



Free Press Viewpoint

Consolidation would hit Brewster

One of the school consolidation plans being kicked around by the Legislature would affect two Thomas County districts. The Division of Legislative Post Audit proposed two scenarios, one of which would consolidate 27 of Kansas' 293 districts, saving an estimated \$18 million a year. The second one, which would affect us, would consolidate 141 districts, including Colby and Brewster, saving an estimated \$138 million. This might benefit Colby a little. More students would mean more state money. Most of the state money is figured on a per-pupil basis, and 1,065 students are going to bring in more than 965. Of course, the district would have to provide services for 100 more students and bus them in from a ways away. Brewster has suffered the same declining population as many rural areas in the Midwest over the past few decades. The 2000 census listed the town's population as 285. A 2008 estimate puts the town at 248. The school district also serves a large farming area in Thomas and Sherman counties; Thomas County's population as a whole has declined by about 900 people in that time.

Although the district had an enrollment increase this school year of seven students, it has dropped by 57 since 2003.

The district has struggled to stay open. To save money, it went to a four-day week. Brewster had to consolidate its football team with Triplains in Winona to have enough kids to compete — in eight-man football.

However, the district has maintained good scores on state assessments, recently counting 14 Standard of Excellence awards from the state.

But if the two districts were folded together, it's quite possible the Brewster school would close. It would be too great a financial strain on the combined district to keep the old building up, pay for utilities and repair it if it got damaged. The Colby district is already worried about how it's going to pay for maintenance on its current buildings. And if the school closes, what happens to the teachers?

And, of course, the new district would have to get the kids to Colby. It's 24 miles, and not all the kids live in town. Would it be their parent's job to get them to a bus stop in Brewster or would the buses run a rural route? The state reimburses a portion of the cost to bus any student more than 2.5 miles from school, but according to the district, the bus program doesn't make money as is. It's also going to put a lot more mileage on the buses.

It's all well and good for those in eastern Kansas to crunch the numbers and say: every district under 1,600 students needs to consolidate. But out here, the reality is that distance is a huge factor. Many rural students in the Brewster school district are closer to Goodland or Winona than Colby.

For a truly logical division, the district would have to be split, and while that might be OK after a few years, it would mean that friends living within a few miles each other would now be bused to different schools.

If the state is serious about consolidation, they had better keep it voluntary. This kind of one-size-fits all solution will not, in fact, fit all. There are some districts, such as Lenora and Norton, which are consolidating next year, and will benefit. Lenora had more school staff than students and really couldn't afford to stay open anyway.

At the moment, however, we don't see consolidation helping Brewster or Colby. — *Kevin Bottrell*

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'Global warming' raises lots of questions

One of the most controversial subjects today is climate change, often referred to as "global warming."

Some say humans cause the problem; some claim there is no problem — extreme weather recently is just normal. Some have said the cold weather this winter is proof global warming doesn't exist, though the cold weather can fit into climate change theory.

So what is "global warming," and what are the consequences? According to some, climate change caused by humans could cause extinction of food species in oceans, redraw coastlines and diminish world food supplies.

Corey S. Powell, editor-in-chief of *Discover* magazine, along with the National Science Foundation and San Francisco Exploratorium, questioned four leading experts on global warming and climate change for an article in the June, 2009, issue. They were Robin Bell, senior research scientist at Columbia University's Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory; Ken Caldeira, professor at Stanford University and staff member in the Department of Global Ecology at the Carnegie Institute of Washington; Bill Easterling, dean of the College of Earth and Mineral Science at Pennsylvania State University; and Stephen Schneider, a senior fellow at the Woods Institute for the Environment at Stanford.

Opponents argue these things have happened before, and that's true. For instance, the ice packs have begun to melt in the north and south poles before. However, according to Bell, they have never before done so simultaneously and at such a rapid pace.

"Both ... (poles) are spewing ice into the global ocean," she said. "This, of course, is causing the ocean levels to rise."

Caldeira says carbon dioxide spreads throughout the atmosphere and is integrated with the ocean surface. When it dissolves in sea water, it forms carbonic acid. In high enough concentrations, the acid is corrosive to the shells and skeletons of marine organisms.

"If we continue ... trends in burning fossil fuel," he said, "the ocean will become more acidic than ... at any time in the past 65 mil-



Marj Brown

• Marj's Snippets

lion years."

To the argument that the earth has become warm in the past and was able to recover, Caldeira replied, "That's true, but it got warm over millions of years, and ecosystems had a chance to adapt. What we're seeing are rates ... that exceed natural rates by a factor of 100."

On world food supplies, Easterling said, "... by the later third of the 21st century, we will need to raise the food supply two times to feed all of the people ... alive.

"In the tropics, where the majority of poor people live today, crops are currently raised at temperatures pretty close to their photosynthetic optimum.... A little more heat may not be harmful in temperate zones, such as the grain belts of North America and Europe. ... But that sets up a kind of haves and have-nots imbalance...."

There are many things to consider in making policies to manage problems caused by global warming. Do we know enough to make intelligent decisions? Schneider says he's often asked that question.

"We know that the world is now 0.75 degrees Celsius warmer than it was a century ago," he said. "We know that the ice sheets are decreasing. But then there are other components with competing potential outcomes. For instance, will a change of 3 degrees make crop yields go up or down?"

Powell asked: "So how should we separate out the well-established parts, and how do we evaluate the ones that are not so certain?"

Schneider answered, "What we do is whittle out the relative likelihood of each of the outcomes.... We (scientists) try to make the risk aspects clear and then leave the risk management ... out among the public and in the political world."

Caldeira says, "Many people have been look-

ing at this as a problem of getting international cooperation and international agreements. But when China builds a power plant that's going to spew carbon dioxide into the environment for at least the next 75 years, what's important is that we build it correctly.

"Transforming our energy system so it does not emit carbon dioxide into the atmosphere might cost 2 percent of our wealth each year. But if you go to a group of people and say, 'Let's pretend we already have energy systems ... that don't emit greenhouse gases.' Then I say, 'You can make 2 percent more money each year, but in return for being 2 percent richer we're going to have to melt the ice caps and acidify the oceans and shift weather patterns. Now would you trade that environmental risk in order to be 2 percent richer?'"

"I have asked that of climate skeptics and even they say, 'Well if we already had this carbon-neutral energy system, I would go with it.' That makes me think it's not the cost of transforming our energy system, it's that we don't have the cooperation we need.... And if we wait until we have international cooperation, it will be too late."

Easterling says, "We have the capability to do amazing things in a short amount of time, but it takes political decision with follow-through."

My opinion is that it is only logical that the population of the earth will continue to multiply to the point that we will eventually outgrow our planet, and if we keep abusing our atmosphere and oceans — causing summers to get hotter and winters to get colder, oceans to rise and take away now usable land area, and making our air poisonous to breathe, that soon we will destroy this earth we live on.

Then we won't have to worry about health care or financing wars, because all will be destroyed.

Marj Brown has lived in Colby for 63 years and has spent a good deal of that time writing about people and places here. She says it's one of her favorite things to do.

Is euthanasia always wrong?

To the Editor:

I vowed I would never have a pet because I would get attached, and when it died it would be like parting with someone I loved. However, when I saw one particularly likable cat, it was like falling in love. It just snuck up on me.

She was a grey, short-haired, domestic cat and his name was Sheba. The vet said I could keep the name but that I had a "castrated male cat!"

He did act like some kind of royalty. He appeared as I was leaving for work each morning and every afternoon when I returned home. I would talk to him (a short pleasantry), but one evening he appeared on the back step and I let him in and found something for him to eat.

The cat appeared each evening after that and we got acquainted, scaring each other from time to time. I wasn't used to a cat and he wasn't used to seeing me in a long dress — a caftan I had received as a Christmas present. He hid under the bed and it was a long time before he came out.

One evening, I was sitting on the back step busy doing something. Sheba came up behind



Free Press Letter Drop

• Our readers sound off

me, and when I turned he planted a cat kiss my forehead with his little nose. I didn't know a cat could show affection, but from then on, I knew I would never part with him.

I called the landlady and told her I had a cat and she said, "Well, get a litter box." Until then, I'd never heard of a litter box. Her father had owned the house and had a huge cat that dominated the neighborhood.

Sheba and I made the trip from California to Kansas together and lived in three houses with our adventures, but he went blind and had epileptic fits. I was afraid he'd wander into the street and get run over, so I took him to the vet and had him "put to sleep."

The bad thing about that was the grieving. I

loved that kitty!

The point that I am making is that euthanasia is not necessarily a bad thing. I was watching Dr. Sanjay Gupta on CNN report that all the doctors had left a makeshift hospital in Haiti. A distressed Gupta was explaining that many amputees were waiting to be treated and I understood that no help whatsoever was available. In closing the interview, anchor Anderson Cooper advised, "Well, do the best you can." Gupta spent the night helping those patients.

I can't help wondering if after they were treated, there would be no place for them to go. Their homes had been destroyed in the earthquake; there were no hospitals, relatives or caretakers, and they were in misery.

It is my opinion that the Almighty God would want them put to death quickly — euthanized — to put them out of their misery.

There may be some religions that teach that it is God's will that they should die suffering that way. This is taking God's name in vain. One of the Ten Commandments says, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord, thy God in vain."

Edna A. Hatcher, Colby

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

