

# commentary

from other pens...

## New director's task rebuild relationships

**The Garden City Telegram on KDOT secretary:**

Deb Miller steps into a challenging position as the state's new director of the Kansas Department of Transportation. In addition to taking over management of the state's transportation program on the roads, she has the task of repairing a relationship with the citizens who travel the state's roads.

The department of transportation has demonstrated an indifference, sometimes morphing into arrogance, toward its citizens. And it's time to put the brakes on that culture.

The examples are numerous. But most recently, a man in Lawrence was forced to go to court to get the department to release the minutes of a public hearing.

A public hearing...

Change is needed. The transportation department is implementing a massive transportation program all across the state. Initially tabbed at \$13 billion, it may be trimmed back because of the state financial problems. Nonetheless, it is a significant expense involving public roadways.

Public roadways.

The department's willful disregard for public interest to its activities obviously won the endorsement of Miller's predecessor. Now that there is new leadership at the top, a fresh-and-inviting approach would be a welcome change.

Miller would do Kansas well to eradicate the culture of indifference toward Kansas that has become the culture permeating the transportation department's higher-ranking offices.

**The Topeka Capital-Journal on broadband:**

Computers have revolutionized the way people do business and how they live and communicate. In the home, computers aren't just a luxury or a toy, but an important tool or appliance, if you will.

For business and industry, computers are an absolute necessity, and those computers need the most efficient, high-speed Internet access available. Whether in Topeka or Atwood, Garden City or White Cloud, computers need to have access to broadband Internet service. ...

SBC, formerly Southwestern Bell, is more than willing to provide that service; in fact, it is anxious to do so.

But for SBC to invest the millions of dollars it will take to provide that service throughout Kansas..., the company wants assurance that its high-speed network investment will be protected from having to be shared with competitors as it currently shares its telephone lines...

So far, SBC has invested more than \$100 million in deploying high-speed Internet service in 24 communities, but any further investment in installing the fiber-optic network necessary for widespread broadband access is on hold until SBC gets the broadband parity legislation it seeks to protect its investment.

Kansas cannot afford to be without broadband access. It's a crucial part of any economic development package. That is one of the first things companies considering locating a business in the state will be looking for.

Lawmakers can ensure that service will be available by passing the parity legislation.

### Letter Policy

The Goodland Daily News encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, and must include a telephone number and 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.



FIND THE HIDDEN MISSILES

## Maybe I pick on lawyers too much

Goodland attorney Ron Vignery writes that I pick on lawyers too much.

"I have read with interest and concern several of your articles through the years regarding attorneys. It is pretty obvious to me that you don't have a particularly high regard for my profession. It is a free country, and you are entitled to your opinions.

"...Such is the free press. I don't have to like the articles you are writing, and you can certainly continue to write them. Just thought you would be interested in this article."

He forwards a column by a law professor pointing out the good that trial lawyers can do in our system. We'd like to run it, and are trying to get permission from the author.

You're right, Ron. We need lawyers. My dad, whom I admired greatly, was a lawyer, a good one. He never took offense at a good lawyer joke, not when he was poking fun at his friends who were doctors, undertakers and car dealers.

Today, I get most of my lawyer jokes from my attorney. He collects them. I clip lawyer cartoons for him.

But the law is no joke. The legal system, good as it is, is full of absurdities and contradictions, no more perfect than any of our institutions. Maybe, though, as a body, it has less of a sense of humor than some.

But while I have been critical of that system at times, I have respect for the lawyers I know, most of them anyway. They are good people, trying their best to make the system work. And it does, after a fashion.

Does that put it beyond reproach? I hope not. What's right with the legal system? Most



steve haynes

• along the sappa

things. It works (most of the time). It's fair (most of the time). It's a lot better than most countries.

What's wrong with the legal system?

I could cite chapter and verse. The system can be hellaciously expensive. We once sued a manager who had stolen \$35,000 some odd dollars from the company before we took over. It cost \$12,000 to get an injunction and an agreement from him to repay the money, but he defaulted. Never paid a dime. Then he took bankruptcy. I asked the lawyer, and he said it might cost another \$5,000 to get the debt emptied by the bankruptcy court. It would have been good money after bad.

Sometimes you have the right to all the justice you can afford.

Or why is it that some poor saps go to trial with inexperienced public defenders, cop a plea and do hard time, but O.J. Simpson is playing golf in Florida?

If you have been wronged by Firestone and Ford, or injured in a wreck, yes, you can get a big-bucks trial lawyer to take your case. They often do us a real service. But if there's no money in it, if the state is taking away your rights or your family, how much justice can you afford?

I've been in lawsuits where we were winning with one judge, then lost when another

took the case. Is that justice? I didn't think so.

Then there is the absurdity which goes along with product liability law, the kind of thing I wrote about this month that ticked you off, Ron. It seems like Americans sue at the drop of a hat today, and lawyers have enabled that. It might be good to stand back and take a look at the system, see what makes sense and what doesn't.

But we're no better off in the press. People gripe about us all the time, and sometimes with some justification. We're all saddled with the excesses of some of our peers, especially the television reporters and the Washington press corps. I admit it.

I also think we, like lawyers, serve a vital function in society.

We are criticized for running too much "negative" news, yet often as not, that's what people want to read when they vote with their quarters. Which master are we supposed to serve?

Ah, but I digress. It's your profession we're talking about today, not mine.

The very fact that people pick on lawyers so much may be a measure of the law's importance to society. Grocers and retailers are important, but you don't hear many jokes about them. Same for dentists and government clerks. Or reporters, for that matter.

There's the majesty of the law, the honor of the court, the tradition of justice. Some problems and a smattering of complaints, a few cartoons and wisecracks thrown in.

It's not a perfect system, but it's a good one, and it takes good lawyers to make it work.

Good lawyers. I think I heard a joke about that....

## Where's the check, mate?

The president has introduced a new plan to stimulate the economy. I don't know what his plan is. I'm pushing my own. A plan that would both revive the economy and satisfy America's fascination with royalty.

It's a simple idea. Let cities and states sell royal titles to rich Americans. You want to be the Marquis of Massachusetts? Nine hundred grand a year. You want to pass the title on to your eldest son? He pays \$900,000 a year. Rich people who complain about paying the sales tax on a box of Q-Tips will stand in line, excuse me, queue up to buy themselves a title.

This is where the British have things completely backward. They pay people to be royalty when they should be charging them. Think of the possibilities for revenue. The Duke of Dallas (\$4,867,000), the Princess of Pottawattamie County (\$1,289,000), the Count and Countess of Chillicothe (\$757,000), the Viscount of Vermont (\$537,000). There would be hundreds of thousands of people who would be happy with a simple knightship (\$100,000 a year).

Every community could be out of debt in a week. Potholes would be a thing of the past. Public school teachers would make a hundred thousand a year. The school bus would be a Mercedes. The Pentagon could buy \$1,200 toilet seats. The best part is that it would cost the average sensible American absolutely nothing. Because like all good royal titles, they would be completely meaningless, except to those who crave them. Besides, we already have people who act like Dukes and Duchesses, why not make them pay for it?

And the possibility of new money into the public coffers wouldn't stop with the selling of titles.



jim mullen

• the village idiot

While royal titles come some heavy-duty expenses. The new princes and princesses will have to live the life of the manor bought, cooks, chauffeurs, butlers, upstairs maids and whatnot. They will have to build huge, drafty castles and join exclusive clubs — creating more jobs for the rest of us.

The Marquis of Massapequa can't very well get out on the riding mower every Saturday, can he? He's going to need a full-time gardener. He will have to throw extravagant dinner parties — a welcome boost for the food service industry. Publishers will find business documenting the new peerage, and People magazine will make even more money writing about the life and times of the American royals as well as the staid old, boring British ones. Who needs to read about Prince William

when we will have our own supply of Lady Kaitlins and Dame Briannas, Lord Brads and Sir Tylers?

Before we start selling royal titles, we'll pass a bunch of laws that heavily tax such activities as polo playing and castle building. The rest of us may never have to pay taxes again. We won't be able to count the extra revenue fast enough.

To be sure, there will be a pecking order. The Lord of Palm Beach (\$6,491,000) will outrank the Lord of Levittown (\$353,000). But what do we care? The streets will be getting fixed with their money and we'll have hired more cops.

Of course, the real advantage of establishing a contributing royalty in this country is that we will ferret out the unsuspecting rich. As we learn during financial crisis, when it comes to paying taxes no one in this country will admit to being wealthy. But how could Lord Larry of Oxnard deny it?

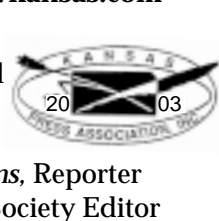
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