays become holy instead of materialistic!

I say give us back our holidays and let the world have theirs.

Robin Somers
Norton