

# Opinion



## Free Press Viewpoint

### 18 counties could easily be two

#### The Hays Daily News

Let the consolidation of Kansas' too-numerous counties begin. The Legislature has paved the way for easier consolidation of counties, removing the requirement that any such merger would need legislative approval.

That helps. County governments are not going to be falling over themselves to merge; the concept is too foreign and radical.

But especially in sparsely populated and economically challenged parts of the state, including northwest Kansas, county mergers should be on the table. As a whole, Kansas has too many counties (105) and too much government in general.

In the Legislature, the consolidation measure passed without provisions for mergers of city and county governments. That was the most controversial piece, because lawmakers argued over whether such consolidations should require a so-called dual majority both of city voters and those living outside the city, or just an overall majority of county voters.

But despite the inability to agree on that, the bill did provide for counties to merge. And that is good. Consolidating counties offers the most sensible approach to the problem of too much government.

Kansas would be well served with just 20 counties. Eighteen northwest Kansas counties easily could be just three, or even two.

We waste considerable taxpayer money, where resources are thin, by duplicating services in all those counties, some that serve only a few thousand residents.

To be sure, county consolidations would face opposition. And counties have their rivalries, too, especially in northwest Kansas. But for northwest Kansas, for one, it could be a matter of our very survival. That requires some radical thinking.

The legislation not only bypasses legislative approval but it empowers citizens to make consolidation happen.

While county commissions could be the impetus, this measure provides for it to go on the ballot if 5 percent of voters in each county petition for it. Then, a majority of voters in each county must approve.

A grand opportunity has become available. Leaders in northwest Kansas should start the dialogue about consolidating counties.

Comments to any opinions expressed on this page are encouraged. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. 5th St., Colby, Kan., 67701. Or e-mail [jvannostrand@nwkanssas.com](mailto:jvannostrand@nwkanssas.com) or [pdecker@nwkanssas.com](mailto:pdecker@nwkanssas.com). Opinions do not necessarily reflect the *Free Press*.

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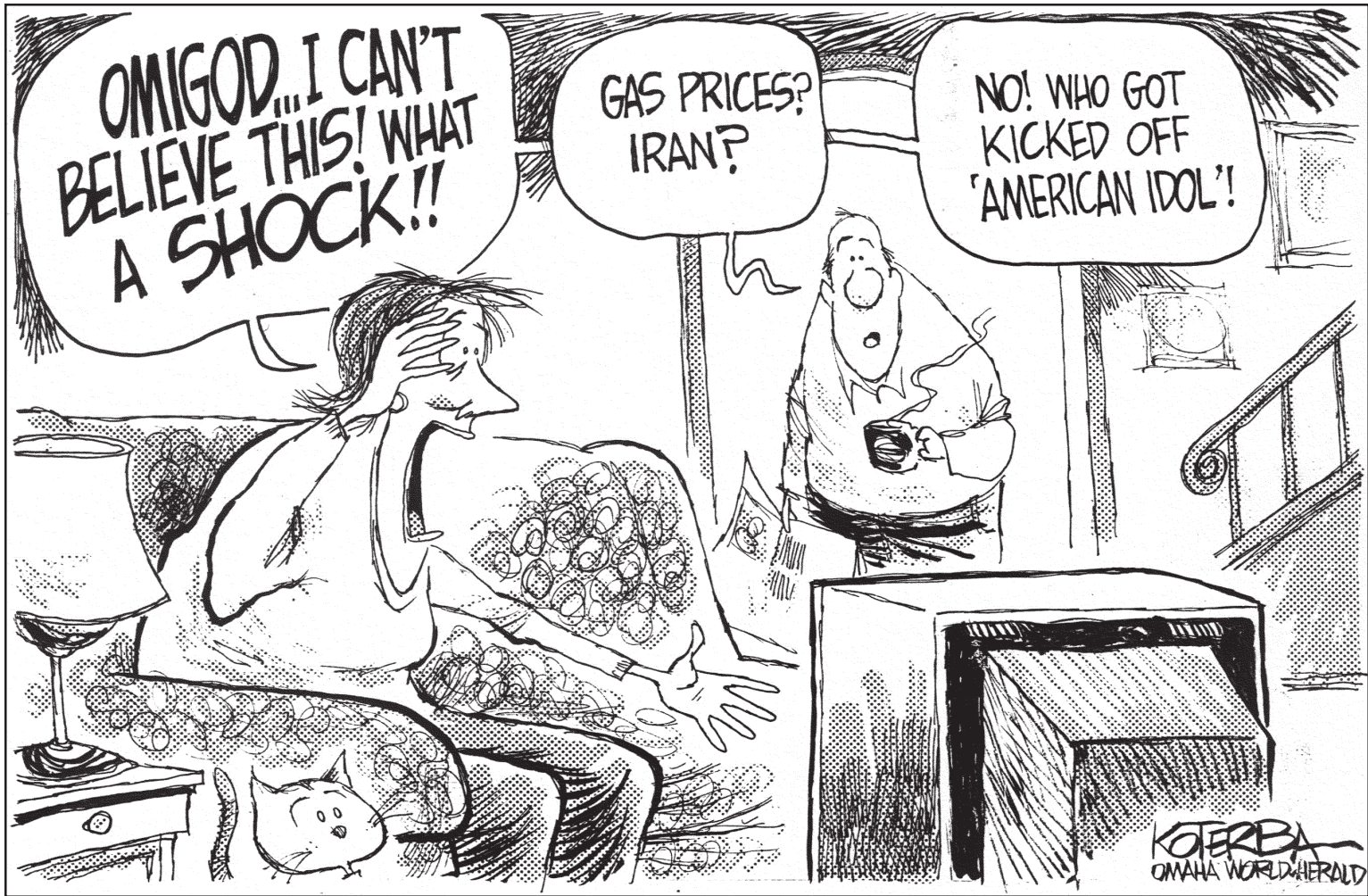
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## What a tangled Web we weave

Probably the greatest advancement in technology for mankind, even greater than television and the automobile, is also becoming the most troubling one too.

Another example of the drawback of the World Wide Web happened right in our backyard. According to authorities, an area teen fell victim to an Internet game encouraging the kid to bolt from home without telling anybody. Tack that onto the growing problem of adults meeting underage kids online, wanting to also meet them in person.

Eight years ago, when the Internet was not as apparent as it is now, I attended a foundation meeting representing the town I was living in. The foundation was offering a large grant to a town that had the best idea for how a town could utilize the Internet.

During that meeting a video clip of a man who runs a Western-themed store in tiny town Oregon was shown. The man said he couldn't keep up with his online business. He implied, in so many ways, people would be stupid thinking the Internet was not the best thing under the sun.

Of course after that meeting, it seemed like everywhere I went, there was some reference to the Internet.

Oh, how quickly things changed in a year's time.

The Super Bowl played in January 2000 had about two dozen commercials from those .com companies people thought would be the best in-



### John Van Nostrand

#### • Line in the Dust

vestment of all time. At the time, that was the economy's accelerator. The Internet had financial influence in addition to a social influence.

But the Super Bowl the next year had less than half as many .com commercials. Many companies had gone bankrupt because of either too much competition or they grew faster than they could afford and had to call it quits.

That has become symbolic of the Internet — there is too much of it and it gets people in trouble in many ways.

Now, I use the Internet. Like the millions of other people, I e-mail my friends and researched Colby before moving here. When my favorite football teams are not on television, I get online and get a real-time play-by-play of the game.

But I don't want the Internet to run my life, like it may have done others. I actually walk across the street to say hi to my neighbor. I don't

have to see if his instant message device is activated to see if he is around. IM's and e-mail have can damage people's conversation and communication abilities. Cell phone text-messaging is doing that too.

I have shopped online. Before buying diapers, I was looking for rare or out-of-print records and books. Even that has changed.

Twenty years ago, I would walk down to the record store after school and see the newest releases, in vinyl, looking like wallpaper on one wall. You could also talk about the latest tunes with the store owner. Now, you have to slide your mouse over the little shopping cart to finish. There's no one to talk to — unless you go to the big franchise store in the city mall. It's just not the same.

My two young children know there is a computer in the house but they are not at the age to comprehend how a computer works. There will be a day when they will need to know how to operate the thing. I'm sure they will find neat presents for their mother for Mother's Day and research for that term paper.

But rule number one is knowing where the off button is because there is so much of the world out there that shouldn't be experienced on a computer monitor.

John Van Nostrand is publisher of the Colby Free Press

## Your turn

## Ostrich shooting was not justified

#### Vern and Linda Goossen

#### Mingo

We are writing concerning the ostrich shooting Thursday, May 11, by the Thomas County deputy sheriff.

The bird was on private land. If it strayed onto Interstate 70, why was it found 18 feet west of the fence, shot? Did the officer kill it, and then drag it over the fence? There are no drag marks, so maybe the bird, after being shot, jumped up and over the fence only to die after getting be-

hind the fence.

According to the article, the officer took 10 fast paces toward the fence line. The bird had its wings up, like it wanted to fly. Ostriches can't fly, and only raise their wings when they feel threatened. I'm sure it did feel threatened, what with somebody running up to it with guns 'blazing.'"

If the sheriff was really concerned about who owned the bird, he only had to go into Mingo, about a mile away and ask anybody who lives

there, and ask. We've had the birds since 1992, and have had many people, children included, out to see them.

If they were dangerous, we would never have allowed them to come out to photograph, pet, talk, etc to them.

We did look for the bird a couple of times the previous evening because folks did call, but the birds like to lie down, and are then very hard to see. We would have taken care of the bird on Thursday.

## Thanks for protecting the public

#### Terri Hanke

#### Colby

Last week, driving down Highway 383 I had to slow down to about 20 mph to avoid hitting a turkey in the road. Luckily there were no vehicles behind me or I would have ended up with a wrecked car or worse. I am glad I didn't have to decide quickly whether to save myself or the bird.

Our sheriff's officers had to make the same decision with the ostrich on Thursday and we

should commend them for making the decision that human life and safety is more important than a big bird.

Had the truck driver who complained that the shooting was inhumane and senseless found that huge bird flying through his engine or windshield he would be crying that local law enforcement did nothing for public safety. Face it, an ostrich on the interstate one way or another someone was going to get hurt. It could have been hit by a car and suffered. It could

have caused a car full of kids to wreck. The truck driver was right, it wasn't a small bird, but even small birds can do tremendous damage to a car. An ostrich would have been like hitting a cow. I am an animal lover but common sense says the safety of the public comes first. Our sheriff's department had a tough decision to make. They are to be commended for doing what had to be done.

Thanks Mike. Now can we talk about those turkeys?

#### About those letters . . .

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### Mallard Fillmore

#### • Bruce Tinsley

