

## Other Viewpoints

# GOP split impacts new representatives

A pair of newcomers to the Kansas Statehouse will encounter a changing landscape in state government. Garden City's John Doll – the new Kansas House representative for District 123 covering most of Garden City – and Russ Jennings of Lakin, representative for the 122nd of Kearny, Hamilton and Greeley counties, much of rural Finney County and a small part of Garden City, will join a state legislature now tipped in favor of an ultra-conservative Republican faction headed by Gov. Sam Brownback.

Because of that shift, there's cause to wonder if more moderate GOP legislators – Doll and Jennings included – stand a chance of being heard.

They're entering the Statehouse at a complicated time thanks to risky, massive tax-cut legislation from the last session that threatens to plunge the state deep into debt, drive up property taxes and undermine funding for education, transportation and other services.

That plan made it to the governor's desk thanks to diabolical maneuvering by conservative GOP leadership. After the recent election saw many moderate Republicans ousted in favor of conservatives, Brownback will have an even easier time pushing through his agenda.

And that is a disturbing notion. Some Kansans may not mind giving control of state government to a single faction, but others understandably want balance in government. They expect their representatives to consider issues on their own merit, and support what's best for their districts.

We'd expect as much from Doll and Jennings.

Doll, a former educator and business owner, and Jennings, with a long run of public service centering on law enforcement and juvenile justice, both promise to be strong advocates for education and its potential to power economic growth and prosperity in southwest Kansas.

Even though it may seem efforts of moderates won't matter in a Legislature dominated by conservatives with their own agenda, a balance in discourse will be more important than ever.

There will be much to debate and question moving forward. Outnumbered as they may be, moderate voices must be heard.

We need Doll and Jennings to help contribute as much as they work to truly represent the interests of their districts.

– *The Garden City Telegram, via the Associated Press*



# Too early to predict wheat crop

Travel anywhere in the Sunflower State and people will tell you it's dry. It's so dry the U.S. Department of Agriculture declared last week that all but one of the 105 Kansas counties is in a drought disaster. This clears the way for farmers and ranchers to seek low-interest emergency loans.

While many areas of the state have been blessed with eight to 10 inches of snow, the winter wheat crop still needs moisture. Limited moisture in most areas of Kansas caused the winter wheat condition to decline through December.

As of the first of the year, 9 percent of the crop was rated very poor, 22 percent poor, 45 percent fair, 23 percent good and 1 percent excellent, according to Kansas Ag Statistics.

Estimates place the number of wheat acres that did not germinate between 5 and 10 percent. Some folks believe it may be less than 2 percent; however, those acres will almost certainly produce approximately 65 percent of a normal yield. And nearly every Kansas farmer knows of someone who has a field that didn't come up.

Many parts of the state received a quarter to half inch of rain Jan. 10. Any moisture in January is considered a bonus.

Significant rainfalls essential for the wellbeing of winter wheat in Kansas generally fall in February and March. Rain or snow before or after this two-month period does not impact wheat as much.

"We can talk about how dry it is now, but what if we receive a foot of snow the beginning of February?" asks Mark Nelson, Kansas



**John Schlageck**

• Insights  
Kansas Farm Bureau

Farm Bureau commodities director. "And let's say this snow just sits on this wheat crop across the state for the next two months. Then March is nice and we receive April showers. All this wheat that has been dry up to this point – well it could make 60, 70, 80 bushels per acre next harvest."

And those farmers whose crop didn't come up? Their wheat harvest may make 50 bushels per acre and they'll say, "Good God. I didn't know she'd do this."

On the flip side, if it remains dry, Kansas farmers could harvest a 270 million bushel wheat crop, Nelson says. Right now, with average yields, Kansas is looking at the potential for a 355 million bushel crop.

In January most wheat growers remain lodged in a kind of limbo. They're busy planning, marketing and oftentimes worrying about the lack of moisture on their wheat crop. And rightly so. The long-range forecast is dry through February and March.

"No moisture in February and March could add up to that 100 million bushel shortfall I was talking about," Nelson says. "There's no subsoil moisture anywhere in Kansas."

Still, it's too early to say how the 2013 wheat crop will pan out. Harvest is nearly six months in the future.

In Kansas, it's often said the wheat crop lives from hand to mouth. It's hanging in there right now. If it receives a little more rain and some snow for cover protection it could make a good crop yet.

"We can chicken scratch along, and if everybody grows a bunch of 35 to 40 bushel wheat and we end up with 335 million bushels across the state next harvest, this may be disappointing but it's far from a disaster," Nelson says. "If this scenario plays out, what I'm worried to death about are the row crops we plant in spring. Where will they find the moisture?"

Nelson isn't alone; more than one irrigator I've spoken to this winter is concerned with this possibility. Their biggest worry during this relatively slow time in January is the fear that February and March will not provide needed moisture.

"The Kansas wheat crop will continue to mosey along," Nelson says. "It's too early to worry too much about this crop. Barring weather disasters, the wheat crop has a relatively good shot. We're behind the eight-ball however, when we look to the future and our corn, milo and soybeans this spring if it remains dry."

*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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# Cell block classrooms not a good answer

We have gone down this road before.

On April 20, 1999, at Columbine High School near Denver, two students killed 12 other students and a teacher before committing suicide. Immediately afterwards, schools across America increased security.

I visited student teachers at both rural and city schools in Kansas and the lockdown was palpable. Entrance to schools was restricted to the front door. All other exits were locked against outside entry. Some schools moved the secretary's office so she could observe the entrance. Identity badges were enforced for staff and visitors (although in small schools, all of the staff knew each other). Locked doors and identity checks made the school atmosphere closer to that of a prison.

But a few schools in Kansas have many separate buildings where students must pass outside to other classes. Their teachers were vigilant and visibly present during class period changes, but there was no attempt to lock the school. And the atmosphere was much better. More smiles. More laughter.

Over 12 years after Columbine, most Kansas schools have returned to some level of normalcy. Few have the feel of a prison.

Schools have been, are, and will remain the safest place for a school-age child to be.

But after the Connecticut school shootings, alarmists are calling for a return to prison-like buildings and a siege mentality.

The charge that schools are selected because they are undefended "soft targets" is blatantly wrong. Very few school shooters walk away alive; surviving is not their intent. They have attacked larger schools with security officers – the Columbine guard actually exchanged gun-



**John Richard Schrock**

• Education Frontlines

fire during that assault.

Those who would arm teachers and administrators underestimate the rigorous training needed by police and military who must sometimes use lethal force. Not only are these professionals continually trained, but they are equipped with body armor and are clearly labeled when on scene. Arming civilians increases the risk of tragedy; police are unlikely to mistakenly shoot a schoolchild – but an armed adult is another matter.

Nor is killing a part of the professional personality needed by a teacher. We know that a portion of our police and military people who have used lethal force – no matter how strong they are – have difficulty living with it. And they decided to enter a profession that involves the potential for lethal force.

Teachers choose to enter a profession that nurtures. There are 3,725,000 U.S. teachers working in the safest environment in society. To turn schools into armed garrisons is simply wrong. Anyone with such a siege mentality has been watching too many "Die Hard" movies and "Gunsmoke" reruns.

As much as we grieve for the little souls lost that day in Connecticut, it is a sad fact that on average over 17 people die every day from gun violence in America. If we put them together

in one place, America would see a Newtown-scale disaster each and every day. But spread across the country in smaller events, we don't notice the daily death toll. Compared to modern developed countries in Europe and Asia, the U.S. is by far the most dangerous.

The National Rifle Association is correct when it says "guns don't kill." It is people, not always deranged, who have easy access to substantial firepower, who kill people in large numbers. In an aberrant non-U.S. mass shooting, right-wing extremist Anders Behring Breivik killed 77 young adults in Norway on July 22, 2011 – and he was found to be sane.

And in a tragedy eerily parallel to the Connecticut shooting, on Dec. 14, 2012, a Chinese man stabbed 22 students at a school in Gaungshan, Henan. But not one child died.

On Oct. 2, 2006, 10 Amish girls at the West Nickel Mines School in Pennsylvania were shot and five died. What school could be more vulnerable than an Amish school? Such killing had never happened before at an Amish school – nor has it happened since. The Amish built another school and they continue on without guns and refuse to live in fear.

*John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.*

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. Opinions do not necessarily reflect those of the Free Press, its staff or the owners.

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