

## Other Viewpoints

# Time for action on depopulation

Rural communities apparently aren't head over heels about Gov. Sam Brownback's initiatives to boost their population. That's disappointing, because what's clear is that the status quo hasn't been working for some time now, and you'd hope the governor's well-intended effort to address the problem would be attractive to shrinking communities.

At issue are financial incentives to lure new residents to sparsely populated counties. One provides payment of student loans for recent college graduates who choose to move to counties that partner with the state to offer the benefit. The other is a tax break for incoming residents from out of state.

But fewer than half of the counties eligible for the loan repayment initiative have signed up for it. Meanwhile, some rural civic and business leaders have questioned whether the tax break would do much to spur growth, and whether they will give incoming business owners a competitive advantage.

Well, OK, the initiatives aren't perfect, but aren't they better than doing nothing?

It's been mentioned, for instance, that the college tuition plan might not actually bring in outsiders but rather incentivize students to return to their parents' homes and work in low-paying jobs until their loans were paid down, at which point they'd move away for more lucrative employment.

But if that's the case, so what? Those individuals would be still be paying taxes and would add to the pool of educated workers in their communities. So where's the problem?

Plus, the state has offered a commitment that the plan wouldn't become an unfunded mandate.

Whether either incentive will work is unknown, but they deserve some time and support to see if they'll bear fruit. Success lies in creating jobs, by bringing in business owners from elsewhere or making communities more attractive to employers by adding to their population. The more people, after all, the more consumers and more members of the work force.

Brownback and his administration deserve credit for putting the initiatives on the table. It's time for aggressive action on the migration from rural communities, as evidenced by the *Capital-Journal's* recent five-part series on the issue.

As stated in the *Capital-Journal's* report, while the state's population grew by 6 percent from 2000 to 2010, it dropped more than 10 percent in 23 of the state's 105 counties. For those counties to reverse the trend, they will have to think outside the box.

Some are, of course, having not only embraced the governor's initiatives but also adopted their own, such as providing free building lots or housing for incoming teachers.

Still, more efforts will be needed. And the more dwindling counties accept change, the better chance they'll have of surviving.

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

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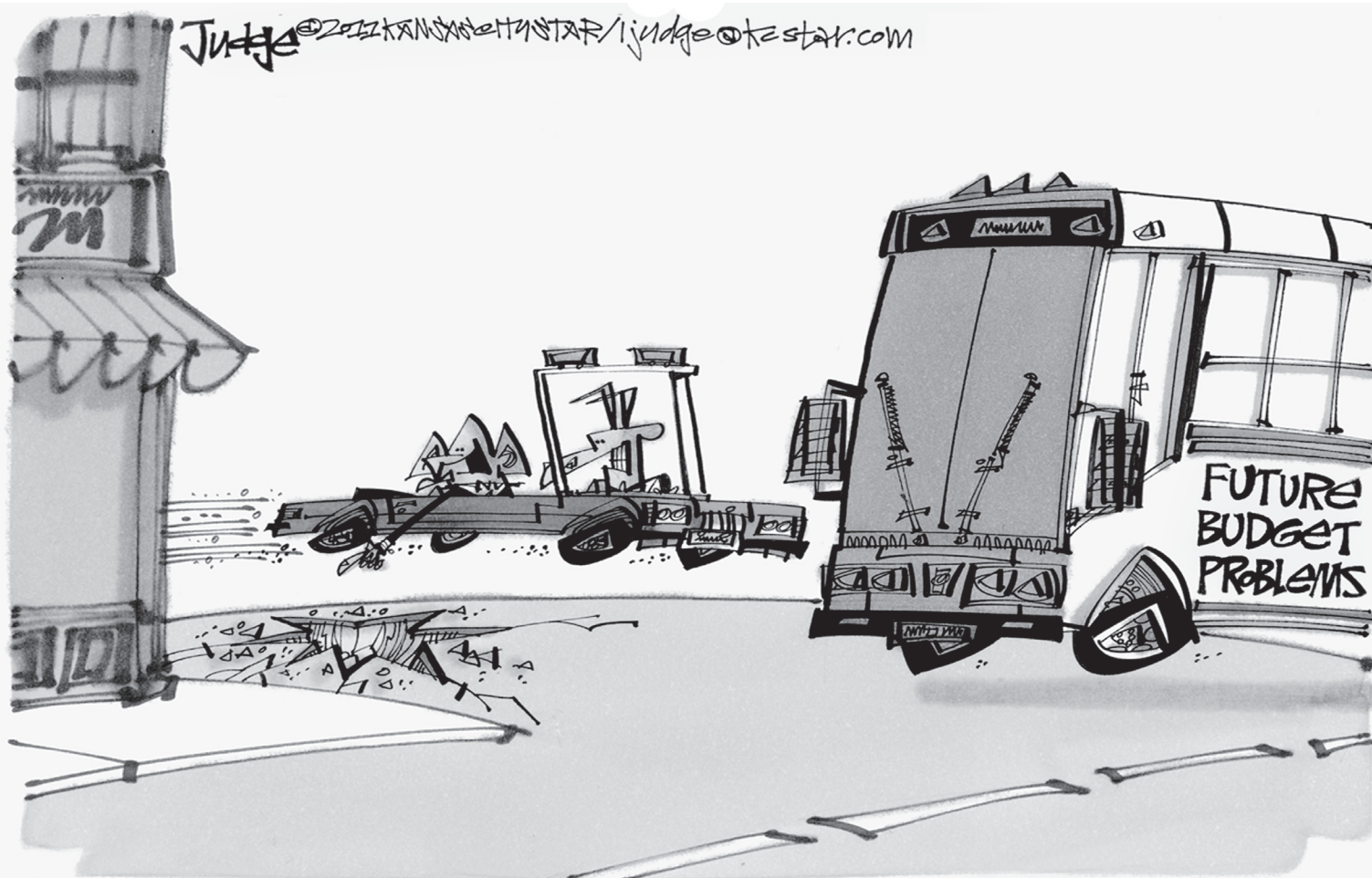
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"HEY, LOOK... WE'VE AVOIDED DEFAULT."

# Cell phone talk invades neighbor's space

My husband and I actually enjoy each other's company and a dinner out is a fun time for us. We were seated and had ordered when the "voice" began to creep over to our booth. A lone diner was having a rather loud conversation on his cell phone.

I don't enjoy a meal when the people sitting near me are carrying on a conversation that should have been shared in private, certainly not in public. I usually don't care to hear about their latest sexual exploits no matter what.

And, why is it that the more private the conversation seems, the louder the volume of the speaker is? You'd think these confidences would make them lower their voices, but no chance of that, is there?

Have you ever been subjected to overhearing an argument between spouses that gets louder and louder until a string of foul language ends the conversation? Inevitably the phone will ring within seconds and the argument will continue.

Don't you just wish you could say to them "just go home and settle this without my listening in." These arguments can only make you glad that you are not their spouse.

Another favorite is when a parent is trying to get their children to do something that they



**Sharon Friedlander**

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obviously don't want to do. You often hear the parents practically offering them anything under the sun to do something simple like take out the trash or mow the lawn.

When did parents lose all control over their children? How hard is it to handle these matters without sharing it with anyone within 10 feet of their cell phone conversation? Do they think we all want to know how inept they are at parenting?

Maybe I am old fashioned in not wanting to be involved in a total stranger's conversation. I really would prefer to just enjoy my evening out with my husband and to carry on our conversation without the background noise of the gentleman in the next booth.

Would our world crumble if we just turned off our phones to enjoy the company of the ones we are with and allowed those around us

to do the same?

I know that cell phones have allowed us to stay in touch at a moment's notice, but we do need to realize that we can be disturbing others. Simple manners should apply when we are out in public.

If you are dining out and your phone rings, please answer it and excuse yourself to somewhere more private. I do understand emergencies, but the dog just ate the remote and yakked it up isn't a conversation I want to hear during a meal.

Besides, do you really want me to know all those personal details in your life?

Maybe I will do an upcoming column of details overheard this week. That might be interesting, but I'll bet some folks would consider it an invasion of their privacy, even though the conversations were clearly not private, since they were on the cell phones within earshot of a multitude of others. Imagine the details I could put in print.

Oh, well, guess I'll continue to just grin and bear it.

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# Kid-level view of farming is eye-opening

Ever have an 11-year-old farmer's daughter give you a tour of their farm?

I did and it was top notch.

Last week I traveled to Dickinson County to meet with Jeff and Charity Bathurst. The young farm/livestock family has six children ranging in ages from 11 to three weeks old — four girls and two boys.

As I pulled up to the farmstead, Jeff and I shook hands and he told me he had to drive to town for parts. He said I could come with him or his 11-year-old daughter, Emma, would give me a tour of the farm.

I opted for the tour with Emma knowing I'd spend several hours with him in the hay field when he returned. We walked into the house where his wife literally had her hands full with her new baby and five other youngsters.

"Emma, come here and meet John and show him around the farm while I run to town," Jeff says.

Emma and I shook hands and outside we went to tour the Bathurst farm. Tall and slender for her age, Emma sported shoulder length blond hair and blue eyes. "Pretty as a peach," my Grandpa Bert used to say. And bright, articulate and the perfect hostess. I couldn't have asked for a better guide.

As we walked west of their home the first stop on the tour was the rabbit hutch. There I learned more about rabbits than I can write about because of the space constraints of this column.

One highlight Emma shared with me is how to hold a rabbit properly especially when showing them at the fair. She looked me squarely in the eye and they sparkled with enthusiasm, joy and pride as she told me about her family's farm.

She also demonstrated the proper way to hold a rabbit upside down, snugly while grasping the ears near the base of the bunny's head. Her favorite rabbit was a Blue Dutch breed and gray in color.

"I have three different breeds," Emma says. "I like the different body types, eye colors,



**John Schlageck**

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lengths of their ears — I especially like to feed, water and care for them."

By the time we finished with the bunny visit, Emma's younger sister Annie, 9, showed up to talk about their three lambs. Here the girls told me the breed of sheep, age, how much they ate each day and they would one day be used as food for people.

Although I'd never met these youngsters they were as comfortable and at ease with me as if we were old friends or I was a nearby neighbor. Sure, they were still kids, but their manners, hospitality and authenticity was a sight to behold and warmed my heart.

Just a few steps from the lambs we entered the chicken fence where 11 birds were crowing and clucking. By this time, seven-year old Alice had joined the tour and went into the roost and brought out fresh-laid eggs for me to eye ball and handle.

Out of curiosity I asked the girls if they ate these eggs and here's what Emma told me.

"Yes, they're one of my favorite foods," she says. "My mom thinks there's no difference between our eggs and store-bought eggs, but I think they're better. We know where they come from."

About 45 minutes later when their dad returned we headed for the hay field where their granddad, Tim, was already busy windowing hay. Jeff fired up the tractor and began baling. By now, two-and-a-half year old Wyatt had joined the farm tour. They all accompanied me as I roamed about the hay field shooting photos and visiting.

All were more than happy to be out in the field where their dad and granddad were work-

ing. Not that they didn't want to be home with mom, but what farm kid wouldn't want to be out in the open air and clear blue sky even if the temperature was approaching 100 degrees?

By the way, before we left to go to the hay field, Emma took me inside to meet the latest member of the family, baby Wade. As she took the tiny child from her mother and gently cradled her youngest brother in her arms a smile spread across her face.

"He's pretty fun," Emma told me keeping her eyes glued on little Wade. "I've always liked babies from the time my little sister, Annie, was born. I especially like babies when they have their eyes open because they seem like they're listening."

Out of the mouths of babes come pearls of wisdom.

*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.*

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