pinion



Free Press **Viewpoint**

Bigger isn't better for school or county

Perhaps the greatest threat to rural Kansas life today is the misguided movement to consolidate both counties and school

Plans have been proposed to combine all of the state into just 40 school districts and 36 similarly sized counties, though boundaries would not be the same.

These plans are touted as saving the state millions while promoting efficient planning and management, "like Wal-Mart and McDonalds.'

Thus, says Richard Shrock, an Emporia professor and education columnist, if your town is big enough to have a McDonalds, it may be big enough to have a high school.

And if that comes to pass, the future is bleak for western Kansans, where less than a dozen high schools might remain. Of course, these plans beg the question of whether any of us wants our schools and counties run with the values of Wal-Mart or the nutritional content of a McDonalds' menu.

These proposals, however, have caught on with both goodgovernment liberals and tight-fisted conservatives to some extent. Inflated claims of savings upward of \$700 million look good to planners in a state facing a \$600 million budget gap.

Proponents tell us, of course, that we'd still get the same level of service that we get today from both counties and schools. Only "excess" jobs and surplus buildings would be dropped.

But those jobs and those schools are vital to the economy in many a Kansas county seat, where public employment is often the biggest factor in the job market. Take away the school, the courthouse and the hospital (and believe us, that will be next), and what's left in the average county seat?

Maybe proponents like Dr. Shrock and Sen. Chris Steineger, who has a bill to study county consolidation, have no concept of rural life. They only know the state needs to save money.

It's theoretically possible to serve all of the northwest corner of Kansas with one courthouse and one high school, presumably in Colby, but do we want to live that kind of life? And what kind of government would rural people have when many have to drive 70 to 100 miles to get to the courthouse, or when high school students are on a bus two to three hours a day?

The consolidation might be good for Colby in the short run. But after a few years, how many people would be left in the outlying towns to come into the "big" city to shop, buy license plates or go to school?

This is a proposal for depopulating much of the High Plains to save the state a few bucks. Even those savings might not be what's projected. Government consolidations seldom reduce employment or spending. Mostly, the same employees and budget are shuffled into a bigger office.

In the end, the counties, school districts and state would have fewer people and fewer dollars as people flee to Denver, Kansas City and Lincoln.

Out here in the sticks, though, we had better get organized if we want to fight this kind of thinking. These people think they are doing the right thing, even though it means the end of rural life as we know it.

At least the high school kids would be able to sneak out for some good food at the nearby McDonalds in the few remaining school/county seat towns, huh? - Steve Haynes

Next week: An alternative to mindless consolidation into megacounties and huge school districts.

Colby Free Press

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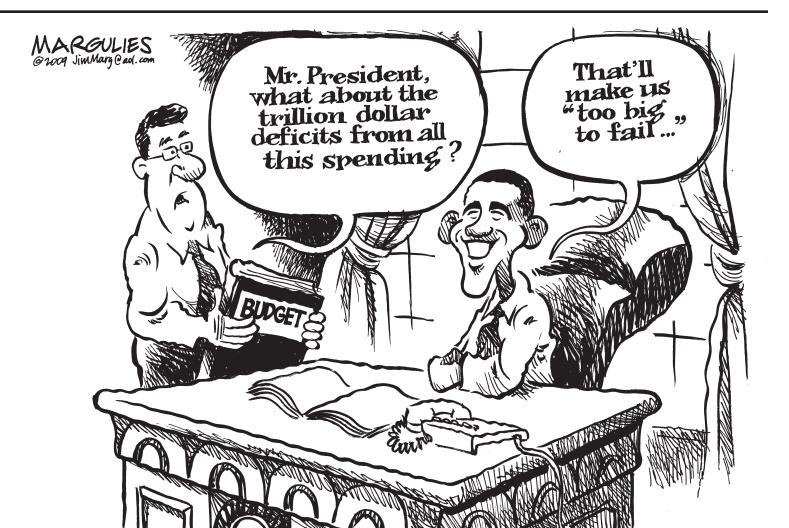
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A little loss hurts too

We suffered a loss on Sunday.

It was just a little loss, such a little thing, but we will miss it and mourn for what might

Youngest daughter Lindsay called about a month ago with the news that she was expecting. This was the first child for her and Bradley, the first grandchild on either side and my mother's first great-grandbaby.

We immediately called our brothers and sisters and told all our co-workers the good news. Steve was on Cloud 9. Then we found out we weren't supposed to tell anyone before she saw the doctor.

Well, darn it kid, you should have told us that before we blabbed it all over Kansas, Colorado and California.

Never mind that, though. The doctor confirmed the home pregnancy test's verdict. Our little Doodle Bug was six weeks along. She got a sonogram and e-mailed it to us. She wrote her grandmother with the good news and enclosed a copy of the sonogram, noting that the baby was just a peanut right now.

Mom hung the photo in her room next to Lindsay and Brad's wedding photo.

I told everyone, announcing the good news



Cynthia Haynes

Open Season

at meetings and when I met perfect strangers.

I asked if they were going find out if the baby was a boy or a girl, and Lindsay reminded me that she never had much luck saving her presents for Christmas. There was no way she wasn't going to find out as soon as possible, she said.

But, that didn't happen. Saturday, she said, she didn't feel good and by Sunday she knew something was wrong. Brad took her to the emergency room and she called her sister, who also lives in far-off Augusta, Ga.

She miscarried on Sunday and called us as soon as she was on her way home.

We said all the usual things to both her and

"She's young, just 30."

"She didn't have any trouble getting preg-

nant the first time. She'll have other chances." "The doctor said she'd be OK."

"In a few months, it won't hurt so much." All true, but somehow it doesn't help right now. Right now we all have to grieve a little

for what might have been. After college biology, when I learned everything that can go wrong between conception and birth, I had wondered how any of us ever makes it. But then I had no trouble getting pregnant and produced three wonderful, healthy children. The biology lessons faded from my mind.

They came back Sunday afternoon. Intellectually, I know some problem arose and this child just couldn't make it. But, that really doesn't help much.

All I can do is say a little prayer, asking my dad and Steve's mom and dad to be on the lookout up there for a little soul, because it's such a tiny thing and heaven is so big.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor'West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes @ nwkansas.com

Current board gets vote of confidence

The upcoming election for the Colby Community College board is of great importance in these times. As a retiring trustee after 16 years, I feel vested in the college and able to make an informed endorsement for two fellow board

• Cindy Black, who is running for re-election, is one of the hardest-working board members I have served with over the years.

All of our current board members are committed to seeing the college continue to progress, and great strides into the 21st century have been made. The trustees, and especially Cindy, have been able to assure that technology continues to be able to be updated with the tech fees paid by the students.

Combined with her leadership experience with Leadership Thomas County, she is equipped and ready to help lead the college through accountability, responsibility and open mindedness.

Cindy fully realizes, as does the rest of the board, that above all, the student is the top priority and that this must always be kept in mind. The new dorm has been a long-needed improvement on campus and is an attraction to incoming students. In addition, the community has been encouraged to become more involved with the college and vice versa.

Cindy and her family attend many college activities and has been a host family in the past. Cindy is a past president of the Colby Community College Endowment. She knows the importance of giving back by being dedicated to making a difference, through time, patience and the perseverance to work through difficult times, whether it be the current economic challenge or other difficulties. By sticking to the tasks at hand, the challenges can become great opportunities. She is definitely an asset to the

• Kenton Krehbiel, also running for reelection, has been on the board for 20 years.



Free Press **Letter Drop**

• Our readers sound off

Through these years, he has gained valuable experience and leadership abilities, having served as chairman many times during his tenure. Kenton, like Cindy, is very involved and dedicated in his role as a trustee. He and wife Sheila also attend many of the college activities and have a good relationship with countless students.

His presence on the board has been invaluable during the years, which have included a change in presidency and more recently a change in the vice-presidents of finance and academic affairs. Kenton is a board member of Leadership Thomas County, and is involved in community organizations. Prior to being elected to the college board Kenton was on the Endowment board, serving two terms as president.

I encourage you to re-elect Cindy Black and Kenton Krehbiel to the Colby Community College Board of Trustees. Both have the dedication and the experience of knowing what it takes to serve on the board. Despite the fact that there are not many races in the upcoming election, it is important to the community that quality and experienced persons such as Cindy Black and Kenton Krehbiel are allowed to continue to serve.

Please vote on Tuesday.

Cleona Flipse, Colby

War pattern must go

To the Editor:

I heard on television that it would take 600,000 troops to win the war in Afghanistan. We don't have that many troops to send anywhere, and if we did, there are plenty of other countries mistreating women and children that could use the help of an army.

Osama bin Laden grew up in Saudi Arabia and escaped to Pakistan or its whereabouts. The three airplanes during 9/11 that did so much damage to the United States were brought down by Saudi Arabian men, but not much has been said about that, probably because we get our oil in that vicinity and it wouldn't do to raise the ire of Saudi Arabia. And why on earth do we have so much sky

traffic using up the oil that the United States needs until it can develop enough other fuel? I can't help but wonder that the reason for

keeping people in the military is because not enough effort has been made to develop peacetime constructive activities that they can be paid for instead of wasting it on the confusions

So far, war has been the only force that can discipline a whole community, and until an equivalent discipline is organized, war will

Mark Twain explains the situation this way: 'There are some that never know how to change. Circumstances may change, but those people are never able to see that they have got to change too to meet those circumstances. All that they know is the one beaten track that their fathers and grandfathers have followed and that they themselves have followed in their turn. If an earthquake come and rip the land to chaos

.. they will march stupidly along and follow the old (road) to death and perdition." - Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc

Edna A. Hatcher, Colby

Mallard **Fillmore**

Bruce Tinsley

