

Other Viewpoints

Kansans protest feds' education law

Any debate over federal mandates has to include education. School officials nationwide have been particularly frustrated by No Child Left Behind, the federal law that requires all students to be proficient in math and reading by 2014. The goal was to identify failing schools and make sure teachers were qualified. But what sounded good in theory has proven to be unrealistic.

The system's one-size-fits-all formula and lofty, increasingly difficult goals have created unnecessary challenges, such as forcing schools to narrow curriculum and teach to the test.

Locally, the Garden City school district has struggled to achieve the standards while delivering a quality education to a diverse student population. Students learning English need more time to grasp the language before their scores should count toward Adequate Yearly Progress set forth by No Child. Still, the district has achieved notable accomplishments. The district's schools recently earned 39 state standard of excellence awards for exemplary academic achievement.

Yet the district failed to meet No Child standards. This district isn't alone. With many Kansas schools coming up short, state education officials want out of a system that fails to acknowledge realities in Kansas schools.

David Dennis, chairman of the Kansas Board of Education, has sought a waiver from some requirements of the law. The request was made as Congress has been working to reauthorize the law. Ideally, change to the existing law would come soon enough to ward off sanctions ranging from forcing additional tutoring to closing schools that fall short 100-percent requirement for proficiency in reading and math.

Tracking student performance is a sensible goal. But good education should be measured in more ways than standardized testing — and in more areas than reading and math. Science, social studies, music and drama, foreign languages and physical education matter, too.

And beyond weighing test scores, overall growth and excellence also should be considered. Dennis said it's time to focus on a system that works. Crafting one that acknowledges the unique challenges of school districts that don't all fit the narrow focus of No Child Left Behind would be a good start.

— *The Garden City Telegram, via the Associated Press*

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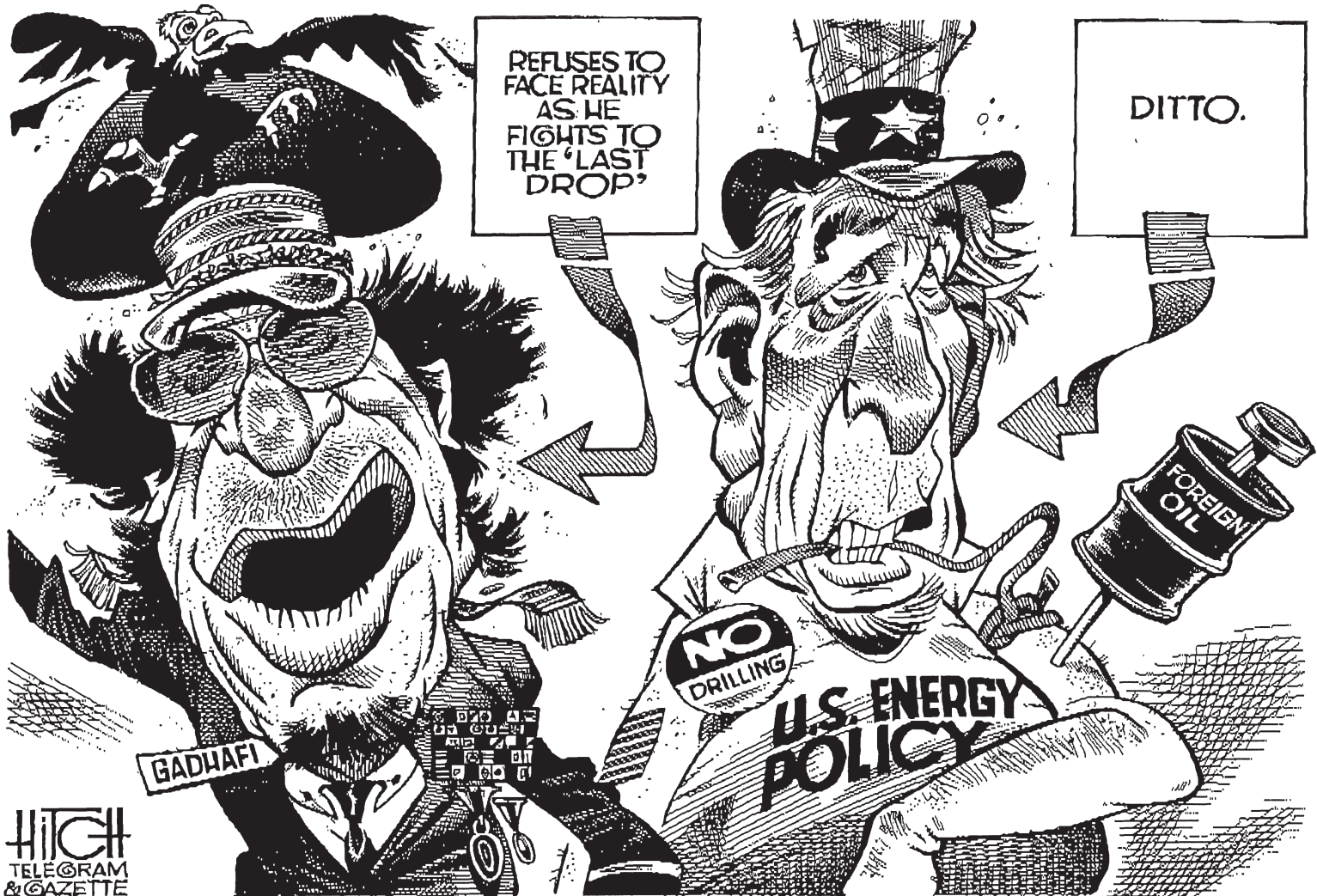
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Telephones didn't start out all that smart

Today's kids have the "smartest" telephones of all time. No debate there. And I invite them to take a trip with me back 60 or 70 years to get some kind of feel for this thing we cherish so openly.

When I was growing up, our telephones were thought to be as far advanced as they could ever get. I was born in November of 1934 and probably became aware of telephones when I was around 5 or 6.

Believe it or not, I remember telephones that allowed you to listen to other people's conversations. Granted, it wasn't the thing to do, but the temptation pretty much won out. If they were naming telephones back then, like they do these days, those would have been called something like the "Informer." You knew every bit of gossip along your party line.

People with these telephones were assigned rings. Your phone might have three rings if the call was for you, four if it was for the neighbor north, or two if it was for the neighbor south.

When the phone rang in the home of our uncle and aunt, Ambrose and Adelia Brungardt, we would quickly turn around to watch whoever answered to see if they were listening in or taking a call. At times we were given the phone to listen to the conversation on the other end. Wow, that was always a big deal!

The phone consisted of a large wooden box with two bells on the front along with a protruding thing to speak into. The receiver was on the left and on the right was a crank to get the operator's attention. You needed to do that every time you wanted to make a call.

We didn't have one of those "informers" in our house in town. We had a different kind



Tom Dreiling

• A View From the West

of telephone. When you took the receiver off the hook a voice would say, "Number please." You would give the operator the number you wanted to call and she did the rest. I remember yet today that my Dad's work number was 262 and our home number was 986.

Just when we thought the telephone company could offer nothing more, lo and behold they came up with the dial telephone. Yes, a DIAL telephone. You didn't need an operator anymore. All you did was take the receiver off the hook, listen for a sound, then take your finger and dial the number you wanted. They won't be able to top that — we thought.

Well, fast forward. Today's telephones do too much. There's a lot of talking just to be talking. And they give you news. They provide weather forecasts. You can exchange pictures with family or friends. Play games. Watch television. And more.

I just look and shake my head in disbelief. But that's OK, I guess, because older people are supposed to exercise, and shaking one's head over these advanced technologies would be one form of exercise. See, there's a health benefit built in.

The remarkable thing about today's telephone is that just about everybody has one

and they take it every where they go, kind of like Mary's little lamb. And no matter the age, it seems there's a phone involved. They tell me that the first word new babies now say is, "taafone." We've gotta' thank Alexander Graham Bell for the phone and also for Graham Crackers.

With today's phones, you determine what kind of available sound or sounds you want to draw attention from a caller. Mine is called "Newage Tone." It's a snappy little thing, grabs my attention, pronto!

Oops, gotta' go! My pants pocket is vibrating. Yes, you can have your phone do all sorts of crazy stuff in your pocket.

I am going to begin using some of your comments as they apply to the stuff (oh, how I love that word) I write. If it's OK to use your name and city, please let me know; if you'd rather I use initials with no city name, let me know.

I'm getting some interesting stuff and would like to share it with you. Join the responders. Thanks in advance. And for my new readers, my e-mail is milehitom@hotmail.com.

One of my grandsons asked me the other evening how old I was. I told him I really didn't know. He told me to look in my underwear. "Underwear?" I quizzed. "Yes grandpa," he said, "mine says I'm 4 to 6."

Have a good evening!
Tom Dreiling of Aurora, Colo., is a former publisher of the Colby Free Press and The Norton Telegraph, and a former long-time editor of the old Goodland Daily News. He is a life-long Democrat, a curmudgeon come lately and a newly minted Coloradan.

Broadband service still short

To the Editor:

I was invited to testify before the U.S. House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Communications and Technology. The hearing was the first step for the new Congress to take a closer look at how broadband money was distributed under the economic stimulus plan.

There are members of Congress who believe that some of the money was given without appropriate consideration for businesses like Eagle Communications, which are then forced to compete against government funding.

Here is what you need to know and what has not been reported:

Eagle Communications does not have any conflict with Rural Telephone-NexTech or Government Recovery Act Taxpayer funds. The objective of Recovery Act taxpayer funding was to provide more broadband in rural communities.

We know there are places in Kansas with inadequate broadband Internet service.

Eagle Communications is not afraid of fair competition; we already compete every day.

Yes, Eagle Communications did apply for a government grant. However, Eagle's applications focused on serving areas where there were truly unserved customers. One example would be our application for a grant in Cheyenne County that would have provided wireless services to rural customers near St. Francis. This is significantly different than NexTech's application that included overbuilding (building additional broadband services where they already exist) in Hays. Eagle did not apply for a loan or grant in Ellis County or Hays. That



Free Press Letter Drop

• Our readers sound off

area is already well served, as explained in a report by the Kansas Corporation Commission.

The KCC report explains that in Cheyenne County, about 60 percent of households have access to broadband Internet. (This is where Eagle wanted to build, and our application was turned down.) We applied in other unserved areas in addition to Cheyenne County.

The report also states that 99.99 percent of homes in Ellis County have access to broadband Internet coverage. (Where NexTech wants to build, and their application was approved.)

Hays, by definition, is not a rural community; Hays and Ellis County already have access to superior broadband service in comparison to other parts of the state of Kansas — as evidenced by the KCC report. Eagle Communications, ATT and Rural Telephone have invested considerable funds to bring Ellis County this superior service. Now the Rural Utilities Service has given taxpayer funds to a single one of those already existing providers — Rural Telephone/NexTech.

Prior to Recovery Act funding being approved, there were calls to wait until a national

broadband map is done — and that map is near completion. The worry was that funds would be allocated to areas where service already exists — and it happened here. If a business is listed in the yellow pages, the government probably should not be in that business. I think most taxpayers would agree.

Gary Shorman
president and chief executive officer
Eagle Communications, Hays

Great jazz, folks

To the Editor:

On Feb. 14, my wife Kathie and I attended the "Chocolate and All That Jazz" event at the Pioneer Memorial Library in Colby.

We thought the concept of combining the Colby College Jazz Band with lots of fabulous chocolate, and doing it on Valentine's Day, was not only generous, but brilliant. It gave us a romantic night out, and provided yet another great occasion to highlight the incredibly good jazz band Tony Schroer has put together this year.

Considering that this is a two-year college, which means that almost all of his band members are first- and second-year students, he amazingly builds jazz bands that rival any found on four-year campuses. This has enabled him to keep talented local students here in Colby and to draw musicians from distant towns as well.

Thanks to everyone who put this entertaining and imaginative event together!

Tom Peyton, Mingo

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

