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## Other **Viewpoints**

## State agencies can save together

Constricting budgets are just the opportunity to streamline government, something that rarely happens when a growing economy feeds a growing government.

State agency heads surely will balk, but the Kansas Legislature should not hesitate to consolidate two small state agencies already identified as an opportunity to save about \$710,000 a year.

A bill to fold the State Conservation Commission and the Animal Health Department into the Department of Agriculture is expected to be introduced when legislators convene their session on Jan. 12.

Interest groups may argue where the agencies should go, but legislators shouldn't let them argue that consolidation wouldn't

We don't know whether Agriculture is the right place. Seemingly it would be for the Animal Health Department. But when it comes to conservation, while Agriculture may be good about soil conservation its record is poor when it comes to water conservation. And the Conservation Commission's mission to protect natural resources is broader than just agriculture.

Legislators, though, will need to sort out legitimate concerns from those emerging purely from self-interest.

Conservation commission Executive Director Greg Foley said this week that the merger proposal needs more study to determine whether "cost efficiencies are truly gained."

They are when government consolidation is done in the true spirit of efficiency. If during the merger every person and every expense is held safe, then that won't achieve anything.

What Foley says is the same thing every agency head says when his agency is scrutinized for efficiency and duplication.

... While in Topeka, legislators look at whether state government could be more compact and more efficient, so too should this exercise go on at all levels of government.

Kansas continues to also have way too much government — way too many counties overlapping with city governments, populated by townships, cemetery districts and on and on. Local bureaucrats have managed to resist consolidation — as they naturally should be expected to do. But when citizens take a harder look at the taxes that support all this government, as they will in lean economic times, we have a fresh opportunity to shrink government.

Legislators haven't wanted to get involved in city-county or county-county consolidations. They haven't even fully removed all the obstacles that prevent local action. They at least should do that, and let motivated locals pursue consolidation without hindrances.

Just as certainly as there is duplication and inefficiency in state government, there is in counties and cities, too. Now is the time to rein in excessive government.

- The Hutchinson News via The Associated Press.

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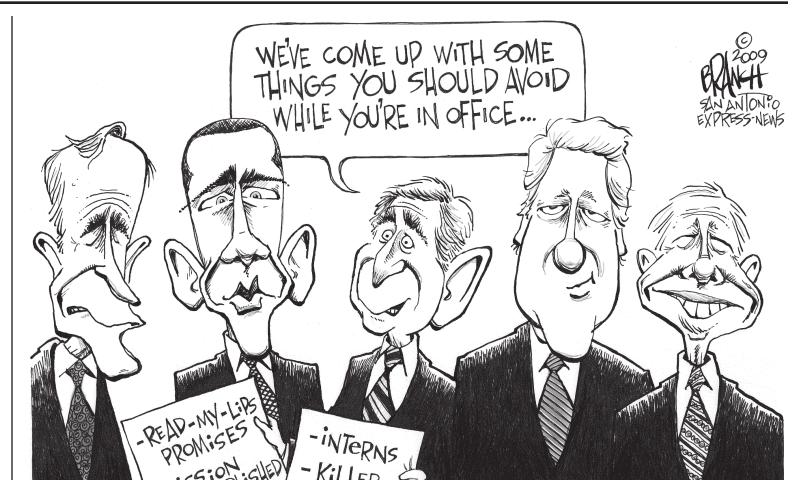
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## Young people need vision and passion

I'm not much of a morning person, so as a part of my daily routine, I listen to either music or podcasts on iTunes to stimulate my mind for the day.

When I opt for a podcast, I usually choose money expert Dave Ramsey or recorded sermons by my favorite preachers. One of my favorites is a man named John Mark Comer of the Solid Rock Church in Tigard, Ore., southwest of Portland. I attend a college church service at Solid Rock every Friday night, along with 1,400 other students. The sermons are uploaded onto iTunes, where they can be downloaded for free.

So Wednesday, I was listening to Pastor Comer as he spoke about some things we need to learn as we begin another year. According to him, we need to learn the "art of visioneering," and he asked the questions, "What is your vision for this year? What is your focus? What is God's plan for your life this year?"

Those are big questions, and this was not the first time I had thought about them.

For example, my vision is to solve the problem of human trafficking, adopt five children from third-world countries, share with people my passion for God, educate people in cities about the importance of farming, write a few books, create a new magazine and become the

best wife and mother the world has ever seen. course, I'm not planning on accomplishing all



 A Moment with Michelle

of this in 2009 — that would be insane — but I am thinking big and long-term for a reason. That's because I think most people in our culture, especially young people, are thinking too What I'm seeing are young people with a

focus to earn enough money for an iPhone, a Wii system or the next Guitar Hero game. They spend their days and nights (and money) downloading songs, going to movies, staring at a computer screen and attending parties that are saturated with alcohol. Instead, they need to learn the art of visioneering.

I'm pretty sure I have mentioned this in a previous column, but this is a quote worth repeating: "We should always remember — and never forget — that those who will commit to nothing, who stand for nothing and who risk for nothing, in the end, rarely accomplish anything.

That's a little ambitious (and slightly unre- we won't accomplish anything. And we can't majoring in Bible and journalism. She enjoys alistic), but I think it's a good place to start. Of have a vision if we don't have passion.

For those who don't have passion about any- *campus*.

thing, maybe they should turn off their iPod, log off Facebook, unplug their plastic guitar from the PS2 and start educating themselves about current events.

The world is in a crisis. We have terrorist organizations in the Middle East running their operations in residential areas, in hospitals, near Red Cross and United Nations buildings. President-elect Obama, with his ambiguous agenda for change, is going to take office Jan.

Jews are being killed because they are Jews (déjà vu, anyone?). The Gaza strip continues to be under violent attack as thousands of air strikes hit the ground, as well as innocent people. Car makers and state governors have begged for a bailout equaling billions of dollars. And too soon will persecution of Christians start creeping across the Pacific waters, landing in the land of the free.

This generation may not realize it, but they need to be prepared for a major shift in history. They aren't going to be prepared if they have no vision and no passion, but are singing about being "Fearless" along with rising country star Taylor Swift. I'm afraid we have much to fear.

Michelle Myers, a Colby native, is a student I would add that if we don't have a vision, at Multnomah University in Portland, Ore., the 32 Starbucks found within five miles of her

## Agriculture can do the job

Agriculture is losing producers. No one will argue that point, but larger, more efficient farmers are replacing those lost in this highly competitive industry.

While this is not necessarily a desirable trend, it has continued for decades - maybe since the beginning of this noble profession. That said, it is also a trend that is not confined to agriculture but has affected nearly every sector of the U.S. and world economies.

Regardless of this continual change, care for the land, a critical resource, continues to improve. Today's farmers are increasing the amount of organic matter in their soil. With the advent of no-till and reduced tillage farming, farmers continue to build organic matter and improve the soil tilth. There is no reason to believe this practice will stop.

Today's modern farmer is not exhausting the land. Just the opposite.

Without question, scarce water is a concern, especially in Midwestern states, where rainfall is limited and people use plenty of it. Farmers constantly chart rainfall amounts and monitor weather conditions.

In Kansas, farmers are aware of changes in the Ogallala Aquifer, the underground supply that provides much irrigation water. They understand the navigable waters issue because of its wide-ranging impact on farmland and farming. They understand the importance of clean water and have long supported the need for clear jurisdictional lines and a common-sense approach to wetlands.

Farmers are very much tuned into water and the conservation of this vital resource. Some are concerned about the potential of a longterm climate change.



### John Schlageck

• Insights Kansas Farm Bureau

If such a phenomenon does occur, there is the possibility that Kansas could become more arid – more like New Mexico, for example. But if this is a concern, no one has been predicting it to date.

Barring a major shift in our climate, crops will continue to be planted in western Kansas. Production could be less than now, but this land will be farmed and farmed wisely.

Another myth that is constantly being circulated is that crop yields will not keep up with population growth. In many parts of the world, world populations have been declining or leveling off.

In addition to a population slow-down, crop yields have been increasing through genetics and sound farming practices around the world. This could all change with a couple of years of drought, but to say that by 2050, the United States will not be able to produce crops is like yelling the sky is falling.

There is nothing to suggest yields will not keep up with population growth. Even countries with marginal soil and more severe climates than our own are growing crops today. We have better yield potential and better food value today and with new genetics and technologies coming on line, there is no reason to believe the world won't be able to feed itself

in the future.

American agriculture is up to the task. This country has the ability to continue producing for the world.

The U.S. farmer and rancher can compete with other nations, as long they aren't shackled by government regulations that cause production costs to soar.

Even the most efficient farmers in America can't make it with regulatory restrictions. Any regulations must be science based and uniform across the board for producers around the world.

If there is equal opportunity for everyone, where all producers have the same health and safety restrictions, U.S. agriculture will compete. Give farmers and ranchers the same opportunity as others around the world, and a supply of bountiful, wholesome food will continue.

Winston Churchill said many years ago, "Give us the tools and we will get the job done." The same can be said for agriculture in this country.

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

## Where to write, call

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774

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