

commentary

from our viewpoint...

Lip service won't save our rural communities

In wailing about the decline of rural communities, the role of the supposedly supportive state in killing small-town Kansas is little remarked.

The state, after all, sponsors programs to give us Pride in our towns and economic development efforts to find us new business, bring us tourists and reinvent retailing.

But by things done and things left undone, the state often encourages the decline of its small towns.

The state taxes us all to support agencies which spend most of their money, and hire most of their workers, in or near Topeka. In effect, the state transfers rural income to eastern Kansas.

Our children are drawn away from small towns to huge state universities, where they learn to love city life and become part of a culture that rejects rural values.

With one exception, the universities are in prosperous eastern Kansas towns. Fort Hays, while culturally in western Kansas, is more or less in the center of the state geographically.

Even Kansas State University, the land grant college founded to help the farmer, often seems more beholden to big agriculture than to the family farm.

Does it have to be that way?

No.

Kansas could decentralize state government.

It would be only fair to spread state offices around. The opposite has been the case, though. Offices like unemployment and the highway patrol dispatchers which once were dispersed have been centralized in the name of economy. From highways to licensing, decision making and operations have been tightly centralized.

But with modern communications, it doesn't have to be that way. State workers could process data and renew license, collect taxes and review laws in Norton, Lyons, Parsons, Oberlin, Goodland or Liberal as easily as they can in Topeka. Computers could link the whole thing together.

Tax money collected in the hinterlands could be spent there. Taxpayers in the boonies could be hired to work there.

No law of nature says that state universities with 25,000 students need to grow to 30,000. Why not trim back the giants and build half a dozen colleges the size of Fort Hays, in towns the size of Colby?

Sure, we need big research institutions like KU and K-State. The would remain the gems of the college system. But do they have to keep growing?

No.

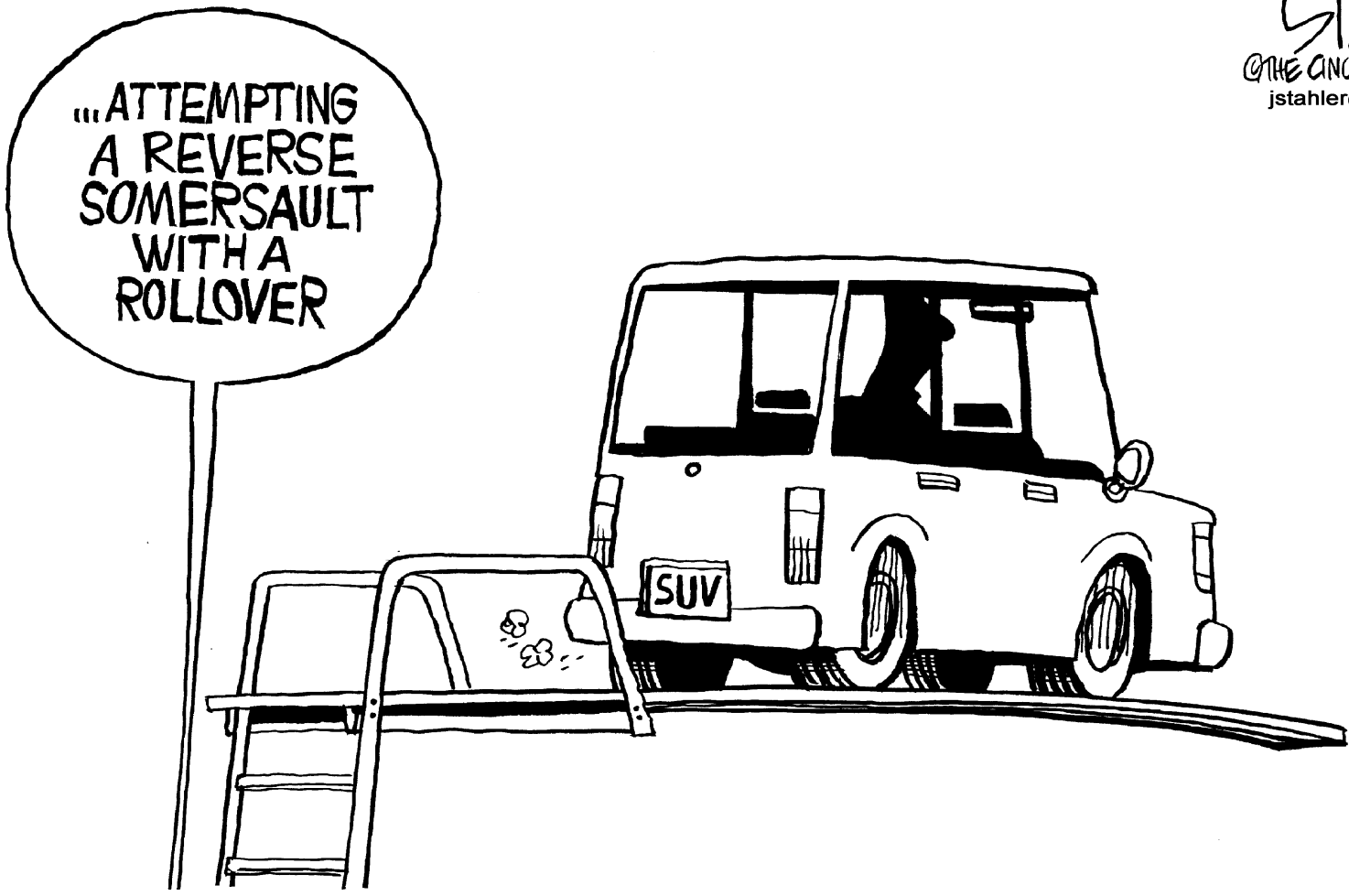
Does the state have to keep centralizing it's offices?

No, not if we don't want it to.

Kansas could be our friend out here, if we ask for something.

But generations of thinking would have to change. Decades of consolidation would have to be reversed.

Rural areas have a lot to offer, and a lot of problems to overcome. Having the state on our side, truly working to help, and not just giving lip service to rural Kansas, would be a start. — *Steve Haynes*



Family keeps missing big eruption

Yogi and Boo Boo didn't show, but we did spot Mrs. Bullwinkle last week as we made a flying trip through Yellowstone National Park.

We had never been to Yellowstone or the Tetons, and decided that since Steve had a meeting in Jackson Hole, Wyo., we would swing north and catch just a glimpse of the two big national parks.

When I think of Yellowstone, I think of bears. That's what the park has long been known for — bears raiding campgrounds, bears begging by the roadside, bears invading cars and trucks in search of food.

The rangers have cracked down on the freeloading, however. It is illegal to feed the bears these days. The garbage cans all have bear-proof lids. There are signs everywhere about not approaching the wildlife. The bears have had to go back to a diet of birds' eggs, grubs and berries. What a comedown from apples, marshmallows and half-eaten sandwiches.

Since the roadside feast has been closed, the bears have gone back to the forest. In our three-



cynthia haynes
• open season

hour swing through the park, we did not catch a glimpse of them. Friends who spent all day in the park said that they had been able to see the rear ends of a couple of bears disappearing into the trees.

Our wildlife sightings amounted to a female moose, a couple of trumpeter swans, hundreds of antelope, some deer and a rabbit, which was nibbling on someone's lawn.

The other tourist thing about Yellowstone is Old Faithful, the geyser that goes off regularly at irregular intervals. The next eruption, signs say, depends on the length and strength of the last one. We pulled into the parking lot as about 50 cars pulled out, and I figured this was not a good sign.

Sure enough, the geyser had just finished blowing its top and the rangers estimated the next eruption at about an hour. We didn't have an hour, so we checked out the steaming crater, hit the restrooms and the bookstore, and headed back down the road.

A couple of years ago, eldest daughter took a trip to Yellowstone with some friends in an open-top jeep. It was rainy and miserable the whole way, and after waiting for Old Faithful for an hour, they took off.

I figure it's a family tradition to not see the eruption. (Of course, if we had seen it go off, we would have immediately called her and said — Naay, nee, naay, nee, naay. We saw it and you didn't.)

Grand Teton National Park adjoins Yellowstone. The mountains are spectacular, much more rugged than the Front Range of the Rockies or the southern Colorado mountains that we are used to.

The wildflowers, waterfalls, meadows and streams were all wonderful and we had a great — if really short — time visiting some of the most magnificent scenery in North America.

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Washington — George W. Bush is back from Slovenia with a red-hot scouting report on Russian president Vladimir Putin: "I looked the man in the eye. I found him to be very straightforward and trustworthy. We had a very good dialogue. I was able to get a sense of his soul."

Such powers of observation deserve our attention. George Reeves, the first Superman, could see whether a bad guy was hiding a gun under his coat. George W. Bush can see clear into a Russian expy-master's "soul."

"It sure is a load off my mind," a reader e-mailed me upon hearing the president's report. "Bush has the ability to look into a person's eyes and see his soul — and know he can trust him! We should have him look into the eyes of everyone in the CIA. We wouldn't have any more of those nasty spies!"

Excellent point.

Consider the current case of Robert Philip Hanssen. A 25-year FBI veteran now negotiating for his life, Hanssen is charged with spying for the Russians the last 15 years with the Bureau. He decided on that joint career, he told his Russian handlers, when he was 14.

Who would have known? This guy fit the profile of gung-ho good guy. He began his career with the Chicago police, digging into corruption cases. He attended Catholic mass each Sunday and went to anti-abortion rallies.



chris matthews
• commentary

Yet, it turns out Hanssen had not just sold out to the Soviet enemy, he had been proactive in striking the deal. They didn't come to him, as is usually the case. He went to them.

And in all those years, no one caught "a sense of his soul."

There he was, raging against "godless" communism on weekdays, sitting in St. Catherine of Siena's on Sunday, his mind dancing with a real-life fantasy: He, Robert Hanssen, was a double agent selling out his country.

Too bad we didn't have George Bush to look this character in the eye and tell us Hanssen was secretly risking all to screw his own country.

For that matter, too bad Mount Holyoke College didn't have President Bush on its faculty screening committee a few semesters back. He could have ferreted out history professors who jazz up their courses on the Vietnam War by claiming to have been in it.

The stakes are higher with Putin. What if the

shrewd Russian leader cuts a deal with China on Taiwan?

What if he secretly underwrites the trade of missile technology with Iran? What if he colludes with the Western European left on SDI?

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who had to deal with a tougher Russian, said that the solution to the perennial Russian "enigma" lies in looking clearly and ruthlessly to that country's interests.

If that was true for Joseph Stalin, it's true for Putin. Bush should focus less on figuring out Putin and more on charting what any Russian would have to do in the face of the American superpower.

The needs of Russia are clear: dignity, which Bush provided; security, which Bush must be careful not to threaten with either SDI or NATO expansion; and hope, which an American president is uniquely equipped to provide.

Those interests — not the quality of Putin's eye contact — offer the best roadmap to the U.S.-Russian connection.

As my brilliant e-mailer suggested, and as Ronald Reagan insisted upon: Mr. Bush, trust, but verify!

Chris Matthews, a nationally syndicated columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle, is host of "Hardball" on CNBC and MSNBC cable channels. The 1999 edition of "Hardball" was published by Touchstone Books.

Exchange student thanks family, community

To the Editor:

My name is Cri Bertelli and I'm an exchange student from Italy. During this past year, I had the pleasure to live with Jeff, Nona, Alyssa, Craig and Kerek Mason.

Now this time is about to get over, as I'm leaving Goodland on Thursday. I want to take the chance, with this letter, to let everybody know how great this experience has been and how much I wish time wouldn't have flown so fast.

The Masons have been great, and my biggest thank you goes to all of them. Thank you for being such a neat family, for teaching me so much about America, about goals, about life and for offering me a loving place to call home. Thank you Mom and Dad for taking me everywhere possible and treating me as your own child, thank you Alyssa for being my very best friend, thank you Craig for being my "teasing mate" when I didn't have anybody else "to make fun of" and thank you Kerek for always being there when I needed a hug.

Thank you to all my friends for the fun we had together ... it's going to be really hard to forget some nights spent together.

Another big thank you goes to Mrs. (Mary) Porterfield and all the American Field Service club and Adult Chapter for the support I had, and also the support given to my family.

Thank you to Goodland High School for accepting me as a member of the student body and giving me the chance to discover how many resources I have and how lucky I am. I hope the exchange program will go ahead for many other years.



from our readers
• to the editor

Thanks especially to all the coaches for the great "American sports" experience that was definitely a challenge that shocked me, but also gave me the opportunity to get to know people and have fun. Also, I will never forget Homecoming, Snoball, Prom, graduation, and Project Graduation; they have been so American!

Thanks finally to all the Goodland community because I felt very special knowing that everybody knew who I was. This happens only in small towns!

As I put a period on this experience, my heart and my eyes fill up with tears. For how hard this experience has been and how much I had to give up, I wouldn't go back and change anything of it. If I could, I'd go back right now, and start everything from the beginning. But leaving is part of life, and I know mine is in Italy with my family and my friends.

I hope one day I will have the chance to come back to the states and to Goodland, maybe with my family, and show them the place that made me grow up so much.

I will hold all these memories forever!
Thank you everybody for this awesome year!
Cri Bertelli
Goodland

berry's world

