

from our viewpoint...

Hot topic this year consolidation, again

Other than the state’s chronic financial embarrassment, the hot topic in Kansas this year will be consolidation.

Not school consolidation, which got talked into the ground last year, but government consolidation.

A state audit report reveals that we have more than 3,400 taxing districts, including 105 counties, 303 school districts and more than 1,200 townships. Kansans are overgoverned and overtaxed, the report shows. Consolidation seems to be the obvious answer, but how do you make it work, and will it really save money?

The answers are not easy.

As the report notes, there hasn’t been much government consolidation to study. Kansas City, Kansas, and Wyandotte County merged a couple of years ago under one unified commission. Today, they have one police department, one street department, one mayor, one court system. But two smaller cities in the county kept their local governments.

It’s easy to see that most Kansas counties, relatively small in size, with one dominant town, could consolidate city and county government and gain in efficiency. The downside is minimal, unless you hold one of the jobs that would be eliminated.

The savings from consolidating city and county government would be real, but limited. They come mostly from having one public works director, one police chief, one financial officer, one clerk, one governing board.

Workers, people who do actual jobs, would be needed in about the same numbers. You’d have the same number of jailers, patrol officers, desk clerks and meter readers. Many costs would not change.

But the idea makes sense. It’s particularly unfair, in many ways, to make city residents pay for county services and county residents to pay for city services.

Politics is the problem. All those public employees and elected officials who’d be affected would be unlikely to support a merger. Who could blame them?

Merging whole counties would be a harder sell. While it’s true that, using the 19th century standard of a citizen being able to get to the county seat and back in a day’s drive, you could serve northwest Kansas with one or two counties, it’s not likely people would see that as a favorable form of government.

County government is not, after all, a business. It’s politics, and people want to have a sense of connection to their government. One big county would be distant and impersonal. There would be no form to make it human and accessible, not like going down to complain to three friends and neighbors.

Townships, there’s another story. There’s no reason in the 21st century to have townships. Many have trouble electing a three-member board. But township budgets average in the low thousands, and the savings from eliminating them would be minimal.

They’re more of an irritant than an expense.

And then there are school districts. We’ve discussed that problem. As small rural schools lose students, they tend to eliminate themselves. It’s a slow but certain process.

Consolidation is an idea whose time has come. It’s here, it will happen. First, the Legislature needs to make consolidation possible by removing all barriers to mergers within, among and between counties, cities and special districts. The Legislature needs to make consolidation possible, even desirable, then stand back.

If consolidation makes sense, and the environment is right, it’ll happen. Let citizens and voters decide how and when, and let them make up the rules. The answer may be different in different towns, but that’s not bad, either.

Just let it happen. — *Steve Haynes*

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As a child I truly loved school

I don’t know about you, but when I was a child I loved school — mainly because I truly thought there would come a day when I’d know everything.

I loved geography and seeing where our country was on the world in relation to others.

I wanted to absorb all of history so I could understand why and how things had happened.

I loved the logic of math and geometry. And I wanted to speak and write correctly.

With all that, I still enjoyed games and sports.

However they were just interesting sidelines to my education.

Now I’m well on the other side of childhood, and the truth is painfully clear. I’ll never know everything. I’ll never understand it all.

History is moving so fast I can’t keep up, and humanity’s mistakes continue to be repeated. Yet, I can’t help but wonder how current events



lorna gt

- commentary

can be understood at all without a working knowledge of the past.

What I see is humankind always tends to react and over-react to current events instead of planning preventive tactics.

And geography. I’m not sure that subject is even taught in school anymore, and it seems more pertinent than ever. The world map changes faster than map and globe makers can keep up. Countries split up and change their names all the time; I never thought the Soviet Union had ever been or would ever be anything

Dems now have real candidate for President

There is now a 10th candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination, retired general Wesley Clark.

To me that’s good news. Except for Howard Dean, none of the other candidates have any serious credibility and they’re definitely are not presidential material.

Professional Washington politicians don’t have that leadership quality that a president should have. That eliminates Dick Gephardt, Joe Lieberman, John Kerry, Carol Moseley Braun and Bob Graham. So for me that cuts the pack in half.

John Edwards began his first term in the U.S. Senate in 1999 and has no other solid political experience. I grant that someone new to the political game as president might be refreshing, but this is not the time. Let’s see what he does in the future; then who knows?

There has been a lot of debate lately, and some confrontation, concerning separation of church and state, which I support wholeheartedly. Therefore the idea of anyone with Reverend (or any other religious title) in front of his name as President is simply unthinkable. Controversial or not, the Rev. Al Sharpton falls into that category.

Dennis Kucinich also falls into the category of professional politician, but I have a personal reason for dismissing him as a legitimate can-



greg stover

- greg’s gripes

didate. While on active duty in the U.S. Army, I was stationed in Cleveland during his term as mayor and saw how things ran under his administration. (Let’s just say not very well.) Perhaps most would consider that ancient history, 1977-1979, or accuse me of holding a grudge, but he hasn’t done anything since to change my opinion.

That leaves Howard Dean. The reason he has credibility with me is I consider a multi-term governor as one who has demonstrated his leadership abilities and political savvy. In addition, Dean gains points because he did not seek re-election in 2002 so he could concentrate on his campaign, not like some candidates run for re-election in their current office while running for another “just in case.”

The problem is that Dean was governor of Vermont. Not to belittle the state or the breadth of his responsibility or achievement, but leadership of a small state by size and population does not develop sufficient confidence in his

but the Soviet Union.

My sister had a friend in college (years ago) from Latvia, and I remember her saying that her country didn’t exist anymore.

I didn’t understand then, but I do now. Just try to keep all the countries of Eastern Europe and Africa straight!

My two oldest grandchildren are both in college this year. One is a senior at Virginia Tech and the other a freshman in Durango, Colo.

It seems impossible; the years have flown by. I wonder if they look forward to the day when school will be behind them, no more textbooks, no more tests. If they learn anything, I hope it is that there is always more to know.

Learning is a life-long process. And as exciting as sports may be, they are nowhere near as important in life as scholarship, knowledge and wisdom.

ability to run the nation. Still he was the best of the Democratic hopefuls.

Yes, Graham was a multi-term governor of Florida, but that was over 20 years ago. It’s a different country now.

Now the Democrats have Clark, with his impressive educational and military background. Reaching four stars in today’s military requires political savvy. Sure he doesn’t have actual experience, but I bet he fully understands it.

Clark’s term as the supreme allied commander in Europe not only enhanced his experience in international relations, but also gave him face-to-face time with many important foreign leaders.

However, the two main reasons I have for welcoming his candidacy are, first, that he has extensive experience in being directly responsible for the total welfare of the people he under his leadership and was successful at it.

The second is his experience in building a staff capable of helping him get the job done and not being afraid of the political backlash if changes need to be made. Clark will realize and admit to those areas where he lacks experience and understanding and will find the right person to provide what he might need.

Now the Democratic Party has someone who can really challenge for the White House.

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