



Other Viewpoints

Non-residents export tax dollars

Many people are rankled by the thought of people whose salaries are paid with Kansas taxpayers' money but who live and pay taxes in an adjoining state.

Several solutions come to mind. One is not to think about it.

Someone – we're not sure who – couldn't stop thinking about it and commissioned the Legislative Post Audit office to do a study. After the study, the audit staff concluded Kansas is losing \$2 million to surrounding states because of nonresident state employees.

The solution suggested by the auditors was implementation and enforcement of a residency requirement for future hires. If new employees want to work for Kansas state government, they would have to live in Kansas.

The scenario was familiar to H.L. Mencken who once wrote, "For every complex problem, there is a solution that is simple, neat and wrong."

Maybe we're more conscious of the problems with a residency law here in Topeka than other Kansans are. We experienced the problems years ago when the Topeka city government imposed a requirement that city employees live in the city. The city's labor unions fought it for years and finally got a sympathetic city council to repeal the law.

One of the problems was enforcement. Some employees found creative ways around it. There were cases of city employees having their mail sent to the home of a relative in Topeka and even registering to vote at the relative's address, even though they went "home" every night outside the city limits.

Governmental administrators insist that a residency requirement hinders their ability to hire the best candidates for some of their jobs. One is Andy Tompkins, president and chief executive officer of the Board of Regents. His job involves staffing not only the six state universities with high quality staff, but also the University of Kansas Medical Center, just this side of the Missouri state line.

That is a significant factor. Of the 3,600 Kansas state employees living outside the state, 1,500 are regent institution employees, and about half of those are at the medical school.

Kansas state Sen. Laura Kelly raised another concern this week. "If we were to implement something like this, it would take all of 30 minutes for Missouri to do something like this," Kelly said.

The number of Kansans working in Missouri is believed to outnumber Missourians working in Kansas.

There are a number of personal scenarios that make such a policy seem unnecessarily harsh. What about a wife working on one side of a state line and the husband on the other side?

What about the couple who don't want to move away from the historic home of one of their ancestors?

Kansas legislators need to consider two things. (1) Whether this is a big enough problem that a solution is needed, and if so (2) Are there better solutions?

We have one to propose. Many states authorize cities to impose an earning tax, which is a special local income tax based on where a person earns the income rather than where the person lives. One benefit is that it solves more than just the issue of public employees. It also asks everyone who works in a city to contribute something toward the costs of city services they received during their working hours.

— The Topeka Capital-Journal, via the Associated Press



Start in printing business gradual

Some people might be surprised to hear that I didn't start school to become a nurse until I was 40. Actually, my first job after I married was working for Bill and Arlene James, owners of Prairie Printers Inc. in Colby.

In 1965, when Linda, my youngest child, started to day care, Bill hired me part time to help put together booklets they were printing for the Thomas County Historical Society and to also do a little artwork. It wasn't long after I started working there that I got the urge to write.

I brought in some of the things I had written – I was always writing something – and showed them to Bill. That was when he hired me to be a reporter for Colby's second newspaper, the *Prairie Drummer*. Bill was editor and publisher of that paper. Colby's other paper, of course, was the *Free Press*.

I never had any training as a writer; all of my classes at the college were in art. Bill, a former journalism teacher at Colby High School, actually had to teach me to be a reporter. When I finished writing a story, I would take it in and put it on Bill's desk so he could edit it before it went to the typist. In those days, after a reporter wrote a story, it had to be typed up in column form and pasted on the paper before the paper could be printed. There was no such thing as a computer at that time.

Each day when Linda got out of preschool, if I wasn't quite finished with my work, I'd pick her up and take her to work with me. She would sit at the empty desk next to me and type on a typewriter.

Sheila Lunsway hadn't been hired yet as the second reporter, so usually no one was at that desk. Even at the age of 4, Linda was very proficient at putting paper in the typewriter, winding it into the machine and removing it when the paper was filled with her typing. Since she



Marj Brown

• Marj's Snippets

noticed what I did with my stories, she would also take her papers in and lay them on Bill's desk.

Bill would, very patiently, make some marks on her papers and return them to Linda's desk saying, "Those were very good," as he patted her on the head. I have often wondered if that's what whetted her appetite for anything having to do with office machines. She now works at Citizen's Medical Center in the Information Systems Department and types on a computer most of the day.

I think I worked for Bill and Arlene for 11 or 12 years before they finally sold the paper and moved back to Bill's home state of Arkansas. That was a great loss to me. I not only lost the world's greatest boss and teacher, but also Arlene. She was like a substitute mother to me. My mom and step-dad, Florence and Bob Richard, had moved to Colorado since all of their children were grown and married. Arlene was a great friend, always willing to patiently listen to all of my problems.

After Bill died on Christmas Eve 1997, Arlene sent me several of the little paperback booklets we printed about the history of Colby. She also sent some of the stories Bill had written about his childhood in Arkansas. One of those Colby books told the history of the Cooper Hotel, one of the first businesses built here.

I was particularly interested because Mom

and Bob were cooks at the Cooper Hotel Coffee Shop for a couple of years when Clay Davis was managing it for Willard Cooper.

I was a junior or senior in high school at that time and often helped out when they served a banquet in the hotel's basement ballroom. I actually worked at Bellamy's Drugstore after school each day also. In fact, all of my family: my older sister, Shirley (Williams) Hankins; younger sister, Ann (Williams) Rogers; brother, Dick Williams; step-sisters, Vicky (Richard) Rhychlik and Dixie (Richard) Leddon; and step-brother, David Richard, all helped out there at one time or another. Mom and Bob eventually quit the coffee shop to open their place, Richard's Café, where Lyle's Body Shop is now.

The information I am going to write about the Cooper Hotel is from the story written by Bill James and Vern Dimmit and published by Prairie Printers in 1973. Permission to use the information has been given for me by Arlene James.

The hotel story is rather a long one and quite involved, so I will be telling it in my next three columns. Be sure to look for it.

I would like to thank all of those who have sent letters and called me to tell me that they like my columns. Writers often wonder if anyone actually reads what they write, so it is reassuring to know that my stories are appreciated. If anyone would like to e-mail me, my address is marj-jimbrown@st-tel.net. Thanks again. — Marj

Marj Brown has lived in Colby for 62 years and has spent a good deal of that time writing about people and places here. She says it's one of her favorite things to do.

Water bills designed to preserve aquifer

Speaking in the heart of irrigation country and the Ogallala Aquifer region, Gov. Sam Brownback signed two bills in southwestern Kansas last week that are intended to lengthen the life of this region's water resources.

Brownback signed the bills last Monday at Garden City High School while students, community leaders, farm-organization members and legislators watched.

The bills were historic because they mark a change in how water-rights holders will use their water in the future, particularly in the Ogallala Aquifer. This aquifer, which covers parts of western Kansas, is one of the world's largest. It underlies parts of eight states: Kansas, Colorado, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, South Dakota and Wyoming.

The High Plains region relies on the Ogallala for water, but this finite resource has been depleted by years of extensive irrigation.

One bill for now applies only to areas of the state closed to water appropriation, that is, where use is so heavy no further wells or irrigation permits are allowed. It partly repeals a 1945 law that required farmers to use their water each year under the so-called use-it-or-lose-it doctrine. The other bill gives rights holders more flexibility in how they use their water each year.

Brownback said he believes it will allow for more water usage in dry years, with an eye toward conservation in wet years. Both measures were part of the agenda he outlined in January



John Schlageck

• Insights

Kansas Farm Bureau

for the 2012 legislative session.

"I believe we should feel good about these measures that will help extend the life of our state's water resources," the Kansas governor said. "The people who use water in this region of Kansas are passionate about water, and they understand we don't have a future without it."

Stanton County farmer Jim Sipes, who attended the signing ceremony, says these two bills are the culmination of something farmers and irrigators have been trying to get in western Kansas for a long time.

"For those of us who do not use our water through irrigation anymore," he said, "it gives us the flexibility to continue to conserve the water without having to figure out ways to keep this water right viable now that use-it-or-lose-it for our closed appropriation areas has been repealed.

"The combination of these two bills will give producers who want to irrigate the ability to do so while getting the most use of that water and benefiting the state and our crop producers."

Joining the governor for the bill signing was

Ogallala Aquifer Advisory Committee chair Gary Harshberger, who farms in southwest Kansas. Harshberger said he believes these measures will help move "the culture from one of consumption to one of water conservation."

Additional water-related measures continue to march through the process. Farm organizations, including Kansas Farm Bureau testified recently in support of separate House-passed measures allowing neighboring farmers to devise their own groundwater management, the dividing of water rights, water banking and an irrigation transition assistance plan.

Anticipation is high for the passage of a law allowing Local Enhancement Management Area plans, which would promote local control for irrigators. These plans would call for reductions of water use, and if supported by the Groundwater Management District, have corrective measures that address conservation and are approved by the state water engineer.

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.

We encourage comments on opinions expressed on this page. Mail them to the *Colby Free Press*, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701, or e-mail colby.editor @ nwkansas.com.

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Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

