

## School consolidation bad for small towns

School consolidation is once again on the minds of the Kansas Legislatures with an audit released last week detailing two scenarios for consolidation. In scenario one, districts not offering all 12 grades, had at least 400 students or served an area of no more than 200 miles would be merged. This scenario would affect 32 districts. Districts would be reduced from 293 to 266.

This option would save an estimated \$18 million but would close 50 school buildings and eliminate 230 teacher positions.

In scenario two, the auditors examined the option of closing district with less than 1,600 students. The state has 239 districts with enrollments less than 1,600. Districts would be reduced to 152.

This option would save \$138 million, would close 304 schools and eliminate 1,532 teaching and administrative jobs.

The last time the state forced districts to consolidate was in the 1960's. Some smaller districts have merged since then. This year several districts have requested a merger including West Solomon Valley and Norton Community Schools, Lucas-Lurray and Sylvan Unified schools, Lorraine and Claflin districts and the Pawnee Heights and Hanston.

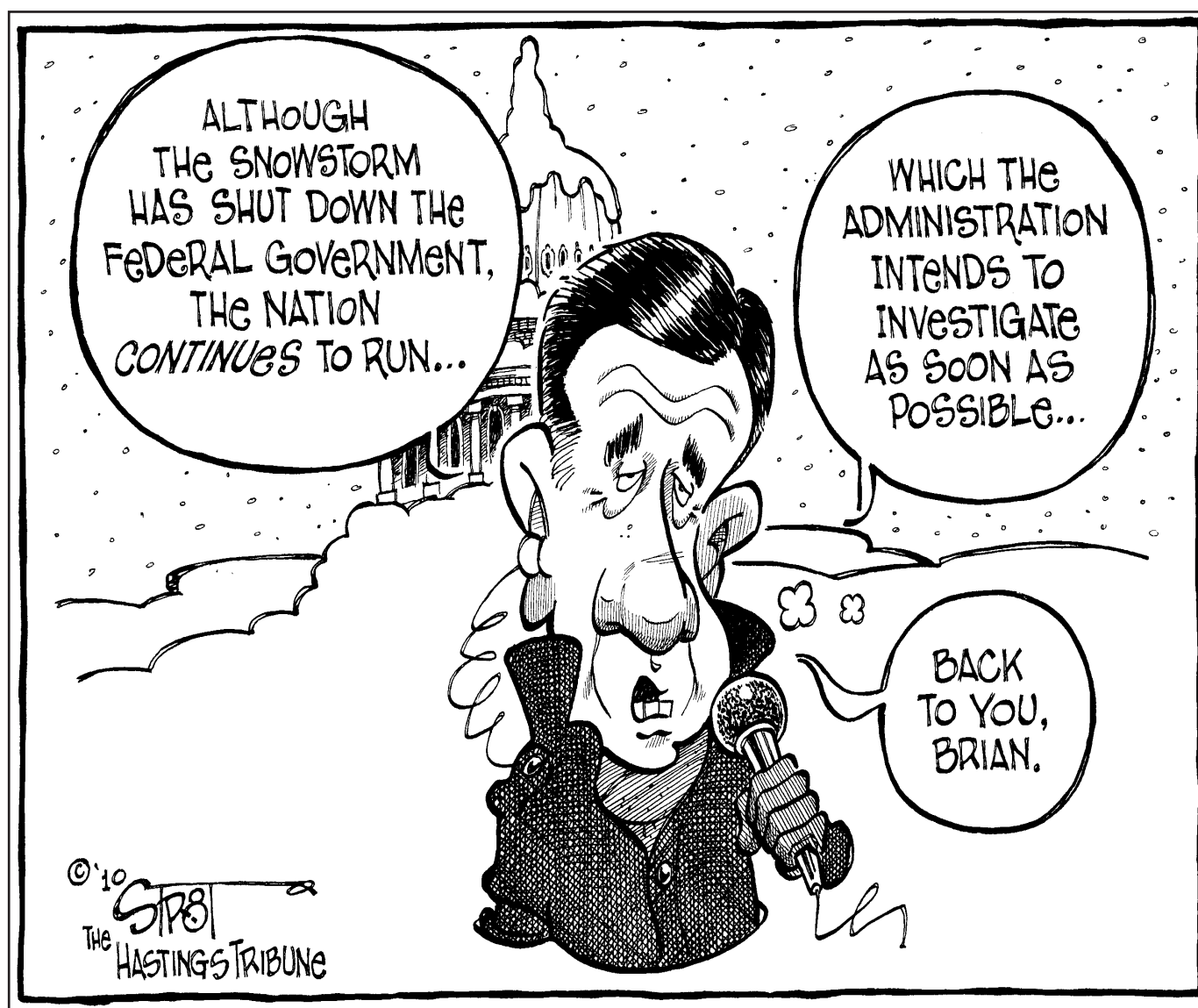
Voluntary disorganization allows smaller districts to continue to operate, even though they do not have the ideal enrollment numbers. This may not be an issue in larger cities in eastern Kansas, but it is a big deal in rural Kansas where districts span hundreds of miles and enrollments aren't more than 1,000 students.

If all Norton County Schools merged, students would still not total 1,600. Norton Community Schools has the highest enrollment at 700, Northern Valley Schools has an estimated 200 and West Solomon Valley Schools, which will disorganize and attach to Norton in July, has 17 elementary students.

Meaning, to meet the 1,600 guideline students would have to be bused either to Norton or to another district. Longer commutes would increase transportation costs dramatically due to fuel, maintenance and hourly employees.

The Legislature needs to keep an open mind about consolidation issues. Saving money would not be worth putting students on buses for extended periods of time, nor would it be worth it to force small communities to give up their schools.

—Erica Bradley



## Last week's senate happenings

Here is a roundup of happenings in the Kansas Senate last week:

**Turnaround:** Turnaround, the day most bills must be past by their house of origin, is Monday. All nonexempt bills must be out of committee by the start of session on Wednesday and read into the record.

**Senate Bill 387, Claims Against the State:** SB 387 authorizes expenditures from existing sources for payment of specific claims against the state.

Agencies affected by the bill include the Department of Revenue and the Department of Corrections, including the Ellsworth, Hutchinson, El Dorado, Lansing and Topeka correctional facilities. SB 387 passed 40-0 on Thursday.

**Senate Bill 410, Electronic Payments:** SB 410 would allow state agencies to accept payments by debit card. The measure requires state agencies to be notified in writing within 14 days when a payment has been refused.

The holder of the refused debit card would have 30 days after the notice is issued to make the payment, or the agency is entitled to a \$100 civil penalty. SB 410 passed 40-0 on Wednesday.

**Senate Bill 452, Purchase or Con-**

### Senate Doings Sen. Ralph Ostmeier



**sumption of Alcoholic Beverages:** SB 452 prohibits anyone under 18 who is arrested for possessing, consuming, obtaining, purchasing or attempting to purchase alcoholic beverages from being detained or placed in jail or a juvenile detention facility for more than 24 hours, excluding Saturdays, Sundays and legal holidays. Existing state law allows for youths to be placed in detention for possessing and/or consuming alcohol, which is a violation of the federal Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP). SB 452 passed 40-0 on Thursday, February 11.

**Senate Bill 479, Unclaimed Property, Disclosure to State Treasurer:** SB 479 would allow the secretary of revenue to provide information to the state treasurer for locating owners of unclaimed property. Current law requires the Department of Revenue to keep income-tax return information confidential with certain

exceptions, and the bill includes the state treasurer as an exemption. Information that could be provided includes the current and prior addresses of taxpayers, spouses, dependents and other associated persons who may have knowledge of the unclaimed property. SB 479 passed 40-0 on Thursday.

**Senate Concurrent Resolution 1615, Tenth Amendment Sovereignty:** SCR 1615 is a nonbinding resolution that declares the sovereignty of Kansas and serves as a notice and demand to the federal government to immediately cease and desist all mandates that are beyond the scope of the powers delegated under the Constitution. In addition, SCR 1615 objects to all federal legislation that requires states to comply under threats of penalties or sanctions or requirements that states pass laws to retain certain funding. SCR 1615 passed 33-7 on Thursday.

**Senate Concurrent Resolution 1625, NBAF Funding:** SCR 1625 urges Congress to fund the construction of the national Bio and Agro-defense Facility and the Department of Homeland Security to advance the sale of Plum Island Animal Disease Centers. SCR 1625 passed 40-0 on Wednesday.

## The ultimate test

Guess things have just been too dull around our place for Jim.

Saturday, a young couple from Colorado were scheduled to pick up one of the antique cars they bought from Jim two weeks ago.

They were on their honeymoon visiting friends in a nearby town when they saw Jim's ad in the paper. Since Jen is as much of a "car nut" as her new husband, Sean, it seemed perfectly natural to them to spend their honeymoon tromping through the mud looking at rusty frames and buckets of parts.

Jim wanted to have everything ready for them when they arrived. He knew they were on a tight schedule and he wanted to have the vehicle ready to load when they arrived.

He had it chained to the front loader of the tractor and was backing out into the alley when he clipped a gas line and knocked the cap off the top.

I wasn't there, but I guess the sound was incredible as natural gas spewed out. Quick-thinking man that he is, Jim grabbed a wooden Model A wheel spoke he was working on; jammed it into the opening; and pounded it in with his hand. At the same time he hollered at son, James, to call for help.

James called 911 and within a minute two first responders from the city's fire department were on the scene making sure the citizenry was safe. Sheriff's department and gas company technicians

### Out Back Carolyn Plotts



soon arrived and the problem was resolved within an hour.

The only thing hurt is going to be our wallet as Jim was assured he will be responsible for the damages. Oh well, it still passes my ultimate test: nobody died.

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And, the newly weds — they managed to get in on all the action. They are a great young couple and took the commotion in stride. Jen came in the house with me while the menfolk attended to business. I had just put a cheese danish in the oven so we had coffee and a nice chat.

As it turns out, we have a lot in common. Not only do we both have daughters and think we got the last "good guy" out there, but we have very similar taste.

I was showing her my dining room and picked up a catalog to show her the rug I had picked out for the room. To our surprise, she said it was exactly the same one she had picked out for her home.

I'm so glad they bought more than one old car. It means we'll get to see them again.

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## Celebrating our health food supply

### Insight

#### John Schlageck

President Bob Stallman. They will work together to highlight how consumers can stretch their food dollars while donating food and time to worthy causes in elementary schools and Ronald McDonald Houses in Sedgwick County.

Food affordability is just one of the many success stories worth celebrating when it comes to American agriculture. There are many others.

In 2008, \$115 billion worth of American agricultural products were exported around the world. Of each dollar spent on food, the farmer's share is approximately 19 cents. The rest goes for costs beyond the farm gate including wages and materials for production, processing, marketing, transportation and distribution. In 1980, farmers and ranchers received 31 cents.

More than 21 million Americans (15 percent of the U.S. workforce) produce, process, sell and trade this country's food and fiber. Only 4.6 million people live on farms — slightly less than 2 percent of the total U.S. population.

Farmers and ranchers are proud of their profession. Nowhere is this more visible than the Midwest and our home state of Kansas in particular. Members of this profession take great pride in producing the cleanest, most abundant wheat crop anywhere in the country. Farmers are also proud of the other cereal crops they pro-

duce along with fruits and vegetables.

Ranchers produce some of the best cattle, hogs and sheep. As producers of some of the most abundant, healthy and economical food anywhere, they wouldn't trade their profession for any other. They remain a fiercely, independent group.

Kansans are also proud that Food Check Out Week is an idea that originated with Kansas Farm Bureau in 1997 and has since gone national. Neosho County Farm Bureau member Linda Reinhart, former chair of the Kansas committee of Farm Bureau Women and the American Farm Bureau Women's committee thought the concept was important and saw it through to completion.

The core message of Food Check Out Week remains the same — food in America is affordable and safe, thanks in large part to America's productive farmers and ranchers. Food Check Out Week allows us to back up that message and build on it to strengthen the consumer's awareness and image of America's farmers and ranchers.

The story of the American farmer and rancher is truly a success story. Our producers are the most productive in the world. Remember to help celebrate this story and the healthiest, safest food anywhere on the planet Feb. 21-27.

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