



## Other Viewpoints

### It's not so simple to identify voters

Even for those who favor requiring Kansas voters to show a photo ID at the polls, the legislation that recently passed the Kansas House includes some provisions that could raise concerns.

Several members of the Kansas Senate have expressed reservations about the bill, crafted by Secretary of State Kris Kobach, that would require ID at the polls and proof of citizenship at registration as well as giving Kobach's office new power to enforce election laws. Senators are right to be cautious in moving the legislation forward.

Senate Majority Leader Jay Emler, a Lindsborg Republican, indicated that the possible inconvenience of the proof-of-citizenship requirement will be a key issue. The bill calls for Kansas to issue free birth certificates to people who meet certain income guidelines, but that doesn't help people who were born in other states. It says an out-of-state driver's license can be used but only if the state issuing the license requires proof of citizenship for a license to be issued. How many states require that? Kansas requires "proof of identity" but not proof of citizenship to obtain a driver's license.

Although the voter bill lists 13 documents that can be presented as proof of citizenship, the most expedient for most voters would be a birth certificate. Some people seeking to register could easily put their hands on a certified copy of their birth certificate, but many could not. Obtaining a copy would involve a fee for many people and would take some time — time during which a voter, if he or she had not planned ahead, might miss the registration deadline, meaning the person wouldn't be eligible to vote.

Senators also should look carefully at provisions in the law that would give the secretary of state's office the power to file and prosecute election fraud cases in state courts. At a time when many Americans and elected officials are trying to eliminate bureaucracy and duplication of services, why does Kansas need to create an enforcement arm in the secretary of state's office when enforcement can be handled by the Kansas attorney general? Kobach is an attorney, who likely would relish taking these cases to court, but it's not a good use of taxpayer money.

Even though there is no evidence Kansas has a widespread voter fraud problem, there's nothing wrong with trying to make sure only legal, qualified voters are casting ballots. The trick, however, is to draw a tough line on potential illegal voters without setting standards that will make it more difficult for legal, qualified voters to get registered and vote in Kansas.

Everyone wants Kansas elections to be clean and fair. If fraud exists in our election system, it should be prosecuted and punished. At the same time, the state should do what it can to encourage qualified voters to participate in elections. Legislators should make sure that whatever new laws they approve to protect the integrity of Kansas elections don't place undue restrictions on qualified voters who simply want to register and cast their ballots.

— The Lawrence Journal-World, via The Associated Press

### Write us

The Colby Free Press encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of general interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

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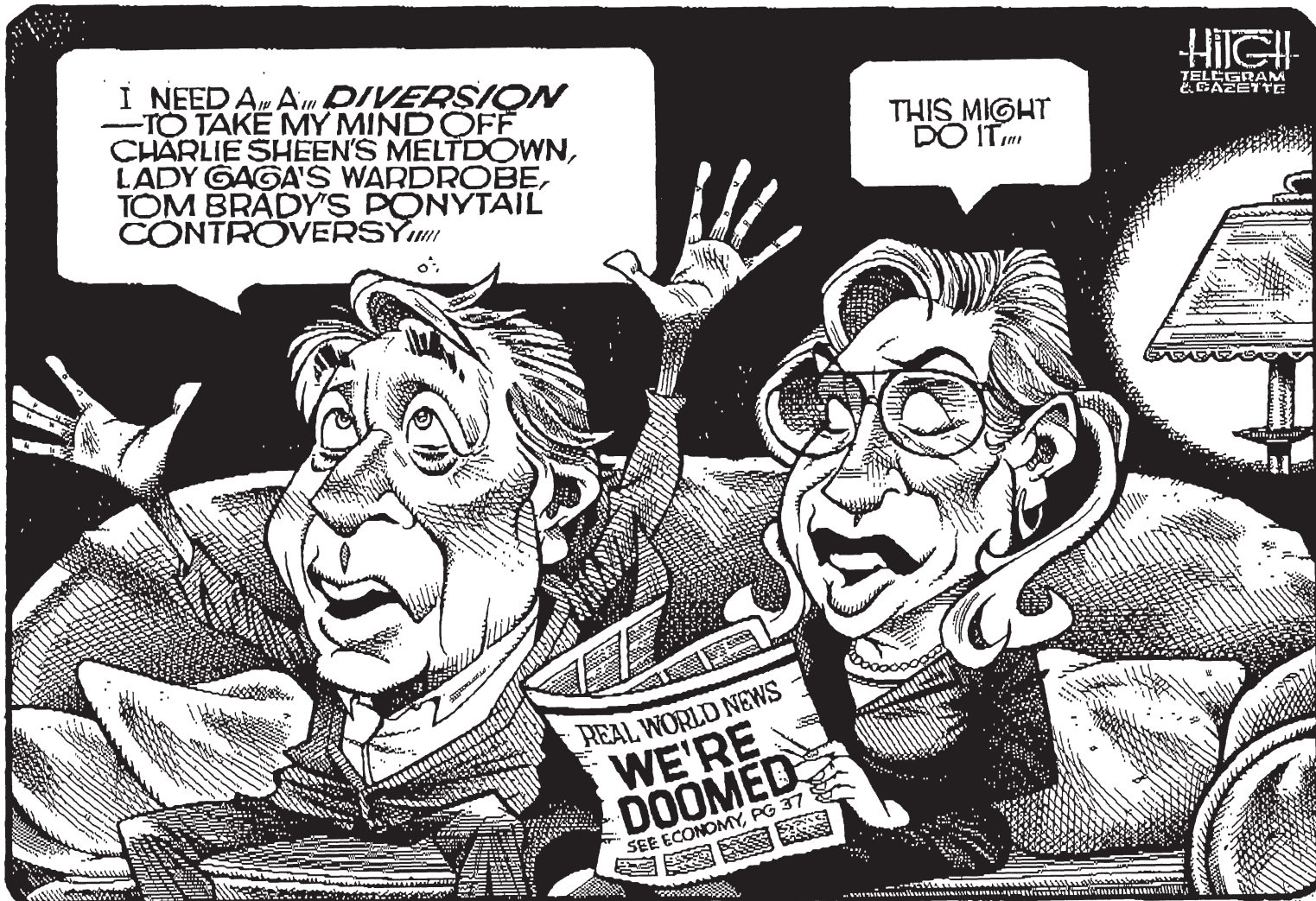
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### Local voters deserve local polling places

Brewster city officials have protested the conundrum of the polling place for their city election being in another city, thanks to penny pinching by a county official:

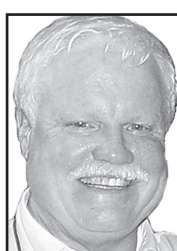
To be eligible to vote in the election, you have to live in Brewster, but to vote, you must drive to Colby. The same logic applies to Rexford, Menlo and outlying towns in many other counties.

That's because Thomas County is one of several in the state to consolidate all voting at one site after federal law required better access for handicapped voters and use of machines to help them vote.

The Thomas and Sherman county officials, among others, decided apparently that voters in the smaller cities didn't count for much. They claim it's not much of a hardship for them to drive to the county seat to vote.

And mind you, this is in a city election where they are choosing city officials for their own independent towns. Not a state or federal election.

It's undoubtedly true that the counties will save a little money, perhaps a few thousand



**Steve Haynes**

- Along the Sappa

dollars per election. We'd be the last to suggest that counties should spend taxpayers' money unwisely. But the amount to be saved here is nothing compared to the raises many counties routinely give their employees.

In Decatur County, by way of contrast, when city officials and residents in outlying cities protested a decision to close the polls in those towns, commissioners listened. They wisely decided that having polls in each city was part of the cost of democracy. They reversed themselves and kept the rural polls open in Jennings, Norcatour and Dresden.

So far, officials in Sherman and Thomas counties have not been so thoughtful. They have flat refused to reconsider. And that just

flies in the face of what democracy is all about.

There might be some legitimate way to save money on outlying polls. At one point, county clerks were offering to take "advance" ballots out to the small towns as a sort of compromise, but that's not really the same as having a polling station on election day, is it?

No, people deserve to be able to vote in their own elections in their own towns. And the county ought to find a way to allow it. The commissioners and county clerk ought to be committed to serving voters in the smaller towns as well as they serve those in the county seat.

The Brewster leaders have a point, a good one. Thomas County officials should listen. So should voters, because how this issue is handled will say a lot about the county's priorities.

Steve Haynes is editor and publisher of The Colby Free Press and president of Nor'West Newspapers. In his spare time, whenever that is, he like to ride and watch trains.

### Voter identification a serious issue

The Secretary of State's office oversees the administration of all national and state elections in Kansas. We take this responsibility seriously, which is why we support legislation that makes it easy to vote but hard to cheat.

On Feb. 25, the Kansas House of Representatives took final action on HB 2067, the Secure and Fair Elections Act. The bill, which requires photographic identification at the polling place and proof of citizenship at voter registration, passed as amended with 83 yeay votes and 36 nay votes.

It was introduced in the Kansas Senate on



**Kris Kobach**

- Secretary of State

Wednesday, March 2, and was scheduled for hearing before the Senate Committee on Ethics and Elections at the Capitol Building in room 159-S at 9:30 a.m. Wednesday.

Be sure to exercise your right of free speech by calling your state Senator and expressing your opinion whether the SAFE Act should be passed into law or not. But before you do, be informed! Read the amended bill by visiting [www.sos.ks.gov](http://www.sos.ks.gov).

Did you know state flags and law books can be ordered from the Secretary of State's office by mail, phone or in person at our office? Use the quick link on our home page to find out more.

Kris Kobach is serving his first term as Kansas Secretary of State.

### Broadband discussion has two sides

To the Editor:

Broadband construction activities of Rural Telephone and its wholly-owned subsidiary, Nex-Tech, came under criticism recently when Gary Shorman, president and chief executive officer of Eagle Communications (a cable television provider in Hays), testified at a Congressional hearing.

Mr. Shorman made exaggerated claims before the House subcommittee and to the press in an effort to distort the facts of Rural Telephone and Nex-Tech's broadband stimulus construction initiative in an unsuccessful attempt to stop the funding. In one such claim, Mr. Shorman stated that while the government was using taxpayers' money to fund an over-build in Hays, Eagle's own broadband stimulus fund application for truly unserved areas was denied.

The following are facts that cannot be disputed:

- Rural Telephone is bringing \$101 million to western Kansas that would have gone to another state.
- \$51.6 million of these funds was a loan that must be paid back to the federal government with interest.
- These funds will be used to bring new and improved broadband service to 21 communities and 26 remote rural areas.



#### Free Press Letter Drop

- Our readers sound off

• Hays is included in the 4,600 square mile project, but is only 8 square miles, which is less than one-half of one percent of the project.

• In one of Eagle's broadband stimulus applications they proposed service to 12 communities they claimed were unserved. Seven public responses were filed on their application indicating that in fact, seven communities were already served by broadband.

• Rural Telephone's broadband initiative will provide free broadband connections and free Wi-Fi to 30 libraries in rural communities, providing Internet access to those who would not otherwise have access.

• Over 2,000 remote, rural customers have already been connected to the new service.

• Over the past 60 years, Rural Telephone has invested \$149 million in loans and \$140 million of equity capital to improve telecom-

munication services in rural western Kansas.

• Since 1998, Rural Telephone has been investing loan funds and equity capital in broadband facilities in western Kansas, creating economic opportunities and job growth.

In the first year of the three-year initiative, we have already completed 35 percent of the project. When completed, broadband service will have been made available to over 39,000 residents and businesses in over 9,300 square miles of some of the most remote rural areas of western and north central Kansas. This project means more jobs for the local economy.

It would be impossible to overestimate our project's positive impact on the commerce, public safety, and quality of life for residents of western Kansas. This is about tapping the power of the American spirit through job creation, wise investment, innovation and risk taking, powered by capital and financial accountability.

Now, you know the rest of the story.  
Larry E. Sevier, CEO  
Rural Telephone/Nex-Tech



### Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

