



Free Press Viewpoint

Redistricting fight beyond reasonable

The Kansas House of Representatives was set this week to make one more stab at doing something the Legislature should have had first on its agenda all session: draw a redistricting map that can pass both houses and become law.

Redistricting is required every 10 years, after the federal census, to balance the population in districts from the U.S. House to the state Legislature and even, sometimes, the county commission and city council.

The practice was always expected, but not always performed, until the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the "one man, one vote" case prompted by a Kansas lawsuit. Forces led by The Hutchinson News sued to force reapportionment of the Legislature, especially the House. Before that, districts had varying populations and each of the 105 counties was guaranteed at least one of the 125 House seats, leaving only 20 to distribute to high-population areas.

This year, Colby might wind up in a six-county House district and the Senate district for northwest Kansas could hit 20 counties, or about one-fifth of the state's area.

While many have predicted the issue will wind up in court, that shouldn't happen. The Legislature should get its stuff together and adopt a reasonable compromise map, one that at least makes our Senate district more or less square and doesn't attempt to protect incumbents.

Unfortunately, the fight to control the Senate has gotten in the way of reasonableness.

Today, "moderate" Republicans, generally supporters of bigger government and more spending, control the Senate as they

Conservatives, who generally want less spending, smaller government and more control on social issues such as abortion, now run the House. They and their backers, including the state Chamber of Commerce and it's political action committee, want control of the Senate, too.

The state Chamber – don't blame your local Chamber for this; the state group is entirely independent – recruited about eight opponents, including five House members, for supposedly vulnerable moderate senators. It's raising money for their campaigns and spoiling for a fight.

The incumbent leadership tried to head this challenge off by drawing district lines that put some challengers outside the districts they've filed in.

Is that dirty pool or smart politics? Partly, at least, the answer depends on whether it's your ox that's being gored. Nevertheless, this fight should not be allowed to derail the reapportionment process.

A fair and just map can and should be drawn; then let the voters decide who gets the seats. Conservatives in both houses need to keep from meddling with district lines to their advan-

Our guess is the Chamber's assault won't be as effective as the liberals fear, but if it is, then the will of the voters will

And whatever else happens, we must be sure to keep the huge 40th District covering the northwest as compact as possible. That's only decent and right. – Steve Haynes

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Wildlife abounds on road to Georgia

There's a lot of snakes, lizards and dead armadillos between Kansas and Georgia.

Having just driven four days to get to see our daughters, son-in-laws and granddaughter, Steve and I got to see a lot of the South – and its wild and tame life.

We headed out from Oberlin on Tuesday, went through Kansas (long drive), Missouri (just a corner) and spent the night in Clarksville, Ark. The next day, we buzzed through Louisiana and on into Mississippi, down to the delta area, where we were to spend the night with friends Bill and Amy Jacobs.

We stopped for a short time just over the Mississippi line for a dose of history, touring part of the Vicksburg battlefield. It's so calm and peaceful today, with giant trees, hundreds of monuments – large and small – and joggers scene of so much death and destruction nearly 150 years ago.

From Vicksburg, we continued on to Amy and Bill's, to be met at the front door by their three dogs. That's a lot of barking, since the two big ones took their watchdog duties seri-

We had a great time and were treated to some that the little guys were taunting them. great animal stories - like the seven-foot 'gator that they found swimming in the pond out rel which got into a fight behind their newspaback. They called for help on that one, but Bill per office. Both lost, it seems, but the animal



Cynthia Haynes

Open Season

was going to have to deal with the dead snake clogging up a drainage tube down by their pool. The snake had apparently gotten stuck and died in the tube and the part-time gardener couldn't get him out. Instead of removing the snake, he had dug down and severed a pipe from the outdoor watering system. Finally, he

Bill was not looking forward to trying to figon the paths. It's hard to imagine that it was the ure out how to remove the snake, which was half in and half out of the pipe, and then repairing the water system. While we were looking over the problem,

> we also watched dozens of little lizards play on the clay pots and fence posts around the backyard. I love lizards, but the dogs seemed to think

Amy told us the story of the snake and squir-

control officer who was called to remove them refused to get out of his car. He was pathologically afraid of snakes, she said, and that cost

Opinion

I just figured it was a good thing that the guys who came to remove the 'gator didn't have the same problem. After spending the night with the Jacobses,

we headed for Alabama, where we met up with John Stevenson, his two dogs, cat, birds and donkey. John lives on five acres in Roanoke, Ala. He and his crew welcomed us with southern bar-

becue and a lot more barking. We left on Friday to the waving of hands and tails.

On the way, we spotted the usual road kill but added armadillos to what we usually see in Kansas. It would be fun to see one of these funny-looking little tanks in its natural, living state. However, they're nocturnal, I'm told, and seldom seen unless they're crossing the

And apparently, they're not very good at

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Postal Service still faces political battle

National Newspaper Association

Now that the Senate has passed a bill, S 1789, to reform the ailing U.S. Postal Service, critics are trying to disable the bill on its way to the House of Representatives. Business Week recently catalogued unhappy stakeholders, including postal unions, postal management and some Republicans who wrongly think the bill will burden taxpayers.

Rep. Darrell Issa, R-CA, whose own bill awaits action in the House, blasted "special interests." But Business Week says, "Considering how many people are unhappy with the bill, it isn't clear which special interests Issa is referring to.'

Some see the Senate bill as the inevitable product of the sausage machine. But, neither a budget buster nor processed meat, it expresses a better vision of the Postal Service.

If you consider that survival of the service means maintaining the circulatory system for a \$1.1 trillion mailing industry – in other words, making sure cash, greeting cards, packages and newspapers and magazines arrive on time – the Senate bill is good medicine.

Consider some of the alternative fixes:

Issa's bill would let the service end Saturday delivery, close half the mail processing centers and thousands of post offices and put a board of political appointees in charge. This board would be expected to trim workers' benefits and wages and direct the Postmaster General to favor profit over service.

At the other extreme might be Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-VT, who wanted to keep everything open. Labor unions backing him say the Postal Service will heal as the economy heals. Then there is the White House: raise postage rates.

For Sens. Susan Collins, R-ME, and Joe Lieberman, I-CT, neither extreme is suited to long-term survival of Postal Service.

To many experts, Issa's approach is likely to frighten away businesses that mail. The Lieberman-Collins group agrees that the service needs a more flexible, less costly workforce. It keeps mail flowing through today's network

while cost-cutting is underway. For example, the service could end Saturday mail delivery in two years, but only if it has taken other big steps toward financial viability. The bill would allow the closing of postal plants now, if the service preserves local mail delivery speed.

Is this bill the product of compromise or of a different vision?

Consider:

• The Postal Service's plant-closing plan is based on a desire to amass more mail at automated urban centers, where costly machines sit idle much of the day. To optimize machines, the service would haul mail hundreds of miles. But this hauling would slow the mail stream, particularly in small towns and rural areas far from mail plants. It would create a set of second-class citizens who get and send mail more slowly than urban dwellers. It will also hamper smaller communities' economic development.

• Many Americans say they wouldn't miss Saturday mail. But the service builds its system around senders, not receivers. Who would be hurt by a five-day delivery regime? Anyone who depends on timely mail delivery. Shutting down the system two days a week - three when Monday holidays occur - would create delays, according to the Postal Regulatory Commission. Then there are those who need prescriptions delivered when they are at home, smalltown citizens who get the newspaper by mail and businesses needing six-day cash flows.

- · Closing small post offices seems a nobrainer to city dwellers who spot those oneroom storefronts at the roadside. Surely not all are needed. But rather than closing them entirely, the Postal Service could have circuitrider postmasters to open them a few hours a day. That would be affordable if worker benefits are brought into line with the private sector. For those towns, a circuit rider could continue their links to the world.
- The Congressional Budget Office says the Senate bill would add \$33.6 billion to the federal deficit. But postage-payers, not taxpayers, carry that burden. Taxpayers face a liability as the funder-of-last-resort only if postage revenues dry up – which is more likely to happen

if the mail slows to a crawl.

Finally, members of Congress may differ on how they see the U.S. Postal Service. Is it a corporation? Is it a government agency responsible for binding the nation together?

It's neither; it is a Government-Sponsored Enterprise, or GSE, more like Fannie Mae than IBM or the Defense Department. It uses business tools to carry out a public mission. And it has enormous power in the marketplace.

Consider, for example, its new Every Door Direct Mail program, which directly competes with private businesses. Members of Congress who mistakenly see postal reform as an exercise in deregulating a company may actually unleash a powerful federal agency, while those who look to raising postage so generous benefits can continue could pull the plug on the economic engine that keeps jobs alive.

It's not compromise that is needed, but a clear-eyed vision based on a full understanding of the needs of all the agency serves. Postal management today has an impossible task, being expected to accomplish business goals without the cost-control tools businesses have. yet expected to achieve government goals without federal support.

Congress owns this confusion. Only Congress can fix it. It will continue to need to fine-tune its solutions as communications cultures change. No bill passed today will avoid the need for legislation in the future. Neither "deregulating" the service nor hiking rates will get the system to stability. Nor will abrupt and disruptive approaches to labor costs.

Sens. Collins and Lieberman, along with cosponsors Tom Carper, D-DE, and Scott Brown. R-MA, have devoted endless hours to understanding the challenge and to crafting the next steps toward fixing the Postal Service. Their approach deserves considerably more respect than it is getting.

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