



Other Viewpoints

Revenue secretary a true public servant

Joan Wagon's resume contains a number of impressive titles, including mayor of Topeka, state representative and secretary of revenue.

You don't put together a work history like that without having a passion for public service, and Wagon possesses that commodity in spades.

She has been working on behalf of her fellow Topekans and Kansans for decades, and she's done it with a high degree of enthusiasm and can-do spirit.

After announcing last week that she would soon retire — for the most part, anyway — here's a show of appreciation for her efforts to better the community and the state.

Her work in that capacity included serving as executive director of the Topeka YWCA beginning in 1977. In that role, she led the way toward establishing the organization's Battered Women's Task Force, a teen pregnancy prevention program and an employment program for disadvantaged women.

In 1983, she began simultaneously serving as a House member representing the 55th district. She held the seat until 1994.

In 1997, she added two titles to her resume — one formal and the other not. The formal one was mayor. The informal one was pioneer, as Wagon became the first woman to be elected to that office here.

Wagon was defeated in the 2001 primary after a tumultuous term, but she returned to public service in 2003 as secretary of the Department of Revenue.

As with anyone who's been in a decision-making capacity, Wagon hasn't always pleased everybody. Detractors come with the territory for public figures, and Wagon was certainly no stranger to them.

The criticism peaked during Wagon's years as mayor, a time when the Topeka City Council was particularly divisive and dysfunctional. Some Topekans believed that Wagon's manner of dealing with the council was part of the problem — a point that possibly had some truth to it, she would magnanimously acknowledge....

Wagon lost the primary, but — to her credit — didn't let any of her negative experiences as mayor stop her from serving her community and the state.

Not only did she accept former Gov. Kathleen Sebelius' invitation to serve on her cabinet in 2003, but she helped start a petition drive aimed at barring Shawnee County from denying the city of Topeka a portion of motor fuel tax revenue it receives from the state.

Topeka political analyst Bob Beatty is right when he says Wagon epitomizes the term "public servant."

"She's still part of that generation of women who paved the way for other women to go into leadership positions," he said. "It used to be a tough road for women, but people like Joan Wagon made it easier."

Now, Wagon says, she won't get out of the picture altogether. She plans to do some work for the Girl Scouts and will be looking for other opportunities. Good for her.

Regardless of how anyone feels about her positions on issues, you can't knock her commitment to serving the public.

—The Topeka Capital-Journal, via the Associated Press



Television foils chronically curious

American culture these days seems to discourage us from fully embracing the empty spaces in the day when we can enjoy a little bit of solitude and do some serious self-examination of where we are in life and what kind of person we want to be.

Many folks fill up the empty spaces in their day simply by turning on the television. Instead of spending the time to figure things out about their own lives, they turn on the tube and let some person or company can tell them what to believe, how they should dress or what they should buy.

It's hard to have a world of creative thinkers if the television provides us with all our entertainment. Sure, we will figure out how do certain tasks out of necessity, but the television encourages us to be passive spectators with a narrow range of interests instead of chronically curious human beings who are interested in economical, environmental, political, cultural, mechanical, international, agricultural, scientific and community issues.

Don't get me wrong. I don't think the television is some evil, monstrous machine created by an elite secret society to manipulate the minds of the American public. I certainly watch my share.

I watch the Kansas City Chiefs on Sunday and try to catch as many Kansas State basketball games as possible. I'm a loyal viewer of *The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report*, *NCIS: Naval Criminal Investigative Service* (when are Tony and Ziva going to get together?), *Family Guy* and *The Rachel Maddow Show*.



Andy Heintz

• Wildcat Ramblings

Programs on the Discovery Channel or PBS also actually inform and teach people things, which is what most shows should be doing in the first place. And there is nothing better than watching a comedy after a particularly stressful day at work.

While relaxing in front of the television once in a while is perfectly fine, there is a limit. I think it's unhealthy to watch television when nothing you want to watch is even on.

There have been times when I've been at people's houses and they would be flipping through the channels because the weather was bad outside and they couldn't think of anything else to do. The notion of actually talking about things going on in the world or in town didn't even come up, because that just isn't something that is really pushed in our culture.

The television, along with superficial pop music and mindless gossip magazines, have isolated people from knowing or appreciating how much we benefit from people we don't even know. Taking farming for example: Even if you don't know the first thing about farming, you should silently thank a farmer every time you eat something you haven't grown

yourself.

The world would go on without actors or athletes, but not without farmers. The same could be said of teachers, policeman or firefighters, even though none of these groups is lavished with the attention or wealth that is given to people involved in the entertainment industry.

I watched way too much television when I was kid, and I'm still suffering from the effects of that decision. My dad and mom tried to teach me how to use tools and cook, but I wasn't terribly interested. And honestly, I tend to pick up some things slower than most people for some reason, so I was always self-conscious about trying new things because I figured I would mess them up. So I just played basketball and other sports with my friends because I loved that and I was pretty good in my younger day.

But the times I wasn't playing sports with my friends or spending time with my family, I was watching television. I really wish I could have those hours back.

Now I'm trying to learn mechanical, auto and cooking skills I should have learned years ago. Young people need to be encouraged to be curious about all aspects of life so they don't make the same mistake I did.

Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate, is sports reporter for the Colby Free Press. He says he loves K-State athletics and fishing, sports and opinion writing.

Futures market gives basis for hope

Farmers who rely on the futures market have long been frustrated by the gap between the cash price for a bushel of hard red winter wheat and the futures price at contract expiration.

In an attempt to resolve this lack of convergence between cash and futures prices, Kansas City Board of Trade members recently voted and approved three changes.

First, they decided to increase seasonal storage rates for written warehouse receipts used for delivery on wheat futures contracts. Second, a minimum of 11 percent protein will be called for on their contracts. Third, there will be a tightening of the vomitoxin levels.

"We should all be encouraged the Kansas City Board of Trade recognizes there's a problem and they're trying to fix it," says Mark Nelson, Kansas Farm Bureau economist.

Unfortunately, change comes slowly and will not be felt until late next year. Farmers will have to exercise patience. The board plan will not take effect until next September, pending approval by the federal Commodities Futures Trading Commission.

Will these changes help wheat producers? "It's hard to say what the end result will be,



John Schlageck

• Insights Kansas Farm Bureau

but we need to sit back and give all these measures a chance to work," Nelson says. "I think we're all happy that something has finally happened."

Nelson says there may well be challenges down the road in spite of the board changes. He still sees some basis issues as long as wheat storage capacity remains in tight supply.

The protein requirements may also be a concern for growers. This could start showing up as more elevators implement a more regimented protein scale, Nelson said.

If that's the case, this will afford opportunities for farmers to bring in wheat with higher protein, the economist says. It will also encourage them to store their wheat and market it as a higher-quality product.

"We have more wheat in wheat country than

we know what to do with," Nelson says. "Over time, I believe this situation will improve, but time will be the real test."

Wheat farmers who belong to Farm Bureau in Kansas and other farm and commodity organizations met with commission Chairman Gary Gensler just after spring harvest in Kansas City. At this meeting, Kansas growers told Gensler the wheat contracting system (futures market) was not working and asked for his help.

"I can assure you he listened and our message was received loud and clear," Nelson says. "The CFTC chairman understands there's a problem and he also understands there must be convergence in the wheat market."

Farm organizations and commodity groups will remain vigilant and monitor how well these changes by the board work during the upcoming year. All are committed to see this convergence issue resolved.

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.

Where to write, call

- U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 225-2715 or Fax (202) 225-5124
- U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-6521
- U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 2202 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715 or Fax (202) 225-5124
- State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol Building, 300 SW10th St., Room 225-E., Topeka, Kan. 66612, (785) 296-7399 ralph.ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

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COLBY FREE PRESS

155 W. Fifth St. (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963
Colby, Kan. 67701 fax (785) 462-7749

Send news to: colby.editor@nwkansan.com

State award-winning newspaper. General Excellence, Design & Layout, Columns, Editorial Writing, Sports Columns, News, Photography. Official newspaper of Thomas County, Colby, Brewster and Rexford.

Steve Haynes - Publisher
s.haynes@nwkansan.com

NEWS

Kevin Bottrell - News Editor
kbottrell@nwkansan.com

Andy Heintz - Sports Reporter
aheintz@nwkansan.com

Marian Ballard - Copy Editor
mballard@nwkansan.com

Vera Sloan - Society Editor

Shelby Pulkrabek - Society Reporter
colby.society@nwkansan.com

ADVERTISING

Andrea Bowers, Kathryn Ballard, Tammy Withers

Advertising Representatives

abowers@nwkansan.com kballard@nwkansan.com twithers@nwkansan.com

Kylee Hunter - Graphic Design
khunter@nwkansan.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Robin Tubbs - Office Manager
rtubbs@nwkansan.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support@nwkansan.com

NORWEST PRESS

Richard Westfahl - General Manager

Lana Westfahl, Jim Jackson, Betty Morris, Jim Bowler, Judy McKnight, Kris McCool

THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the days observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by NorWest Newspaper, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

PERIODICALS POSTAGE paid at Colby, Kan. 67701, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday to Friday, closed Saturday and Sunday. MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, which is exclusively entitled to the use for publication of all news herein. Member Kansas Press Association and National Newspaper Association.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: In Colby, Thomas County and Oakley: three months \$35, one year \$85. By mail to ZIP Codes beginning with 676 and 677: three months \$39, one year \$95. Elsewhere in the U.S., mailed once per week: three months \$39, one year \$95. Student rate, nine months, in Colby, Thomas County and Oakley, \$64; mailed once per week elsewhere in the U.S. \$72

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• Bruce Tinsley

