

Opinion

A Kansas Viewpoint

Kansas wants an education leader

From The Garden City Telegram
 Turmoil best described Bob Corkins' brief run as Kansas education commissioner.
 A questionable hire by the Kansas State Board of Education in October 2005, Corkins ended his tumultuous tenure by resigning ... Controversy continually swirled around Corkins, from his credentials — he had no professional education experience — to his prior work running two think tanks, when he lobbied against increased spending for public schools. ...
 Corkins' hiring was the brainchild of a state BOE conservative majority that sought someone in line with their thinking, which focused on such narrow, ideological wedge issues as intelligent design, sex education and vouchers. ...
 ... But rather than striving to work with local school districts and schools in crafting innovative ways to improve the educational effort, Corkins and the board's conservative majority looked to undermine the state's public school system. ...
 Thankfully, the election-driven shift in the state BOE from a conservative to moderate majority sparked the end of Corkins' tenure. Now a new state BOE will have an opportunity to restore credibility to the education commissioner's post.
 Kansans want an education leader who would pursue innovative ways to address challenges of the K-12 educational process — strategies to recruit and retain good teachers, for example — without undermining public schooling. ...

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@nwkansas.com or pdecker@nwkansas.com. Opinions do not necessarily reflect the *Free Press*.

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Costly election

Battle lines are being drawn in Sheridan County and the outcome does not look to be pretty.

Sheridan County Commissioners David Zimmerman, Keith Kennedy and Ron Schamberger are chipping away at the democratic process. The voice of the voter was muffled Monday when they refused County Attorney Mike Haas' advice to conduct a new election for Commission District No. 1.

Haas told commissioners the right thing to do was to have a new election and let voters from the townships of Adell, Bow Creek, East Kenneth, Valley, East Saline and West Saline say once and for all who should be their commissioner.

Zimmerman said the commissioners didn't want the county to foot the bill for a new election. According to a deputy in the county clerk's office, a new election would cost less than \$700. But the commissioners last week alone spent \$1,164 to hire Oberlin attorney Steve Hirsch to tell them they didn't need to have a new election. What they paid Hirsch amounts to about a month's pay for Haas working full-time as county attorney.

Taxpayers are not only getting ripped off, they are getting their constitutional rights to have their voice heard at the polls ripped off.

Last week, Haas asked the secretary of state's office for help in ending the political war. His request didn't turn out as expected.

Seems the secretary of state's office is not an investigative agency of the state when it comes to elections. Haas, in a letter dated Nov. 21 from Melissa A. Wagemann, legal counsel for Ron Thornburgh's office, learned law enforcement would have to lead an investigation of the situation. With Monday's new sheriff, Brian Fenner,



Jan Katz Ackerman

• From Where I stand

being sworn in, that just might happen.

Seems the trio of commissioners didn't like what Haas had to say, so they hired Hirsch, who happens to be Decatur County's attorney. Hirsch said despite Victor Bielser asking for and paying for a recount, Bielser's wife, Paula, who is county clerk and election officer, should have waited for a canvassing board to order the recount.

Since no canvassing board ordered the recount, the commissioners, who usually serve as such, listened to Hirsch, rather than following their own county attorney's advice.

But it gets better. Hirsch admitted state law is open to interpretation and he might be in error of how this whole thing should play out. He said since the secretary of state's office admits it has never dealt with a situation like currently in Sheridan County, a judge might have to decide who's to stand where on Jan. 9.

Will it be Schamberger or Victor Bielser standing to be sworn in as commissioner? That's yet to be seen.

While the first election count ended with Schamberger having 220 votes to Victor Bielser's 214, that recount ended with Bielser winning by seven votes.

But Haas and Hirsch agreed on one point though.

Both said anyone who wants to challenge the commissioners' decision can file paperwork with Sheridan County District Court. But, the paperwork can only be filed after an election abstract of the certified results from the first race are on file in Topeka. That's in the works.

Wagemann told Haas she understands the citizens of Sheridan County are concerned about the change in vote totals following the recount. She also wrote that a judge's look at things might be the only way to ensure the results are fair and accurate.

Fair and accurate. Seems there is not much fair and accurate with this whole mess and voters continue to lose their voice all along the way.

It's not just an election results that need to be fair and accurate, so do decisions made by the commissioners. If the attorney closest to the activity says there needs to be a new election, from where I stand that's the guy commissioners need to listen to. After all, aren't Sheridan County taxpayers the ones who put Haas in office and the ones paying for his advice in the first place?

While I'm the first person to admit an objective viewpoint is always the best, I also believe it stands to reason the person with all the facts might be the most objective — especially in this situation.

Goes back to what I said last week, seems to me the voters ought to be figuring out how to handle matters themselves. As a voter, the word recall is still top on my list of ways.

Jan Katz Ackerman is a reporter for the Colby Free Press.

Sort of un-American?

By Steve Haynes

Government agencies enter land against the owners' will, spreading poison.

An armed officer stands guard, keeping the landowner away.

The government plans to send the landowner the bill for killing his animals.

This happens in Communist China, perhaps? Soviet Russia? Fidel's Cuba?

No, western Kansas, where the deer and the antelope play, and the skies are not cloudy all day.

It's a high-stakes game of prairie dog eradication, and the script just drips with irony.

The land in question is owned by Larry Haverfield, a maverick rancher who touts unorthodox grazing ideas and thinks that deep down, prairie dogs might not be so bad. He's convinced there's a place for all of God's creatures and he sure doesn't want the county telling him how to run his ranch.

His neighbors don't see things quite that way. They share the average western prejudice against prairie dogs. They read all the stories about how we've killed millions and millions of the little critters, reduced the range and driven

them near to being listed as an endangered species.

And they think that's a pretty good start.

Most of them, if they could push a button and eliminate every single prairie dog from the face of the earth, they'd do it. In a heartbeat.

Larry Haverfield thinks you should leave some, maybe not all, the rodents around. His neighbors think he's nuts — maybe worse.

Other landowners want Haverfield's dogs eliminated. They have the Logan County commissioners and the weight of the law behind them. Commissioners, under pressure from other landowners, refused to approve any plan from Haverfield that includes keeping prairie dogs around.

What really rankles many landowners is that Haverfield and a couple of friends have invited the federal government to help them "manage" the prairie dogs by reintroducing the black-footed ferret on their land. This rare, endangered species lives among and eats prairie dogs. How well it can control them remains to be seen, since only a few hundred of the cute little devils remain.

Commissioners and landowners fear if the

endangered ferret is let loose in Logan County, they'll never be able to poison prairie dogs again. Opposition is at a fever pitch, and you can almost see the villagers gathering, pitchforks and firebrands in hand, to confront the evil that lurks.

On any given day, we're sure, most of the farmers, ranchers and county officials of Logan County are decent, conservative types who support the National Rifle Association and belong to the Farm Bureau. They likely espouse the freedom to own guns and private property.

Property rights, however, go just so far, and in Logan County, they apparently don't cover harboring vermin — or cute little endangered ferrets.

How else can you explain the county sending exterminators unannounced onto private land and an armed officer to keep landowners from interfering.

Sound sort of un-American to you? Apparently, property rights are only for those we agree with.

With all due respect to the feelings most ranchers and stockmen have about prairie dogs, maybe this is carrying things just a bit too far. — Steve Haynes is owner of Nor'West Newspapers including the Colby Free Press

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



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