

# Opinion

## A Kansas Viewpoint



### Don't hold your breath

**From The Wichita Eagle**  
Now that the state's school funding plan has been blessed by the Kansas Supreme Court, lawmakers need to get to work on another important school issue: consolidation.

But don't hold your breath. Most lawmakers — along with Gov. Kathleen Sebelius and her GOP gubernatorial challenger Jim Barnett — don't want to talk about declining enrollments and the need to close some schools.

In fact, they didn't even seriously consider their own post-audit report this year that determined that many small, rural districts are receiving too much state funding. Instead, they gave them even more money.

But ignoring the issue won't make it go away. Five years ago, Kansas had 304 school districts. Now it has 296. Four of those reductions happened July 1. Three districts in Jewell, Washington and Republic counties merged with three other districts in those counties. And the Prairie Heights district in Decatur County, which had fewer than 15 students, dissolved.

More districts need to consolidate — especially if enrollment trends continue.

Last year, 60 percent of the state's 300 school districts lost enrollment. The Lawrence Journal-World reported, and 60 Kansas high schools had 100 or fewer students.

Consolidating can be painful, as many small towns believe — perhaps correctly — that local schools are key to their economic survival. And there are limits to how far students can be bused, though video courses are becoming more of an educational option.

But there are also limits to how much the state can spend on education. So lawmakers and the governor have a duty to spend education money efficiently.

At the least, if they are unwilling to close schools, they should move to consolidating administrative functions, such as sharing superintendents and accounting services between districts.

But, again, don't hold your breath.

### Your turn

### Who will gain?

**Frank Sowers  
Benkelman, Neb.**

How did Bill Gates and Warren Buffet sneak that much money past their wives? Their combined wealth is a pittance in the cost of the Iraq War. Long live Saddam Hussein is a poor trade for any dead American.

The road department and border security could both use a foundation. The death tax is fairer than the income tax. Could Bill Gates and Warren Buffet be circumventing it?

"For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" Mark 8:36.

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@nwks.com](mailto:jvannostrand@nwks.com) or [pdecker@nwks.com](mailto:pdecker@nwks.com). Opinions do not necessarily reflect the *Free Press*.

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### It could have been worse

Monday was no small potatoes, literally.

Two days later and Colby is still talking about the tornado that touched down Monday evening near Interstate 70 exit 53. It has been 10 years since a tornado has been spotted that close to town, so I don't blame people for talking about it so much.

That tornado was the first one I have seen in my life, and for my two kids too. Wife Jennifer has seen several in her life. She saw a few the week we met in July 1993. She grew up in eastern Colorado, about 100 miles away from Colby, still in tornado alley. Jennifer was once in the basement of a house during a tornado and the tornado severely damaged the house.

I grew up in northeastern Colorado, still prime for a tornado. But the joke is in Sterling, the town is so boring even tornadoes refuse to go there. A myth in Sterling is since the town is in the Platte River Valley, tornadoes have a difficult time forming. I don't know how true that is, but I don't believe it.

I was on the back porch Monday grilling and heard the warning sirens. I walked to the west side of the house and saw the tornado over the south side of town. We live on the north side. I immediately went inside and told everybody else. Jennifer and the kids ran out and also saw the tor-



**John Van Nostrand**

#### • Line in the Dust

nado. Our kids are still too young to comprehend a tornado.

Jennifer and I then had contrasting responses to the tornado.

She took the kids and ran for cover.

I went to the telephone trying to contact editor Patty and reporter Tisha making sure what kind of pictures we could get. We are ever grateful to our readers who have sent us their own pictures and stories for our coverage in today's paper.

You may be wondering why Jenn took the kids to safety and I stuck around. Well, it's our trained response to such things.

Because of Jennifer's history with tornadoes, her reaction is to look for safety. I knew this would be front-page news, so I had to make sure we would have something for the front page. I

knew what Jennifer would do and she knew what I would do.

I do have my limits though. I have talked to other people who have been in tornadoes and they say look for one of two things during tornado-producing weather; when the wind comes to an abrupt stop, then you think you hear a freight train.

I didn't hear or see either and the tornado got lost in the clouds and I figured we were in the clear.

After the heavy rain passed, I checked the grill. The rain fell through the ventilation of the grill lid and put out some of the charcoals, but the chicken was cooked enough by that time to eat. Our potatoes just needed more time, and heat, to finish. There was not much heat left in the grill.

Daughter Kari, 3, gave Jenn and I a chuckle as she kept saying "potato" rather than tornado when we talked about it over our rain-soaked meal.

But we realized a rained out barbecue is nothing compared to the damage and injuries that happened in Colby. We were thankful that it wasn't much worse — and that is no small potatoes.

John Van Nostrand is publisher of the Colby Free Press

### We are not in charge

One of my friends serving in Iraq sends me a weekly update on his travels and travails. Cary is about 40 with a couple of grown kids, one of whom is in the Army in Kuwait. They got to see each other recently, but it was more serendipity than anything planned. The needs of the Army come first.

Cary joined the U.S. Army as a young man trying to get out of Indonesia and into a better life. He converted from Islam to Christianity during his first tour in the Army and even graduated from the Sunset International Bible Institute in Lubbock, Texas.

By that time, he had met and married an American girl and had a family, so he chose to finish his time in the Army Reserve and was stationed in Hays for some time. I met him in school (I was a couple of years behind him) and we renewed our friendship after I came to Colby.

Cary is not a stereotypical soldier. He is somewhat soft-spoken most of the time, although he gets pretty excited in a pulpit. He also loves to lead singing at church and he can't do it standing still.

He is a man of prayer as well. He prays he will never have to use his weapon and he prays, when the time comes, he will use his weapon effectively to save the lives of his comrades.

He also believes what he is doing is important,



**Jay Kelley**

#### • Speaking MyMind

even though he would rather be doing almost anything else. The suffering of the Iraqi people is heartbreaking to him, as it would be to any thinking person, and he sometimes wonders if the help we give is simply wasted on people who do not want to be helped.

There is the key. The Iraqi people are becoming independent, albeit not in the way we would like. We want democracy to break out in the Middle East and it still might, but it probably won't look like American democracy and it is doubtful that it will take root in Iraq without a civil war.

That is not failure. As I remember, it took a revolution and a civil war for our government to be truly unified. Anyone who thinks the Civil War created disunity doesn't know our history. It simply revealed it.

Do a Google search on the Compromises of 1820 and 1850 sometime and you might find out

we had been avoiding a fight between two cultures for many years.

We cannot prevent a civil war in Iraq. In fact, we couldn't prevent it if we sent a million troops into the country. We can take sides and win it, which would be foolish, but we can't prevent it.

We can't because we are not in charge and don't want to be. The government of Iraq is slowly beginning to take charge. That doesn't mean everything is going to be OK, but it does mean that our job is coming to a close.

So, what do we do? We can't leave yet simply because we are still being asked to stay. Of course there are those who say the Iraqi government is doing the bidding of the Bush Administration. You could have fooled me, considering their stance on the Israeli-Palestinian war and their support of Iran.

We can't pull back, either. Those who are calling for a pull-back are simply asking to prolong the war and the loss of life. If we are not engaged directly, the pressure is off the Iraqi government and they will not ask us to leave.

American troops bivouacked in the Muslim Holy Land and helped start this mess to begin with.

In the end, the solution lies with the Iraqi people, where it has always been.

Jay Kelley is a local writer who speaks his mind from time to time. His e-mail is [jkkelley@st-tel.net](mailto:jkkelley@st-tel.net).

#### About those letters . . .

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#### Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

