

Opinion

Another Viewpoint



The late Sen. Clark had a novel idea

Let's revisit a proposition championed by the late Sen. Stan Clark, who thought the state should have more offices out in the hinterlands and fewer in Topeka.

Sen. Clark once suggested that, instead of buying up more buildings in Topeka to house an ever-expanding work force, the state should start farming out its work to places like Oberlin and Norton.

With modern communications, he argued, most jobs could be done in our area as well as they could in Topeka. Some might argue that the state would get better workers and a better product out in rural Kansas.

Half a century ago, the state built an office tower in Topeka. Today, the government spills out into two more office buildings and a passel of other space.

There's no reason why all that money has to be spent in Topeka. Some of it could be creating economic development in rural counties bypassed by state government in the last few decades.

There's a whole litany of crimes against the rural economy the state should atone for: closing Social and Rehabilitation Services offices, highway shops in smaller towns, consolidating Highway Patrol dispatch centers, the list goes on.

Sure, that's the way utilities like Southwestern Bell (now the "new" AT&T) do business. Once Bell had operators and a business office in nearly every town; today our small towns have been deserted. Those functions have been "centralized" in Wichita, Tulsa, Dallas — or Bangalore.

But Ma Bell isn't run with tax money and has no responsibility to promote economic development. We all know how much she loves us.

The state of Kansas, though, in many ways has been a booster for rural decline. New highways concentrated traffic, drying up commerce along the two-lanes across our state. Consolidations closed school, offices and services.

If we're interested in a stronger state economy, shouldn't we demand that the state reverse this trend? And shouldn't we want every county in Kansas to be prosperous, not just a few?

Stan Clark thought so. He'd only begun the fight before his untimely death in a prairie dust storm three years ago.

The rest of us should take up the torch.

A computer center in Atwood. An engineering office in Hill City. Maybe a prison in Oakley and a research center over in Norton.

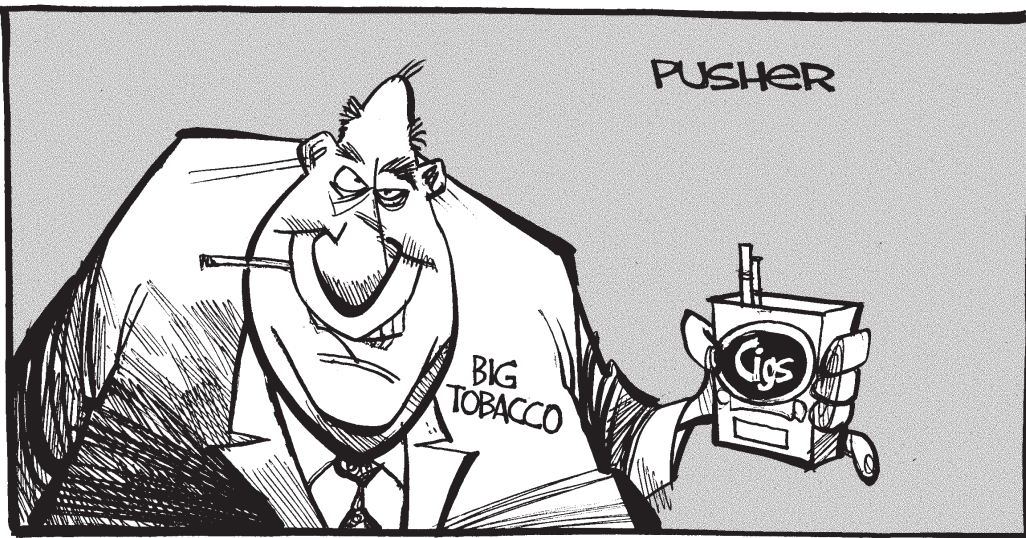
Oh, here's an idea: welfare offices in every county where people can go down and apply for help — in person, not on the phone. Maybe state service centers where people could get all kinds of services at the county seat without a day-long drive to some consolidated office.

Someone will say state workers don't want to move out to the sticks. Too bad. Hire people who want to live here. Rural Kansas will be a lot more hip with jobs and people.

There are, last time we checked, lots of other jobs in Topeka for those who don't want to move.

— Steve Haynes is president of Nor'West Newspapers, which includes the Colby Free Press.

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.



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Celebrating heroes

I love celebrations such as the one I witnessed Saturday in Grinnell when Congressman Jerry Moran awarded Gove resident Arnold Prather the Purple Heart.

I met Arnold when he was a Gove County Commissioner, not knowing he served in the United States Army from 1951 to 1952 during the Korean War.

An 18-year-old upon entering, Arnold first saw combat on April 9, 1951, as a 19-year-old. Part of the 7th Division, 17th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Battalion, Easy Company, 4th Platoon, Arnold started out as a medic, but ended up in the infantry and was wounded in his legs and back where shrapnel remains.

Engaged when he left for war, Arnold returned to the United States, married and had two sons and one daughter and a host of grandchildren, family and friends. Semi-retired, Arnold says his boys run the farming operation of which he's now the "go-for."

But over and above the mechanic of Arnolds current life, it's his younger life which drew about 100 people to Grinnell's VFW on Saturday.

A long overdue thank you from America is what captured my thoughts about how our American heroes, particularly those Moran said were part of a "forgotten war," are a blessing to our nation.

"The thing that always impresses is that we are always looking for heroes, somebody to be our role models and we don't have to look very far," Moran said.

"They're our neighbors, the people we work with, the farmer down the road, they are the people who answer the call to duty and make tremendous sacrifices throughout the history of our country and, so I hold Arnold as a true hero and somebody that's a role model for other Americans."

As Opal pinned a small purple heart hanging from a purple ribbon on Arnold's lapel, Con-



Jan Katz Ackerman

• From Where I stand

gressman Moran read from an accompanying certificate: "The United States of America, to all who shall see these greetings, this is to certify that the President of the United States of America has awarded the Purple Heart, established by General George Washington at Newberg, New York, Aug. 7, 1782, to then Corporal Arnold W. Prather, United States Army for wounds received in action on the tenth day of Aug. 1951 in the Republic of Korea."

Moran said he is grateful for men and women like Arnold, not only their service to our country, but also for the continued roles they fulfill in our communities.

Someone asked me on Monday how my weekend went, and at first I flat could not remember.

But then the thoughts of Arnold's celebration came to mind.

Arnold, being called to serve our nation, was being called to die for it. How fitting that his Purple Heart was awarded right smack in the middle of another war, the war in Iraq.

But there's a bigger war being waged right now, the war between good and evil, a holy war which will not end until Jesus Christ returns. A war in which those of us who follow Christ are called to die; always spiritually, and sometimes bodily.

That thought was brought keenly home to me during a sermon preached Sunday at my local church. The pastor told how German martyr

Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said when Christ calls you to follow Him, He calls you to die. Die to self. Die to evil. Die to the world, so that we can live for Christ. Live for good and live for the Kingdom of God.

Going back to Arnold, it's appropriate that he received his Purple Heart during the season of Lent, a time I'm joyfully awaiting the celebration of Easter. Not because it usually falls close to my birthday, this being my 52, but also because I finally figured out my purpose for being this big celestial ball.

Like the lines of a hymn sung Sunday, "Church of God, elect and glorious, Holy nation, chosen race; Called as God's own special people, Royal priests and heirs of grace; Know the purpose of your calling, Show to all His mighty deeds; Tell of love that knows no limits, Grace that meets all human needs."

The major human need is for each and every person on Earth to know Christ as his or her savior.

It's like the pastor said of the late Arthur F. Burns, chairman of the United States Federal Reserve from 1970 to 1978, who at a prayer breakfast in Washington, D. C. prayed — "Lord, I pray that your would bring Jews to know Jesus Christ. I pray that you would bring Muslims to know Jesus Christ.

"Finally, Lord, I pray, that you would bring Christians to know Jesus Christ. Amen."

While many people label themselves a Christian, do they really walk the walk or just talk the talk? We all have to figure this out, while at the same time we are try and figure out what God's plan for us is all about.

And the simple fact is that His plan is that He is the plan.

Jan Katz Ackerman is a reporter for the Colby Free Press. Her column appears on Thursdays.

Let's poll on issues, not popularity

The news media, like politicians, love polls. Are John McCain and Hillary Clinton the leaders? Is John Edwards gaining on Barack Obama?

The polling overdose is more about convenience than substance. Polls make an easy story. Reporters don't have to dissect complicated topics, like health insurance, and polls are easy for readers to digest.

We can stand around the water cooler wondering if Hillary will slip or gain in the next poll. Everybody's happy with a poll story, right? Wrong.

Personally, I'd rather read what any candidate is saying about health insurance, the Iraq War, or pretty much any other topic, even about Monica Lewinsky. By constantly telling us who's winning the electoral horse race, journalists deprive us of the real information we need to be able to make intelligent choices among candidates.

But that's just one problem with the American media's obsession with polls. A bigger problem is that, more often than not, they are meaningless. And you don't have to be much of a political analyst to understand why. All you need is common sense, and not much of it.

I hope this doesn't shock you, but polls are manipulated easily by how the questions are asked. Take, for example, polling on the Iraq War.

It was widely accepted that Americans fa-

vored the Iraq war before we invaded in March 2003. But, actually, it depended on how you asked the question.

It's true that most Americans supported the invasion by a wide margin, as long as the war didn't last very long. In four separate CBS News/*New York Times* polls conducted in the months leading up to the war, Americans were just about split on whether they favored the war if it lasted "months or even years." Anybody out there remember that polling question coming up very much?

No, the message you got from reading the newspaper headlines was more simple: strong support for the war, maybe fading a touch before the invasion, but strong support nonetheless.

And, of course, war support surged, if you'll pardon the expression, after the invasion.

Now it's in the dumps, with about 60 percent favoring withdrawal by the end of next year. There's a lesson here for journalists. If you're going to insist on polling us so much, which I think is a mistake at least emphasize the nuances in our responses. Don't just run the poll stories with the simplest answers to the simplest questions. Like, do you support Hillary or McCain?

Instead, ask voters what they think about the positions these candidates are taking on the issues.

How do voters feel about Dennis Kucinich's

position on Iraq? Mitt Romney's? What about John Edwards' proposal on health insurance?

Yes, pollsters would have to explain what the candidates are saying about these issues. The polling would be more difficult but much more useful. The resulting news stories about voter reactions to the candidates' positions on issues such as health care could actually provide some real insight. They'd help us formulate meaningful opinions about the candidates. And this information would allow us to get to know candidates that aren't already household names in America.

As it is, a poll asking your typical American about a candidate he or she has never heard of is pretty meaningless, don't you think? And most Americans don't know a thing about folks like Democrat Bill Richardson or Republican Romney.

So, all you journalists out there, how about cutting back on the popularity-contest polls and giving us information to make informed decisions in our democracy?

Jason Salzman is a media critic for the Rocky Mountain News. He is Board Chair of Rocky Mountain Media Watch, a media watchdog group based in Denver.

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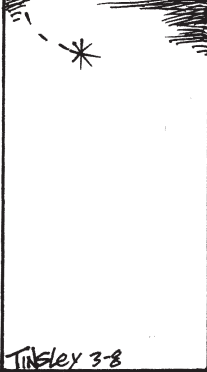
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