

## Exercise the right to vote

How do we get more people involved in the political process? Are our state and national governments representative of what people want, or just a collection of fringe elements that can't get along?

And would we be better off if people could vote from home?

Tough questions.

Over the years, we've changed voting laws to allow people to register when they get a driver's license, known as "Motor Voter." We've relaxed things so anyone can vote early at the county clerk's office, rather than having to swear that they will be out of town or cannot get to the polls, the change from "absentee balloting" to "advance voting."

None of this has made a significant difference in voting percentages. In Decatur County, Clerk Colleen Geihlsler says, out of 2,001 registered voters, she expects about 35 percent to vote in next week's primary elections and maybe 45 to vote in the non-presidential general election this fall. But she admits, she may be optimistic.

While that could change if some of the races heat up - and Gov. Sam Brownback is under heavy fire for his tax and budget cuts, which have curbed state spending for the first time in decades. That race and the Senate race, assuming Sen Pat Roberts wins the Republican primary despite a "tea-party" challenge - could bring out more voters than usual.

The trick is getting people to care. It's not always easy; many of us sit around and moan about the government - whether we think it's too conservative, too liberal or just too inactive - rather than get out and get involved.

People will respond when they think something is important - as they did in a recent school-bond election in Salina, which drew bet-

ter than a 60 percent vote in a mail-in ballot. Backers conducted a thorough and thoughtful campaign to convince voters to back the issue, and they responded.

In Oberlin, however, a mail ballot on the swimming pool issue last year drew only 46 percent, and that for a hot issue that was debated for months. Of 1,172 city voters, only 539 bothered to fill out a ballot, Ms. Geihlsler said.

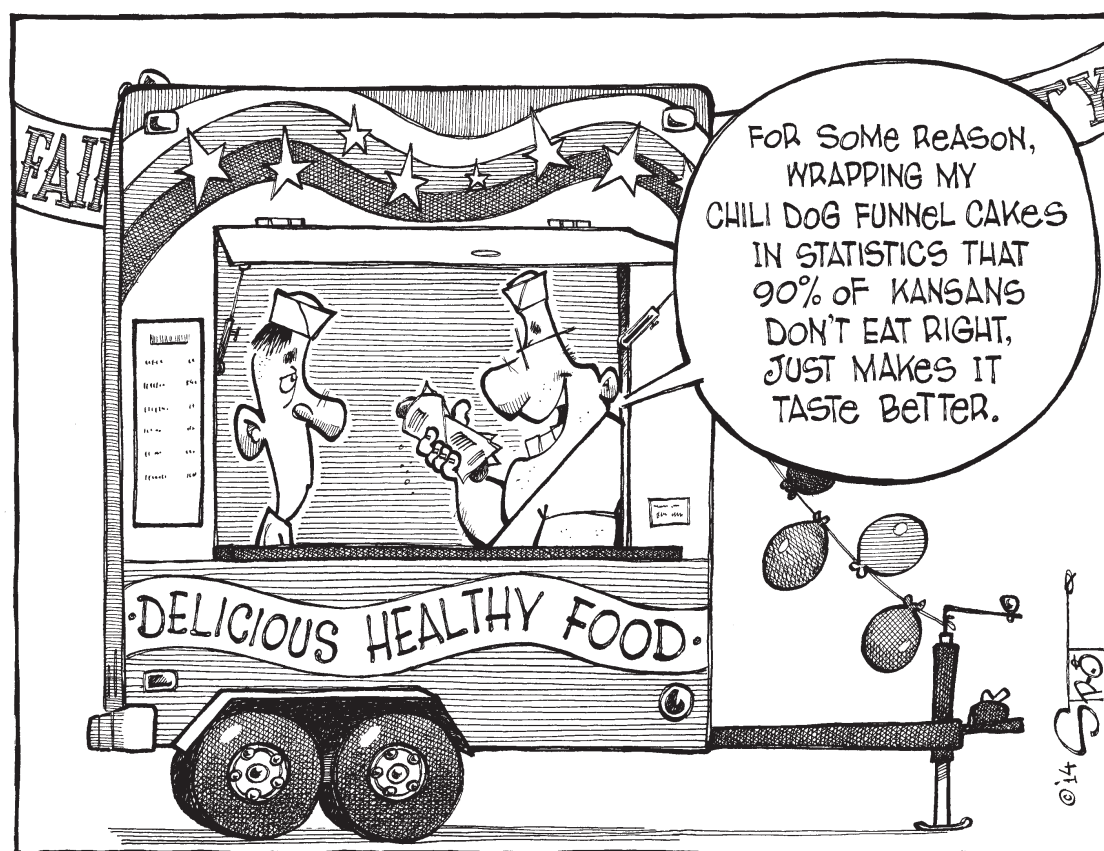
Some think easier access will automatically increase voter totals, but the sad fact is that isn't always true. Many, perhaps most, of those who register by the "motor voter" route never bother to actually vote. It's easy to register, hard to care.

Witness the collection of nearly 20,000 Kansas voters who've registered using the "federal form" at a driver's license office but have never bothered to provide evidence of citizenship required by current Kansas law to vote in state and local elections.

Allowing mail-in ballots in candidate elections is often suggested, but won't automatically make people care enough to vote. It also opens up routes to vote fraud that don't exist today: People could control how others vote, or even vote for them, with a mail ballot, obviating the present requirement that voters show a photo ID or other documents to vote.

To make people care, you have to show them how they'll benefit from voting, and many just don't get it. For those who grew up believing the vote is both a priceless right and a sacred privilege, that's hard to understand.

But many citizens have no idea how government works or how it affects them - and no inclination to find out. That's a travesty, but one not easily corrected. - Steve Haynes



## Representative tired of negativity

It saddens me that running for public office, can be marred with negative attack ads... even in a place as kind, friendly and conservative as Western Kansas.

I want to thank the great number of my supporters who reached out to me after hearing these negative ads. As I told these supporters: "My campaign will continue to focus on our positive messages, and proactive plans to make Western Kansas and this State better... we focus on positive, we don't waste our time being negative".

I am a common sense, conservative with a solid record reflecting nothing but the highest support for Western Kansas as well as this great State overall. Many of you are familiar with my record in the House of Representatives where I have worked tirelessly to make Western Kansas a better place, from focusing on improving education to working to make farm communities better.

I plan on continuing my weekly information articles, which were provided to all newspapers within my district explaining the issues and the process of the legislature when I was last in the House. It is beyond important to me to keep my constituents informed and involved. I write these articles to explain issues and their importance to Western Kansas and Kansas.

When I last served in the House of Representatives I took ALL votes very seriously. My rapport with my colleagues in the House was well respected, as well as seen as a strong and honest voice for Western Kansas. I was able to work with the different factions within the legislature, including lobbyist representing many different groups. This is the reason why major groups such as: Kansas Farm Bureau, Kansas Livestock Assoc., Kansas Agri Busi-

### Letter to the Editor

ness Council are all supporting my campaign.

Medical groups who know of my support for bettering rural health care are now supporting my campaign. The Kansas Hospital association, Kansas Medical Society, The Kansas Optometric Association and The Kansas Dental Association have all endorsed me.

I proudly served on the Commerce and Economic Development Committee during my tenure working for the business community in Western Kansas, trying to eliminate the red tape and barriers that make it hard to successfully operate business in our great state. The Kansas Chamber of Commerce, Kansas Association of Realtors, Kansas Manufacturing Housing Industry and Kansas Committee for Rural Electrification recognized my hard work and dedication to Western Kansas and have endorsed my candidacy as well.

Please remember when you hear these negative ads they do not tell the whole story at all. If you have questions on my voting record please feel free to contact me by email or telephone and I would be more than happy to discuss the issues with you. Thank

you for taking time to read this letter to the editor. It was my honor and pleasure to serve Northwest Kansas during the 2011 and 2012 session and it would honor me to serve you in the next session.

Thank you, God Bless you.

House of Representative Candidate for 120th District Richard (Rick) Billinger 785 899-4700 rb\_rick@hotmail.com

### Corrections

The Saint Francis Herald will correct or clarify any mistake or misunderstanding in a news story. Please call our office at 332-3162 to report errors. We believe that news stories should be fair and factual, and appreciate your calling to our attention any failure to live up to this standard.

## Casey's Comments

Making a new friend

By Casey McCormick



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Hope can come in unexpected places.

Last weekend we took a break from our daily toils and headed to Glen Elder Lake. Plenty of fun was had playing in the water, eating good food and being around family and friends.

We made a new friend, as a matter of fact, when one of the families brought a guest from another country. Max, a German, is spending a few weeks with the Mike and Jo Roger's clan. He is participating in the 4-H program, International Farm Youth Exchange (IFYE). The young man first stayed in Lawrence before coming to Northwest Kansas. After here, he will head to Ness City, and finally will

have some time in New York City. In these parts, an established farm family is often third or fourth generation. Max's family has farmed near their hometown, not far from Mannheim, for 14 generations.

But, despite living half a world away and being in the business a bit longer, many of the same issues face the German farmers as they work to feed the masses.

For instance, they have a challenge of educating consumers, convincing them that they are using safe agricultural practices while generating the most they can from their crops. Sound familiar?

There are differences, of course. Over there, a large farm would be a fraction of the size of those found

here. Therefore, crop rotations are used so no ground ever sits idle. These crops include cauliflower, kohlrabi, parsley, fennel and rye.

But what impressed me most were the issues and concerns Max expressed for his country and the world we share. Plenty of thought has gone into this arena. Obviously, there are more similarities between us than what one might expect.

Last, I was very impressed with Max's command of the English language. Thinking back on my year or two of studying German, back in high school, certainly put me at a sad disadvantage. Thank goodness he could bridge the gap.

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