

Opinion



A Kansas Viewpoint

New commission must follow through

From The Hutchinson News

An idea to create a new rural policy commission has an empty-suit feeling about it.

The new commission, proposed in a bill that passed the Senate late last month, acknowledges the need to put more attention on rural economic development. And we shouldn't downplay the importance of that. Rural Kansas economies need special attention.

But the proposed nine-member commission and a new deputy commerce secretary for rural development sounds like it will create more opportunity for talking about the problem but not necessarily more economic opportunity for rural communities. Furthermore, it might create more bureaucracy without resources to create action.

Again, the goals are worthy — develop leadership in rural communities, retain youth, promote rural entrepreneurship, and maintain wealth through the development of community foundations. Those are good strategies.

But the bill doesn't consolidate the resources of any existing rural economic development agencies and programs. It seemingly only creates one more.

It seems like just a way for urban legislators to say they are doing something about rural decline while not — well, let's be honest — spending any real money on it.

The rub here is illustrated in a report issued last month by the Legislature's audit division. Among other conclusions, it found that more than half of government economic development resources were spent in the state's three most urban counties — Johnson, Wyandotte and Sedgwick. ...

The new policy authority is great, but it needs authority. It needs money.

Kansas is never going to be able to say it is making a serious effort at rural economic development until it starts directing financial resources to the places that need it most.

Johnson County already is wealthy, and it frankly doesn't have to work too hard to attract a thousand new jobs. Government's resources need to go to the many places in Kansas that are desperate for just a dozen new jobs.

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Tourney time

The high schools had their version of March madness last week. Now, it's time for college basketball to take over.

Conference tournaments began earlier this week, and for a basketball junkie like myself, it doesn't get much better than this.

You come home for lunch and there are two or three really good games on. Then you get off for the day, and there's games going well past midnight.

These conference tournaments are almost too much to handle for a diehard fan with how many good matchups in such a short period of time.

For example, if Missouri had beaten Nebraska Thursday, they would have faced KU Friday night in Kansas City. We all know how dynamite that atmosphere would be.

If KU won, they could then potentially face Kansas State the next day and Texas on Sunday for the Big 12 Title.

Those are three biggest games KU plays all year, and they could have all happened again in three straight days. Whew. Good thing Missouri lost, huh?

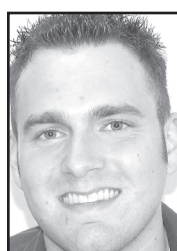
Still, playing Kansas State and Texas on back-to-back days is brutal enough.

I don't know if the Jayhawks or their fan base will have anything left in the tank after this weekend.

The funny thing about these conference tournaments is how the games that feature two ranked teams like KU and Texas are basically meaningless. This is a week for the Cinderellas and the bubble teams.

Once a team like Colorado gets eliminated from the Big 12 Tournament, no one really cares anymore.

Sure, people will watch a KU/Texas final like they have the last two years, but it's almost like an exhibition game by Sunday afternoon. The tournament selection show is two hours after the game, and by that point that is



Joe Falkoff

• **A Sideline View**

all that is on anyone's mind.

Even if Kansas wins the Big 12 Tournament, no one will care about that if they go and lose in the second round of the NCAA Tournament.

Ultimately, conference tournament week is for the fans. It's just a good excuse to play more games and sell more tickets.

The NCAA Tournament is what it's all about.

For basketball fans in the Sunflower State, KU is either going to be a #1 or #2 seed in the tournament. You figure Duke or North Carolina will grab one #1 seed. UCLA and Memphis will get the other two.

If Tennessee loses early in the SEC Tournament, and Kansas wins the Big 12, I don't think there's any doubt the Jayhawks will also be a top seed.

I want to assume Kansas State is in the tournament even if they lose tonight to Texas A&M, but after how they got duped last year you never know. The 19-10 Wildcats could be as high as #6 seed or as low as a #9, depending on how they do this weekend.

Of all the top teams in the country, I believe KU is surest thing to get to the Final Four in San Antonio. They've had three losses this year, but all were on the road to teams playing well at the time. Other than those games, they really haven't been challenged. Their 109-51 over Texas Tech March 3 looked like they were

playing against a high school team. That's how scary-good the Jayhawks can be.

I want to think they're the team to beat, but they have one thing missing I know is going to trip them up when they run into North Carolina or UCLA; they don't have a go-to player.

They've got seven guys that can all score, but no one guy they can go to in a close game they know is going to deliver a basket or get fouled. That's what killed them in their losses at Kansas State and Texas.

I do know one thing, the Jayhawks better win it this year. With all the players they are about to lose, it could be a while before they are this good again.

The Wildcats, on the other hand, do have that one go-to guy in Michael Beasley, but not much else around him other than Bill Walker.

For Kansas State, the lower they are seeded the better. If they get a #6 seed and have to play a scrappy mid-major, I think they're done in the first round.

I thought Texas was a Final Four team last year with Kevin Durant. They got pounded in second round. I won't make that same mistake with Kansas State. They're too young, and too inconsistent to make a deep run this year.

It's been a while since both the Wildcats and Jayhawks have been in the tournament together.

So fans of both schools, try to not get too worked up about this week (although round three of KU/KState would be fun to watch). Besides the seeding, these games don't mean much for either school.

And really, does moving up or down a seed really matter a whole lot?

So use this weekend to get your vocal chords and recliners warmed up, because the real show begins around 11:20 a.m. Thursday.

—Joe Falkoff is a reporter for the Colby Free Press.

Your turn

To the anonymous letter writer . . .

Kristi Powell

Colby

To the "True Colby Fan," let me first apologize if I offended you with a comment I made on the air prior to Friday night's basketball game in Salina. If what you say I said is true, it definitely wasn't meant to come across that way.

I do not, nor have I ever, felt the Lady Eagles basketball team is or ever were "losers." What I was saying is that whoever loses that game will go home the losers of that game and not state champions.

If you, whoever you are, have listened to any other broadcasts including those to follow that one, you would know that I am a huge fan of

the Eagles and Trojans and so is my father. We both gave them great compliments as a team and individuals throughout the whole season.

You are one among very few who do not appreciate the service my father and I provide to this community. Rich Epp has been a devout fan of area sports for many years and has provided a huge service to those of you who cannot or choose not to go to the games in person. To the anonymous writer, your dislike and lack of appreciation for our broadcasts is one in a million. We will continue to support the Eagles and Trojans in the best way we can.

My suggestion to you is to shut off your radio and stop listening if you believe my "stupidity" and lack of knowledge is going to continue

to cross the airwaves.

Your letter suggested you know who I am with your comment that I, as a person, am a "loser." If you know me you would know that I am as proud of these girls as any other Colby fan, including you.

If you feel the comments you put in the letter about me were legitimate, you would have signed your name. As you can see, I have.

To the Lady Eagles team and coaches: You had a fantastic year and I along with many others are extremely proud of your efforts and accomplishments. Way to go.

Just as all coaches know, there is always going to be someone (The true Colby fan) who is never satisfied with anything.

About those letters . . .

The *Free Press* encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, if at all possible, and should include a telephone number and an address. These are used for verification of the writer only. If, however, you want your address and telephone number to appear with your letter, please ask us to do so when you submit your letter, or include a note with your letter. Most importantly, all letters must include a signature. Unsigned letters cannot be published. We reserve the right to edit for clarity and length, and, likewise, reserve the right to reject letters deemed to be of no public interest or considered offensive or libelous. Letters to the Free Press allow readers to become engaged in public debate on topics they deem important. Please consider sharing your thoughts with the family of Colby Free Press readers. Thank you.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

