

# Opinion



## A Kansas Viewpoint

### Kansas can't neglect

From The Wichita Eagle

When the most mentally ill Kansans are judged to be dangerous to themselves or others, they can find treatment and safety in the state hospitals in Larned, Osawatotie and Kansas City, Kan. — at least that is the plan. But the plan falters if the hospitals are full, out of funds and in crisis, as they reportedly are in Kansas. As lawmakers wrap up the omnibus spending bill and the 2008 session late this month, they should ensure that these vital facilities are adequately funded.

The Kansas Health Institute News Service sounded the alarm this week in reporting that both Larned and Osawatotie have had budget problems and operated recently at or over their licensed capacities — 465 and 176 beds, respectively. Osawatotie State Hospital had 32 admissions over the weekend. ...

All three facilities are experiencing 10 percent increases in admissions over last year. ...

Hospital officials are at a loss to explain the increases. But because admissions are up, Valentine said, the outside medical, pharmaceutical and food costs are increasing.

Full beds also mean 16-hour shifts for workers, who cover them for "comp time" because there is no money for overtime. Larned can't afford to fill the 100 full-time jobs it has open. ...

State Sen. Dwayne Umbarger, R-Thayer, who chairs the Senate Ways and Means Committee, suggested he's more than aware of the problem at the hospitals. ...

Before final adjournment, lawmakers need to work with the Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services to assess and meet the hospitals' needs. They also need to factor in the state's community mental health agencies, which recently have seen their funding cut under a new payment system.

There's a bigger picture that state and local officials also must face, one in which mental illness, homelessness, substance abuse, public safety, corrections and lack of health care overlap. Kansas can't neglect its neediest and most mentally ill without costly consequences.

#### Where to write, call

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- U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback**, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202/224-6521
- U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran**, 2202 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. 202/225-2715 or Fax 202/225-5124
- State Rep. Jim Morrison**, State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St. Rm. 143-N, Topeka, Kan. 66612. 785/296-7676 e-mail: jmorriso@ink.org web: www.morrisonfamily.com
- State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer**, State Capitol, 300 SW 10th St., Rm. 128-S., Topeka, Kan. 66612, 785/296-7399 ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

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### Water, wind and what next?



**John Van Nostrand**

• Line in the Dust

The past couple of weeks have been real educational for me and hopefully for the dozens of others who were at the meetings.

Monday, Lt. Gov. Mark Parkinson was in town to talk about the benefits and potential future of having more wind turbines in western Kansas to generate electricity.

Before that, the Kansas Water Authority held one of its scheduled meetings in Colby over two days. Highlighting that meeting was the future of water use in western Kansas.

I quickly noticed the contrast between the two meetings. The water authority's meeting about the future of water was not as bright as the wind meeting. Thomas County farmer Lon Frahm, who sits on the authority, said there have been various measures taken to preserve the sources of water into the future, which is honorable. But water will still be consumed at the same time.

What's happening between the states of Kansas, Nebraska and Colorado over water in the Republican River is a little unnerving. Kansas and Nebraska have been in the courts for a long time over how much water each state is using, or is supposed to get, out of the Republican. Colorado's usage was noticed too as there are plans now to pump water out of wells near Wray, Colo., and pipe it to the Republican River to make the other two states happy.

But will there be enough water among the three states to comply with the Republican River water rules and not threaten the existing consumers among the three states? One of

the speakers at the meeting said the proposal to pump water out of the wells still might not be enough to make everyone happy.

One comment I heard, before and after the meeting, is how water is used for irrigation for corn crops in western Kansas. Some people, knowing how corn is such a water-needy crop, said maybe western Kansas farmers should give up corn production as a way to preserve the water. I don't know how well that would fly, especially with the multiple uses for corn and its attractive price these days. I can't see how anyone could tell a farmer not to grow a certain crop.

A person from Kansas State University at the meeting explained a very technical theory of how to pay farmers a certain amount for not using irrigation. But there are some financial concerns related to that to keep agricultural economy viable around here.

Frohm said water used in factory work is encouraged as way to bring more jobs and economic development to areas.

My fear is in the future when metro-Denver or Salina and east needs water and certain peo-

ple look to our part of the state for a solution.

On a positive note, the wind meeting was more encouraging. Lt. Gov. Parkinson said wind turbine growth in western Kansas can provide a diverse economic development tool from the long-term land leases where the turbines will be placed to the construction and utility companies installing them.

But I can't expect wind turbines to be the foundation for all our electrical needs. As much as we notice and complain about the wind around here, it doesn't blow all day, every day. Sure, there is enough wind to justify having wind turbines, but I can't think of wind turbines anymore than a side order at dinner. It only complements what the main course is. In our case that will still be coal or natural gas-based electricity.

But the more wind we have, the less reliance we will have on the other sources.

No matter what your opinions are on water use and the future of wind turbines, we should be thankful and grateful those people and organizations wanted to meet in Colby. We need to continue to invite others to town.

I just hope those people from out of town who were a part of the meetings enjoyed their stay in our town and could see our potential that is begging to be used. You never know, some of those people may know of others who are looking for a place to set up shop somewhere.

— John Van Nostrand is publisher of the Colby Free Press

### Farm bill conference meets

By Rep. Jerry Moran,

After being appointed to the farm bill conference committee this week, I participated in the first conference committee meeting on Thursday. The conference committee is made of up agricultural leaders from the House and Senate and has the task of working out the differences between the two versions of the farm bill passed by the House and Senate. The 2002 Farm Bill expired on September 30, 2007. Since that time, Congress has passed two short-term extensions of the 2002 bill, the latest of which is set to expire on Friday, April 18.

One of the issues being considered by the farm bill conference committee is a reduction of federal funding to the federal crop insurance program. Among the funding reductions are budgetary timing shifts. Included in the budgetary timing shifts proposed by some members of the conference committee is a provision that would cause the billing date of crop insurance premiums to occur on August 15 rather than October 1. This would cause Kansas farmers to pay crop insurance premiums for fall crops prior to harvest. I am concerned this will cause farmers to seek additional operating capital not currently needed under the crop insurance program and increase interest expenses during the crop year. Those who propose this change, however, view it as a way to use the savings to increase funding for other programs such as conservation. I welcome your input on this proposal. To e-mail me your thoughts go to [www.house.gov/formjerryoran/contact](http://www.house.gov/formjerryoran/contact).

This process has been delayed for far too long. There is a substantial amount of work to be done to reach an agreement and little time

to accomplish that goal. Increasingly, there is pressure to cut programs that are essential to Kansas producers. This bill has been heavily influenced by people and groups with interests outside rural America. My focus will continue to be keeping the emphasis where it belongs — on our nation's farmers and ranchers. We must ensure a strong safety net for producers.

**World Food Aid Needs**

This week, I chaired a House Hunger Caucus briefing held to discuss food aid needs. With record commodity prices, our country's efforts to feed the starving around the world have become more difficult. Earlier this month, I led a group of Members of Congress in asking President Bush to use the reserve of grain saved for unforeseen crises in order to avoid cutting the rations of refugees and others experiencing famine.

**Cloud County Wind Farm**

I joined state and local leaders just south of Concordia on Friday to break ground on what will be Kansas' largest wind farm. The 201-megawatt Meridian Way Wind Farm will supply clean power to thousands of Kansans and will create new jobs and economic opportunity. Cloud County Community College has established a program to train technicians and will work with the wind farm's developer, Horizon Wind Energy, on the project. Thanks to Westar Energy, Empire District Electric Company and Horizon Wind Energy for the opportunity to join them at this event.

Wind power is an important part of the solution to our country's energy needs. To increase the use of wind power and other renewable sources of energy, we need to set aggressive

goals. I am a strong supporter of the 25x'25 initiative, which challenges the U.S. to obtain 25 percent of its energy from renewable sources by 2025. I am also a sponsor of legislation that provides incentives for the development of wind and solar energy.

**Opening New Vet Center in Manhattan**

On Tuesday, I attended the grand opening of the Manhattan Vet Center, which will provide readjustment counseling and outreach services to military veterans and their families. The Manhattan Vet Center is operated by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and is the second center to open in Kansas.

I joined Regional Manager Clarence Slaughter and Shawn Martin, who will be in charge of the Vet Center, as well as many active military service members and veterans at the ceremony. Taking care of our veterans is one of my top priorities in Congress. We cannot thank our service members and their families enough for the sacrifices they make. I am pleased the VA has taken this positive step toward providing better care for Kansas veterans.

**Faith and Values with Student Leaders**

This weekend, I spoke to about 50 college student leaders from across the country about faith and values in regard to leadership. This annual event in Kansas City is a follow-up to the National Student Leadership Forum on Faith and Values held each fall in Washington, D.C. These students represent the top leaders in our colleges and universities. There were eight Kansans participating in the event. It was a pleasure visiting with these student leaders. Thank you to Tracey Mann, a former intern in my office from Quinter, for the invitation.

### Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

