



Other Viewpoints

New flag display shows patriotism

Here's a salute to everyone involved in the new flag display project on the Statehouse grounds. Actually, let's give out 105 salutes — one for every flag that volunteers will place around the Capitol through this special initiative.

It took a great deal of volunteer effort, cash donations and coordination to bring the project to fruition, but a spectacular payoff is in store when the flags go on display for the first time on Sept. 11.

Each of the 105 flags — one per Kansas county — will be attached to a removable pole with rings that allow it to spin freely with the wind. The poles will be placed in sleeves sunk into the perimeter of the Capitol.

Boy Scouts and members of the Topeka School District junior Reserve Officers Training Corps will be responsible for placing and removing the flags, organizers say.

Thus far, plans call for the display to occur on Veteran's Day, Flag Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Kansas Day and the anniversary of the founding of the Boy Scouts, Feb. 8.

The project was spearheaded by Dr. Kevin Singer, Topeka school superintendent and a board member of the Jayhawk Area Council of the Boy Scouts of America. Singer, who has been involved in similar projects in other states, said he was impressed by the level of cooperation among the groups involved, including the Legislature and state administration, businesses and volunteer groups.

"There hasn't been any politics, there hasn't been any separation, there hasn't been anyone saying: 'Don't do this. Do that. I don't like the idea. Let's debate it,'" Singer said. "They all just say, 'I love it. I can't wait to see them up.'"

What a great thing to hear, huh?

But then again, there's a lot to like about the project. It will be a tremendous showing of patriotism and Kansas pride, with each flag pole bearing the name of the county it represents.

The display will be a refreshing addition to the Capitol — not only because of its beauty but because — unlike the marathon renovation work at the Statehouse — it won't cost taxpayers a dime. Donors are footing the bills for the project, which will cost in excess of \$30,000.

So here's a sincere thank you to Singer, Topeka Public Schools, the Boy Scouts, J.E. Dunn Construction, Kansas Fence Co., legislative leaders, state officials and all other individuals and organizations participating in the project.

All are great Americans who have done their nation, their state and their community proud.

— *The Topeka Capital-Journal, via the Associated Press*

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Avoid bad decisions in good times

An associate of mine once said, "Some of the worst decisions are made in the best of times."

His observation pertained to negotiating agreements with labor unions, but I was reminded of it by a news report saying local governments may eliminate 500,000 jobs across the country if Congress doesn't pony up more federal tax dollars. The story was based on a survey released by the National League of Cities, the National Association of Counties and United States Conference of Mayors.

Here's the taxpayer perspective: According to the U.S. Census Bureau and the Bureau of Economic Analysis, the country's population grew 34.4 percent between 1980 and 2008 but local government employment jumped 51.3 percent. If local government employment had simply kept pace with population gains, there would be 1.6 million fewer local government jobs today. Instead, we've seen runaway property taxes (93 per-

Other Opinions

● **Dave Trabert**
Kansas Policy Institute

cent over the last 12 years in Kansas) and higher local sales taxes. Governments chose to add employees when revenues were flowing (instead of reducing taxes and improving the economy), and now face the painful task of backing off some of their excess employment.

Local government job growth outpaced population growth in most states, but some were extreme, including Kansas, which had 65 percent growth in local government jobs but only an 18 percent population increase. In 2008, Kansas had 65.7 local government employees

for every thousand residents, 39 percent above the national average and the second-worst state ratio in the country.

No one wants to see someone lose their job, but using tax dollars to subsidize employment is bad policy to begin with, and spending federal dollars on local government employment destroys the Constitutional protections of state sovereignty.

Governments have no money of their own; they simply take money from taxpayers and redistribute it. Raising federal taxes to maintain a bloated local government workforce will only make an already weak economy even worse.

Dave Trabert is president of Kansas Policy Institute. He is a speaker to business, legislative and civic groups and also does research and writes on fiscal policy and education issues.

Speak from your heart, tell farmer's story

Life teaches plenty to those willing to learn. From the time I was a boy, I remember my dad, uncles and grandfather talking and debating the issues of the day whenever we visited one another.

As I grew older, I began to hear some of what they said. I began to understand what they were talking about. But it has taken me nearly 30 years to realize what my grandfather used to say about comprehending issues.

About the time I was halfway through high school, something he said finally sunk in. Grandpa Bert always said when you know a little about an issue, it's easy to form an opinion. When you learn a little more, it becomes a little more difficult. And when you learn even more about an issue, your decision becomes, "just plain hard."

Lately, I've been thinking a lot about the issue faced by farmers and ranchers, who often toil long days away by themselves. Sometimes they feel isolated, with their backs against the wall. More than one farmer has expressed a feeling of "me against the world."

Never before in agriculture has it been more important for farmers to express their basic wants, hopes and needs. Things like protection of personal property, a sound education for their children and a responsible, nonintrusive federal government, to mention a few.

Never before has there been such an opportunity to express agriculture's needs. Today there are countless satellites in orbit around our globe. Our cable system is loaded with hundreds of networks.

The information highway continues to speed forward, and we can communicate with people around the world instantly. Many farmers and



John Schlageck

● **Insights**
Kansas Farm Bureau

ranchers use Facebook, blog and Tweet with the best of them

Technology allows individuals to access videos, music, news, weather, markets and consumer information — literally anything happening in our world today and more importantly — instantaneously.

It's been nearly three decades since newspapers entered the era of national and international publications. In this country, *Christian Science Monitor* and the *Wall Street Journal* pioneered the way.

Magazines and newspapers from all over the world are online today, available for anyone with the time and desire to read them. Of course they are still being shipped by mail. You can also read news, weather, markets and sports on the screen of your computer or in the palm of your hand. If you've got the money, honey, communication tools are there to purchase.

With all of these different information avenues at your fingertips, it may also be easy for some to tune out and turn off. Farmers, ranchers, businessmen, bankers and professionals cannot afford to do that. We must utilize these communication tools to tell our story.

One way to help do this is by becoming active in the farm organizations and commod-

ity groups of your choice. They can provide the vehicle to help you tell agriculture's story while developing sound farming policy that must be communicated.

Agriculture finally arrived as a headliner during the farm crisis of the mid-1980s. Every day, newspapers, radios, televisions and computers are chock full of stories about agriculture. Subjects range from food additives used in processing to agricultural chemicals. Stories include animal care, cholesterol in the diet, passing on the family farm, increasing agricultural trade and the next farm bill.

Remember, farmers and ranchers must continue to voice their message in the public information arena. Agriculture must use every medium to promote and persuade others to bring about change. Change that will benefit agriculture, and a society that relies on U.S. farmers and ranchers for the safest and most abundant food source in the world.

A Kansas citizen said it best nearly 90 years ago: "This nation will survive, this state will prosper, the orderly business of life will go forward only if men can speak in whatever way given them to utter what their hearts hold — by voice, by postal card, by letter or by press."

William Allen White wrote this in his *Emporia Gazette* during the post-World War I recession in 1922. His words ring true today.

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

Mallard Fillmore

● **Bruce Tinsley**

