

# Opinion



## Other Viewpoints

### Kids learn voting at parents' side

Young voter participation has been a disappointment in years past.

But not so in this year's election, as reports showed younger Americans — those in the under-30 crowd, in particular — casting ballots in strong numbers.

Then there were the youngest voters of all — children who went to the polls with an adult ... to participate in the process.

Through Kids Voting Kansas, more than 45,000 young Kansans cast ballots in the presidential election. The nonprofit, nonpartisan Kids Voting Kansas is a grass-roots organization dedicated to educating Kansas students about the rights, responsibilities and process of participating in a democracy.

... After classroom instruction, students across the state went to the polls with a parent or other adult and "voted" in their own election at booths staffed by community volunteers. ...

As for the presidential election winners in Kids Voting Kansas, students in the Sunflower State followed the nation in preferring the Democratic ticket, choosing Sen. Barack Obama and running mate Sen. Joe Biden over Republican Sen. John McCain and Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin. In the U.S. Senate race, however, incumbent Republican Pat Roberts received the nod over Democratic challenger Jim Slatery.

Teaching children about democracy and the right to vote encourages them to become informed citizens. Children who've participated in Kids Voting have been more likely to read the newspaper and watch television news.

They've also set an example for adults, many of whom pass on their chance to be heard.

Of those registered voters who did participate Tuesday, the number of young adults taking advantage of the opportunity to make history was encouraging.

The same goes for the many kids in Kansas and other states who learned about voting through an exercise that also promises to teach them to be engaged citizens — one of the more important lessons they'll ever learn.

— Garden City Telegram, via The Associated Press

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**U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback**, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-6521

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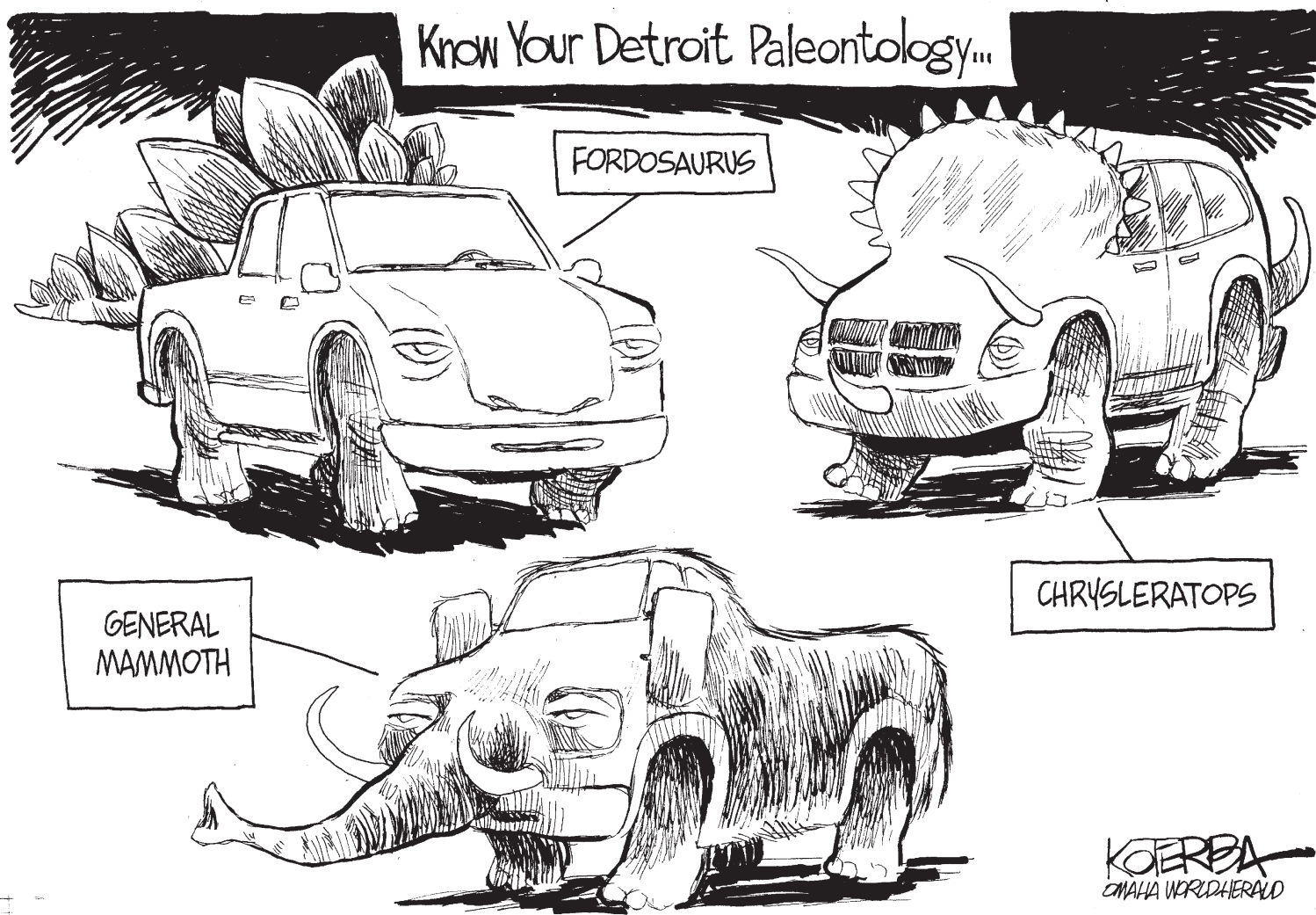
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## Traditions die hard as league fades

Larry Gabel says he's as much a part of the tradition as anyone, but finally had to admit it may be time to pull the plug on the venerable Northwest Kansas League.

Mr. Gabel, a long-time coach and principal in St. Francis, and now activities director and acting principal at Colby High School, told the Colby Rotary Club it seems likely that within two years, Colby and Goodland will have left the league for a new alliance of larger schools.

"I have been coaching in northwest Kansas for 35 years," he said. "Tradition is hard to give up."

With the population shrinking in nearly every county but Thomas, he said, school enrollment has been dropping in most districts for years. Colby High has managed to hold onto its Class 4A rating, but Goodland High dropped to 3A. Other county-seat schools — including Oberlin, Atwood and St. Francis — were once in the 3A ranks but have dropped to Class 2A.

This year, Quinter High moved to eight-man football, and other smaller schools — he mentioned Hoxie and Atwood, even St. Francis — may be forced to follow suit. In the end, he said, it may not so much be a matter of Colby and Goodland leaving the league as of the league leaving Colby and Goodland.

Mr. Gabel said he expects the new league to be formed in meetings after the first of the year.



**Steve Haynes**

• Along the Sappa

It might include Goodland, Colby, Scott City, Lakin, Ulysses, Hugoton and maybe Norton or Thomas More Prep of Hays, all Class 3A or 4A schools.

He said he expects the 2A schools big enough to stay in 11-man football to join with schools their size in a league of their own.

The change may be costly in that it more than doubles the distance for a single round trip to each opponent, he said, but schools might make up for that by scheduling more games on a single day. They're not sure how the change would affect middle school or junior high competition, he added, because administrators are wary of taking younger teams someplace as far away as Ulysses at midweek.

The only change that would make everyone happy, he noted, would be a population surge across the area, but that doesn't seem likely. Because football schedules are set for two years at a time, he added, changes won't come until the fall of 2010. And Colby High would still try to schedule area towns as nonleague

games to keep up traditional rivalries.

The idea of splitting up the Northwest Kansas League is not new; it's been discussed for several years as enrollments have declined. Mr. Gabel said some schools here had discussed a possible merger with the Mid-Continent League to the east, but that group wanted to look eastward, not to the west.

One advantage to playing schools of similar size, he said, besides the more even competition, would be the ability to have league contests in "minor" sports such as tennis, golf, softball and baseball, which most smaller schools don't offer.

Sheila Frahm, a guest at the Rotary meeting, speculated that a north-south sports alliance might help forge new bonds between northwest Kansas and the southwest.

Someone suggested that if smaller districts close, as a couple already have in the region, the county-seat schools might gain a little ground. Colby Superintendent Terrel Harrison said, however, that Colby, like many area districts, still has some bigger classes in high school, indicating a few more years of enrollment loss unless something happens.

No one jumped up to say that was likely.

*Steve Haynes is editor and publisher of The Colby Free Press and president of Nor'West Newspapers. In his spare time, whenever that is, he like to ride and watch trains.*

## Where are the boys?

For the last few years, a large majority of the students we are sending to medical or veterinary school are girls.

While female students have traditionally been a majority in elementary education and nursing, they are now becoming the substantial majority in nearly all fields.

In 1976, male students made up 52 percent of the undergraduates in U.S. colleges. By 2004, boys had dropped to only 43 percent. And today, often seven out of 10 students in American classrooms are girls.

Not just in Kansas universities and colleges, but across all developed countries, male students are rapidly disappearing from higher education.

When I lecture in Chinese universities, I look out at a sea of 80 to 90 percent women preparing to be high school biology teachers. My biology-teacher-trainer colleagues in England and Germany report the same decline.

The percent of women biology teachers in Kansas high schools has risen from below 40 in the early 1980s to where they became a three years ago. This is not bad in itself. It is good to see the continuous climb in women entering all academic fields. But the even-more-dramatic decline in men is worrisome.

Peg Tyre, a staff writer for *Newsweek*, recently published "The Trouble With Boys." She documents how boys are failing to keep up with girls not only in college enrollment, but also in literacy and classroom performance at all levels. She blames cultural changes of the last 15 years, including academic pressure and narrow curricula.

She considers boys' disengagement from school as the result of more intense focus on testing, less recess and free time, and over-



**John Richard Schrock**

• Education Frontlines

medication for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD (as high as 20 percent of the boys at some schools), among other factors. She thinks we can change teaching methods to solve the imbalance.

However, while U.S. schools have moved to testing and narrowed the curriculum, schools in Asia and Europe have not. Her reasons do not explain the decrease in male students across all developed countries.

An alternative factor that would correlate with the male dropout is electronic games, which emerged about 15 years ago and have accelerated in popularity in the last five. While there is no more evidence to support this theory than the others listed above, there is accumulating evidence that the male brain is wired differently and responds to these handheld and computer games differently than do females.

It is called "Gameboy" and not "Gamegirl" for a reason. A boy who receives these electronic toys soon is spending hours on them. Girls often grow bored after a few minutes.

China in particular is concerned with this potential loss of academic talent and has taken action to address the upsurge in male students who are addicted to handheld and Internet games. China tries to enforce a three-hour-a-day limit. Nevertheless, some boys become

truly addicted and foregoes studies, food and normal life. Just as we have summer "fat camps" for overweight children, China has summer camps for overcoming electronic game and online addiction.

We ignore the problem. Boys will be boys. To test the hypothesis, whenever I pass a strip mall with a video-game arcade, I look in to count the numbers of boys and girls playing. So far, the tally is overwhelmingly male. When girls are present, they are usually enjoying the dance revolution games that are more of a body coordination workout.

I could write more, but I am male and therefore need to go play some electronic games.

*John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.*

### Write us

The *Colby Free Press* encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of general interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

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## Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

