



Other Viewpoints

Working together should start earlier

There was “no politics” involved in the decision to close the Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services office in Lawrence, the department’s Secretary Robert Siedlecki told a group of *Journal-World* editors and reporters.

It was simply the hard reality of having to satisfy a \$42 million budget cut approved by the Kansas Legislature. Siedlecki said he didn’t fight the size of the cut during the legislative session because he thought the agency he has led for less than six months should do its share to help cut the state budget.

Siedlecki and the two aides that accompanied him brought along the facts and figures they said justify the closing of the Lawrence office, but for the people of Lawrence and Douglas County, the closure decision and the process by which that decision was reached still don’t add up.

Initially, the agency said it wouldn’t eliminate any of the 87 positions at the Lawrence office. However, Siedlecki then promised only that there would be “no layoffs.” If Lawrence employees quit rather than move to another office, their positions might be eliminated unless they are considered “critical.”

There will be no reduction in local services, Siedlecki and his aides said. The county will continue to be served full-time by agency workers that handle child in need of care cases. If someone offers free office space, they will try to have caseworkers available locally a couple of days a week. It’s not unusual, they say, for local entities to provide free space to the agency.

And they hope more people will use the Internet to access services. Statewide, only about 16 percent of services currently are accessed on the Internet, but they want that to increase.

They say they are working with local “stakeholders” like Bert Nash Community Mental Health Center to help ease the transition. Have agencies like Bert Nash and the Lawrence Community Shelter expressed concern about the added responsibility their agencies will have to help clients access services? No, we haven’t really heard that, the officials said. That message came through loud and clear at a public meeting Monday night at Plymouth Congregational Church, but no state officials attended.

The process by which this decision was reached is frustrating to many local residents. Siedlecki said his office didn’t seek local input because legislators and others across the state would have risen up in defense of their local offices. That probably was a safe assumption, considering that more than 500 people attended Monday night’s meeting organized by local legislators.

So rather than seeking input from local officials or perhaps considering a more moderate approach to downsizing the Lawrence office, officials simply decided to announce the closing and deal with the details later. Siedlecki said on Monday “we really want to work with the community to make sure that we do have adequate coverage.”

It’s unfortunate that officials didn’t do a better job of working with the community before this decision was handed down. We hope they will try harder in the future.

According to Siedlecki, there is no possibility that the state will reconsider the closing of the Lawrence office. If the decision stands, local officials and nonprofit agencies will have little choice but to try to work with officials to minimize the negative impact on Lawrence and its residents. They currently do an outstanding job of providing and coordinating needed services for local residents who face a number of physical, mental and financial challenges. That job apparently will become far more difficult in the months to come.

— 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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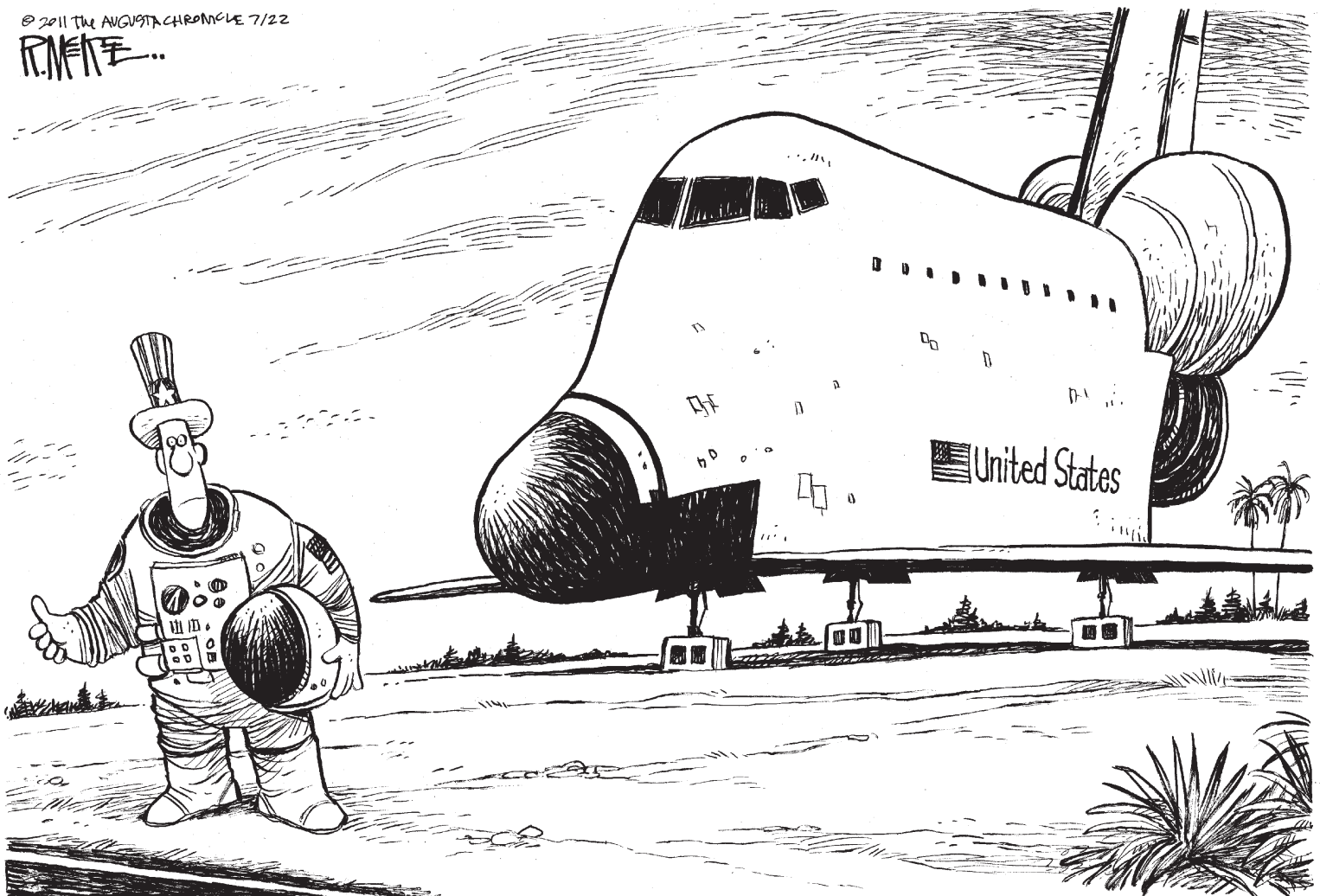
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R.MATE...



Kids' obesity: a simple problem

Hold your fire! Hold your fire!

And while you are doing that, keep these three letters in mind: E and P.

I think I know why obesity is running out of control among our young people in the NiftyFifty.

Many kids today – not all of them – but many of them, pig out day in and day out on stuff seemingly designed to pack on the pounds. If you’ve got kids at home you know what I’m talking about. Overlooked, sadly, is something so vital but so absent.

The problem, as this Man of the Plains sees it, is simply something kids did when I was growing up that just doesn’t seem to have any room in today’s world.

In my day, we had some kids we would call “fat,” but they couldn’t begin to hold a candle to what’s going on in our obesity community in this day ad age.

As I look back on my years as a youngster – late 1930s to the late 1940s – when the school bell rang sending us home for the rest of the day, we walked home, tossed our books on the front room couch then hit the kitchen for an apple or an orange, and then out the door we went.

We would join our neighborhood buddies and walk a block or two to an empty field where we’d engage in a baseball game with other friends already there.

Or we would cross the street to a friend’s home where a basketball goal was nailed to the front of the garage and see who could hit the longest shot and make the most free throws.

Or we would determine, while walking home from school, that football would be the



Tom Dreiling

• Man of the Plains

game of the day and began a search for a vacant lot.

Or we would see how far we could run before needing a break, then head back and see who could reach home first.

These weren’t just “now and then” activities, they were practically commitments.

By the time supper was ready, we were ready to sit down and eat with our parents and siblings and engage in conversation. (We had breakfast, dinner and supper. We didn’t “do lunch.”)

All of the activities mentioned above we forms of – okay, what’s the word? “Exercise!” – one of the three letters mentioned above.

That is the simple ingredient missing from the lives of many, many young people today. And folks, exercise is free. Stuffing your kids with foods that sicken, is costly. And eventually your child becomes part of the obesity crowd. You can ward that off by inserting the “E” word in each day’s routine.

Unfortunately, today’s youngsters come home from school, and in many cases sit down in front of a computer, or put their state-of-the-art phones to work, and the only things getting exercise are their fingers and their mouths.

Enter letters P. That stands for Parent In-

volvement. And without question parents certainly can do a lot better job. Sure you are tired from a day at your workplace, but the youngsters at home need your focus when you enter that front door. And if your family doesn’t eat the evening meal together, maybe today’s a good day to start. And the conversation can be centered around obesity and the need for exercise. Once obesity takes over, well – good luck!

My little straw poll is not off to a good start, and some of you responding are of the opinion I shelve it until the rest of the wannabe presidents get into the race. So I’ll hold off for and use the few I’ve already received later.

Briefly, on the political scene, here is what I see: Michelle Bachmann’s dream of becoming the Commissress-in-Chief just isn’t going to happen; former governor Mitt Romney will get the Republican nomination; President Barack Obama is hanging by a thread that could snap at any time if he doesn’t refocus on the middle class and my class; Texas Gov. Rick Perry just might be Mr. Romney’s running mate; Donald Trump won’t run as an Independent; Sarah Palin will probably end up owning the bus line toting her all over the place; and best bumper sticker, “Forget it! It’s Already too Late!”

Won’t you be glad when winter gets here?

Tom Dreiling of Aurora, Colo., is a former publisher of the Colby Free Press and The Norton Telegram, 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.

What goes around, comes around

The word oasis comes to mind when describing northwestern Kansas this summer. Although within a few weeks if the 100-degree plus temperatures continue, it may turn a bit drier.

But for now, in mid-July, the cattle graze in pastures with lush, tall grass. Each field of corn, beans or milo resembles a living green tapestry woven by the Master’s hand. Dryland corn looks just like its irrigated cousin. Both have even, uniform stands colored in deep dark green while standing six feet tall. Powerful corn as farmers say in this part of Kansas.

And the wheat crop?

You have to see it to believe it. And that’s just what I did on July 14/15. I traveled nearly 240 miles west on Highway 36 from Manhattan to visit the Holle family in Rawlins County. Crops and grassland were green the entire distance in the upper tier of Kansas counties.

Once I pulled up to the wheat field, I climbed up the combine ladder and veteran Rawlins County farmer/stockmen Kevin Holle opened the cab. Old friends, we both sported broad smiles as we shook hands and I sat down in the buddy seat as we began to talk. I’d known Kevin since we were both kids nearly 35 years ago. Our two schools, Atwood and Hoxie, where I grew up, were sports rivals.

Needless to say an hour sped by like the blink of an eye as we caught up and he told me about this year’s wheat crop. He was running a Gleaner with a stripper head on a field approximately 22 miles southwest of Oberlin.

It didn’t take me long to ask Kevin how the wheat was rolling into the bin. He pointed to



John Schlageck

• Insights  
Kansas Farm Bureau

the computer on the right side of the combine cab. The number 66 (bushels per acre) flashed across the screen.

Reports of 50-85 bushel wheat have been common throughout some counties in far northwestern Kansas this harvest. The only problem is showers have come through this region of Kansas nearly every other night since the end of June.

In Rawlins County, Holle says they’ve received nearly six inches of rain since July 1. Throughout harvest he cut around the bottom of terraces to avoid getting stuck in the wet fields.

“It’s one of those unbelievable years,” Holle told me. “It’s just such a great feeling to watch the crop coming in like this.”

Holle believes his wheat crop will average 65 bushels per acre. Yes, the last three years have been kind and bountiful for the Holles and other northwestern Kansas grain producers. Two years ago they harvested 180 bushel dryland corn. Their best crop ever.

“Everything has to come together just right,” Holle says. “Timely rains, cooler temperatures when the wheat heads are filling or the corn is tasseling.”

Still with the abundant harvest Holle knows what it’s like to be on the other end of the stick. During the beginning of the 21st century, his family suffered through six years of drought, crop failure and heartache. He knows all too well what his fellow farmers across Kansas are feeling.

“I feel bad for the producers who can’t get a rain for anything,” the Rawlins County producer says. “I’d sure like to share some of this with them right now.”

During those tough times beginning in 2002, it was so dry on the Holle pastureland they didn’t bother to even turn their cow herd out on the grass. There wasn’t any for his herd to eat. They also swathed their corn crop, rather than cut it for grain, to feed their hungry herd for six years.

“It’s amazing what this country out here will produce with a little moisture,” Holle says. “This year is testimony to that. The good Lord has blessed us.”

Yes, so far in 2011 crops and livestock in northwestern Kansas have flourished. Crops roll for miles in green splendor with the promise of an abundant harvest this fall. That means farmer/stockmen like the Holles will prosper this year, set some aside for the lean years and continue to farm land that’s been under their family’s care for five generations.

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

