

# commentary

from other pens...

## Small school closure lesson of economics

**The Iola Register on shrinking schools:**  
Morland is a community in Graham County in northwest Kansas that is being forced to shut down its schools for lack of students... Others will follow, sad to say... The children should be sent to larger schools even if ways could be found to keep classrooms open in these disappearing communities. More than dollars are at stake. Students learn from other students as well from teachers and they can only learn social skills when they are in a social environment... When towns become ghost towns by sending their residents elsewhere, those who grew up in them can feel a deep sense of loss and may launch an effort to sweep back the tide and engineer a rebirth of their community... For better or worse, that pattern of development will continue until social, economic, technological and environmental developments combine to make people move away from large cities into smaller ones for the sake of their health, their sanity and their pocketbooks. Perhaps that happy new day isn't as far in the future as it now appears, but until it arrives, Kansans must deal with things as they are and turn a deaf ear to those determined to make time stand still — or turn backward in its flight — no matter what it costs.

**The Garden City Telegram on KAN-ED proposal:**  
The private sector can be counted on to do many things, but sometimes elected officials need to have the fortitude to take risks with the public's money. Such is the case with the uncertainty regarding the potential success of a high-speed network designed to give schools, colleges, universities and hospitals in Kansas access to high-speed Internet and interactive video. Kansas lawmakers in both houses signed off on the a bill to establish such a network. Called KAN-ED, it would, for example, allow students to enroll in courses taught by teachers based in distant locations... It could be a real boon to expanding educational opportunities for all Kansas children, but especially those in rural areas. Dwindling enrollments strain local school budgets and the first things to go are typically elective courses that are expensive to fund and tough to justify given their limited specialized interest... Some lawmakers appropriately worry about the cost. Others said they were concerned that the private sector was best suited to finance such a network... It's difficult for lawmakers on the state's eastern side to fully comprehend the vastness of the distance between communities west of Interstate 135. Rural in western Kansas takes a fully different scope than rural in eastern Kansas. Given the geographic challenges of over half of the state, such public investment in new technology is not only warranted, it's wise.

### Letter Policy

The Goodland Daily News encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten if possible, and should include a telephone number and, most importantly, a signature. Unsigned letters will not be published. Form letters will be rejected, as will letters deemed to be of no public interest or considered offensive. We reserve the right to edit letters for length and good taste. We encourage letters, with phone numbers, by e-mail to: <daily@nwkansas.com>.

## The Goodland Daily News

(USPS No. 222-460. ISSN 0893-0562)  
Member: Kansas Press Association  
The Associated Press  
Inland Press Association Colorado Press Association  
e-mail: **daily@nwkansas.com**



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Published daily except Saturday and Sunday and the day observed for New Year's Day, Memorial Day, Fourth of July, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day, at 1205 Main St., Goodland, Kan. 67735.  
Periodicals postage paid at Goodland, Kan. 67735; entered at the Goodland, Kan., Post Office under the Act of Congress of March 8, 1878.  
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Goodland Daily News, 1205 Main St., Goodland, Kan. 67735.  
TELEPHONE: (785) 899-2338. Editorial e-mail: daily@nwkansas.com. Advertising questions can be sent to: gdnadv@nwkansas.com  
**The Goodland Daily News** assumes no liability for mistakes or omissions in advertising or failure to publish beyond the actual cost of the ad.  
SUBSCRIPTIONS: In Sherman County and adjacent counties: three months, \$22; six months, \$38; 12 months, \$72. By mail in Kansas, Colorado: three months, \$ 28; six months, \$50; 12 months, \$95. (All tax included.) Out of area, weekly mailing of five issues: three months, \$25; six months, \$40; 12 months, \$75.

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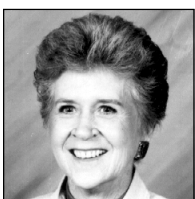
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## There are many ways to help those in need

I don't know about you, but I know there are people who need help. We Americans are so blessed. We have so much. Even the poorest among us has more than many in other nations. Yet, we have come somehow to believe that the government can take care of all needs, that money is the cure-all of any problem. We fool ourselves into thinking that only then, with all the problems solved, can we give and receive love. Each of us needs to examine our expectations and also our examples of love. There are many more ways of showing love than financially, even though sometimes that is appropriate. This story is by Michel Roux in Giving Back: "A Christian gives much, often and anonymously: Don't speak about your giving, and don't think when you give. Just give, both with your means and with your heart. And give spontane-



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• commentary

ously. Real charity can happen at any moment in life. I came to this country from France with a couple of hundred dollars in my pocket, and I started working as a dishwasher in a Houston hotel in 1964. At one point, I had to buy a car, and a coworker - someone I barely knew - offered to cosign for the loan. Was this charity? I don't think so, because he didn't give me anything material. Instead, he gave me his confidence, which was the greatest gift in the world. If you have the resources

to give away a lot of money, then by all means do so. But don't underestimate the value of PERSONAL charity." Personal charity is just as it sounds - personal. We all have abilities to help or hinder, plus the choice of how to use those abilities. Here's a quote from J.K. Rowling in Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets: "It is our choices that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities." Think about your abundance, your abilities and above all, re-evaluate your choices. You'll be happier, more productive and probably more loving. (I won't even mention probably more lovable.) Which brings me to my parting shot, put into words by Georges Courteline: "If it was necessary to tolerate in other people everything one permits in oneself, life would be unbearable."

## It is amazing to see how big government is

Walking around Washington, you get an idea of just how big the federal government is. Building height is limited to preserve the views, so there are no skyscrapers, but government buildings are big. The Agriculture Department alone occupies over four blocks. There is the old, traditional building on the Mall, and a monster called the South Building, which stretches for blocks. Sky bridges link the two. Commerce has a similar fortress on the other side of the mall. Some newer, small departments, such as Energy, occupy smaller quarters, just a block or two. But they have centuries yet to grow. The biggest of the big, the Pentagon, is across the Potomac River in Virginia. It's so massive that it's hard to recognize from the ground. You can't see more than one side from the highway, and the instantly recognizable shape is not apparent from below. The side you see is massive, though. Washington is a tourist town, and truly a people's capital. On any given day — when it's warm enough, anyway — there are thousands of Americans out touring the town, enjoying the sights, or just playing on the Mall. Americans of all colors and religions join on the broad sidewalks and vast, grassy expanse, or jam into the Smithsonian's museums, joined by visitors from around the world.



**steve  
haynes**

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But there is another side. Nothing belonging to the government is safe from terrorist attack. Metal detectors flank the entrance to every building. Guards stop each car entering a basement parking garage. One searches the trunk while another uses a mirror on a stick to check the undercarriage for bombs. Explosive sniffers and dogs are used sometimes. The FBI has class. Truck barriers lining the sidewalks and blocking the entrances to the Hoover Building are disguised as planters. Lots of planters. Big planters. Security guards patrol around the buildings in cars marked "FBI Police." House of Representatives office buildings are adequate, well-kept government buildings. You would not mistake them for anything else. House offices are cramped, staffs are small. Tunnels lead under the Mall to the Capitol, where a winding corridor takes you to the Senate side.

## Kansans plugged into Topeka by Access Kansas

By John Milburn

Associated Press Writer

TOPEKA — It's not unusual for legislators to share mail from constituents during debate. They read heartfelt sentiments from Kansans about education, health care or taxes. Not long ago, those letters were scribbled out at the kitchen table and dropped in the mail. Not anymore. Today, those letters arrive by e-mail on the House and Senate floor, instantly becoming part of the day's debate — another way the information age is transforming ties between politicians and constituents. Among the most "wired" legislators is Rep. Jim Morrison. The Colby Republican spends countless hours online each day checking e-mail, legislation and gathering other information for his House duties. Morrison, an optometrist by profession, traces his interest in technology to the 1950s when he began operating his own amateur radio. In the 1970s, he built his first computer and was even part of the same loose group of computer developers with software entrepreneur Bill Gates. "I've gone through all the growing pains along the way," Morrison said. Today, Morrison advocates putting technology in the hands of legislators and constituents. He said it makes little sense for government to be encouraging businesses to use technology but not move forward with them. "We should be using every tool available," said Morrison, who has served on numerous technology committees since being elected to the House in 1992. There are numerous signs of technology in use



Morrison

throughout the Statehouse. Each legislator has a direct connection to the Internet at his or her seat in the House and Senate. Committee rooms and meeting rooms also are wired for Internet access. Around the rotunda, legislators, lobbyists and government staff feverishly work their cellular telephones and personal data assistants, often with laptop computers slung over their shoulders or tucked under arm. House rules are more relaxed regarding the use of computers. Members frequently record their presence in the chamber, then log onto their laptops for the latest news back home or around the world. In the press area, reporters camp out for long debates with their notebook computers, often filing stories directly from the House floor through telephone lines. The Senate, however, holds close to traditions. Few legislators use their laptops on the floor, while reporters are not allowed to work from press row on computers. Lisa Counts, director of marketing for accessKansas, the state's Internet portal for online information, said the legislative site was retooled in 2000, with minor modifications this session. During the session, accessKansas gets about 10.5 million page views per month during the January through May session. That's an increase from 6.5 million page views monthly during the rest of the year. "Legislative services is by far the most popular site on the portal," Counts said.

The site is maintained by four to six accessKansas staff members, Counts said, who work with the state printers and House and Senate clerks to update the information each evening. Legislators are not alone in getting response from constituents. Gov. Bill Graves also has a Web site and receives a steady stream of e-mail. Don Brown, the governor's spokesman, said having the Internet site and e-mail capability has cut down the time it takes to get feedback from Kansans. "Instead of getting mail in two weeks, we get it in a day or two after the governor makes a policy statement," Brown said. In meeting reader demands, the Topeka Capital-Journal has jumped in full force with online reporting. Statehouse reporters are armed not just with notepads and pens but voice recorders. The audio bites are then placed on the newspaper's Web page for easy access. Jim McLean, managing editor for government and special projects, said the site is a good way for the newspaper to bring citizens to often impersonal subjects. Only the site's sports section is more popular, McLean said. "The main point is that at a time when state government is more important in our lives than ever before — and yet voter interest is going down — we want to give people a chance to plug-in and become part of the process," McLean said. While the Internet may involve more people in the process, it won't replace a deliberate democracy, Morrison said. "We won't speed up the process," he said. "Democracy, by its nature, has to be lethargic. People lose out if we move too quick."