



## Free Press Viewpoint

### 'Kansas dictator' hasn't materialized

Editorialists wailed and gnashed their teeth. Kansas, they said, could become a dictatorship when Gov. Sam Brownback got his friends in control of both houses of the Legislature. He'd be able to pass any bill he wanted, and that would be too much power for any one man. The governor's agenda would have "smooth sailing" during the 2013 session, one "expert" predicted. Ha! Anyone who thought that might happen hasn't spent much time around legislatures or politics. There's a dynamic that makes senators and representatives independent from the governor, and one house poles apart from the other, no matter who's in office.

In fact, that's what the Founding Fathers hoped for when they created our three-part government, featuring executive, judicial and legislative branches sharing power in a rough balance.

No branch completely trusts the other, each is jealous of its independence and all fear one of the others might become too powerful. Each house of a legislature eyes the other with suspicion, casting a wary eye on the other side.

That's just the way things are, even when all three are run by members of the same party and even when, as the governor and his allies did last fall, one group becomes more powerful and gangs up on another.

The governor and other conservatives campaigned successfully to oust liberal Republican senators who blocked many of Mr. Brownback's plans in the Senate. The old Senate leadership was ousted, replaced by a group closer to the governor's way of thinking. The Democrats, as usual in Kansas, were left with too few votes to count much.

So, this year, everyone expected great (or terrible) things from a new conservative alliance dominating the Statehouse. It never works that way, though.

The governor and many legislators saw eye to eye on many things, and his new allies in the Senate backed his plan to hold onto much of the remaining state spending while continuing to cut income taxes. Cuts would be paid for by retaining a 1-cent increase on the state sales tax passed under Gov. Mark Parkinson which otherwise would have expired next year.

Some reporters billed this as a \$700-million tax increase, though tax rates were going down, not up. The House balked, though, mostly because conservatives there felt they have made a promise to let the sales tax go down.

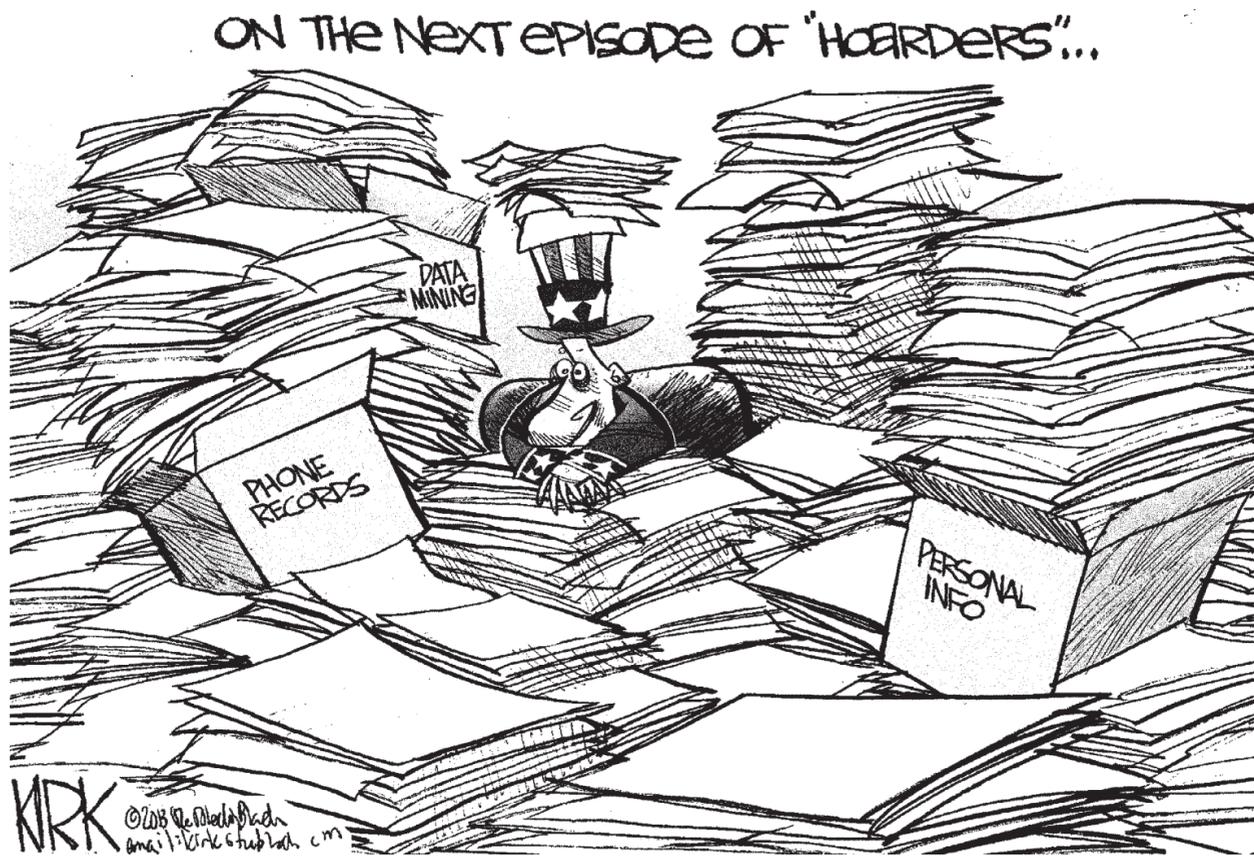
The deadlock left the session incomplete as the 80-day goal for adjournment leaders had announced came and went. Soon, the 90-day limit set by law passed. Still no agreement.

Finally the houses compromised, shaving the sales tax to 6.15 percent and setting a schedule for further income-tax cuts. So much for the governor's unlimited power.

Will Kansas be better off for the changes pushed by Gov. Brownback? Only time will tell. But for sure, we're in no danger of him becoming some sort of all-powerful dictator.

The system just won't allow that.

— Steve Haynes



## Lessons from the land endure

For Kansans June, July and August are months when some of us return to our roots and visit family in rural communities across the state. Some go back to help with wheat harvest, others go home to spend time visiting with friends they have grown up with. For all it's a time to reflect and remember.

Many of us are one or even two generations removed from the farm but we still remember fondly our early years. A friend once told me, remembering our early life on the farm is an important part of saying good-bye.

For me summertime meant harvest. It still does.

I accompanied my dad and Uncle Bernie to the harvest fields when I was eight years old. I couldn't wait to see those monster machines chew through the golden waves of grain.

By the time I was a teenager, I was a regular member of the harvest crew. My responsibility was to level off the load in the back of one of our International Harvester trucks. In between unloading, a big handful of wheat — thoroughly chewed without swallowing — made a pretty big wad of gum. Not much flavor but one heck'va chew.

Mom brought meals to the field in the family car and we had the chance to eat her wonderful home cooking while sitting on the tailgate of our pickup truck. What a treat.

The summer after I finished the fifth grade, I started helping dad one-way plow our summer fallow ground. It took me another couple years before I could pull this heavy cultivating tool out of the ground, before hydraulic cylinders.

Other things I remember — looking down a



**John Schlageck**

• Insights  
Kansas Farm Bureau

badger's hole and seeing the critter looking back up at me — learning to hunt the wily ring-neck pheasant with our Irish setter, Red, something I still enjoy today — looking to the westward sky and watching the sun paint a masterpiece at the close of day — listening to the melodious meadowlark — darting through the summer grass during hot summer nights — and catching fireflies to make a lantern in one of Mom's empty Mason jars.

Dad always watched the weather from our picture window on the west side of our house. You could easily see the Menlo elevator nine miles to the west across the pancake-flat High Plains prairie. I'd help him watch, hope and pray that parched land would receive rain and crop-crushing storms would skip our land.

Without question the greatest lesson we can learn from the land is hope. Crops and a bountiful harvest are never guaranteed. Drought always threatened my dad's crops. Too much rain meant harvest delays or crop-choking weeds. Thunderstorms — the likes seen nowhere else in the world — often carried with them damaging winds and hail that could level a field of wheat in minutes.

The summer of my junior year at Sheridan

Community High School, such a storm wiped out our wheat crop. Dad rode in the combine cab with me as we entered one field a few days later. One round later we both looked back in the bin and saw less than a fourth of it filled. It should have been full halfway around.

After we completed the first round, Dad told me to let him off and he left the field. As he walked away, I saw him dry his eyes. He couldn't stand to see the crop he'd work so hard to grow hailed into the ground.

Two and a half months later on Sept. 15 — he always started wheat seeding then — we were out in our fields planting for the next year. He always had hope.

I learned at an early age that hope is not wishful thinking of harvest success. Rather, hope is planning and planting seeds. For some, harvest may not occur every year, but the seeds of hope must be planted if there is even the thought of a next year's harvest.

There are many other memories I have of growing up on a farm, too numerous to mention in this column. As I continue to work with farmers, I am reminded that they continue to love and learn from their land. Those of us who could not stay on the land, cherish the time we spent there. We have benefited from this experience — the lessons learned on the land will nourish us wherever we are planted.

*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.*

## Universal identity cards have benefits

Every person in China carries an official government-issued photo identification card. As a foreign visitor, my passport serves as my official photo ID.

Many countries require every citizen to have an official government-issued photo identification. But most Americans are unaware of its many benefits.

China is a country with nearly five times the U.S. population. You can imagine how many people have the exact same name. With Li and Chen being the equivalent of our Smith and Jones, the cases of full duplicate names are at least five times greater in China.

Because many folks have the same name, our government issues unique numbers to keep social security accounts separate. All but a few survivalists accept this because we all benefit.

That social security number was soon used by universities for student identifications and for other purposes before legislators enacted restrictions due to concerns over identity theft.

Nevertheless, look in your billfold or purse and you will find a fistful of cards with numbers on them. Our library, our credit card companies, our medical insurance and many other agencies all try to keep us separated.

Somehow we have the feeling that these "identity cards" and their numbers are acceptable because we voluntarily chose to have them. Even a government-issued driver license with photo is by our choice because driving is a privilege, not a right. If we choose, we can refuse to have any of these and "live off of the grid" — except for that social security number (we want the money).

But when our handful of cards are stolen, we are vulnerable because most lack a photo.



**John Richard Schrock**

• In the Public Good

The cost and trouble of investigating identity theft, and resuming our activities, is shared by a variety of businesses and agencies. But as I visit with colleagues here in a country with a government-issued photo identification, their problem with identity theft appears to be far less than ours.

Everyone in China gets a photo identification issued shortly after birth. Getting one is not a burden any more than getting our U.S. social security number is a burden. For those who are poor or handicapped, family and friends and even the local authorities take extra effort to make sure everyone has an ID.

Just as our bank accounts are tagged with our social security number, their identification numbers trace the flow of money and makes fraud and corruption more difficult.

Another benefit is that it prevents "scalping" of tickets. We have almost no way to prevent scalpers from buying up tickets and reselling them at outrageous profits. But when you purchase a train or plane ticket in China, you must submit your identification, and that number will be on your ticket. When the conductor checks your ticket on the train, that number must match your identification. We are now doing this at our airports.

Do they really confirm IDs in China? Yes

they do. I first visited Chongqing in 2008 when airline tickets were still on paper and prior flight confirmation was still required. Landing early, I used the opportunity to confirm my outbound flight. I handed my papers to the airline agent — who wrote down the wrong number. When I returned to fly out several days later, my ticket and my passport number did not match. And I was going nowhere. At an impasse and needing to leave, I asked if I could buy another ticket. (I knew there would be one empty seat: mine!) When I handed them my credit card, they realized that was the number that had been written in the identification line and — it being their mistake — I could fly.

Kansans are skeptical about government IDs. Our voter identification law requires an official photo identification for voting. Advocates want to prevent voter fraud. Opponents charge that this is just one way to suppress poor and minority voters.

This is a case where I agree that a government-issued photo identification should be required. But for everyone, not just voters.

If supporters of voter identification laws balk at a universal photo identification requirement, then perhaps the intent of voter identification laws is suspect.

Children have a wonderful saying: "When everybody is special, nobody is special." When everyone has a government-issued photo identification, then no one is being excluded.

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

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