

from our viewpoint...

Community steps up to 'make it happen'

One of the enjoyable things about living on the High Plains is that when a situation is tight, people come together and do what it takes to make things happen.

That was evident Friday afternoon as citizens from all over Sherman County gathered to see what they could do to bring Aircraft Seal and Gasket Corp. of California to Goodland.

People asked some good tough questions, and Steve West of Western State Bank said there was some risk in making an investment in the firm. However, he said any money raised would be put in escrow until final agreements were reached. If the company does not come to Goodland, no one here would lose any money.

He went on to suggest the fund could be used in the future to bring other companies to the area, and that having such a venture capital fund would be a great asset to the county.

Whether the aircraft parts company comes or not, the community has shown the ability to respond and put together a suitable package that can be offered to other companies who are looking to relocate. The people showed they can step forward and answer the challenge to bring economic development to Sherman County.

It was good to watch as leaders of the city, technical college, banks and citizens put the pieces together over the past week to present a workable package that could bring the company to Goodland.

In many ways, this is a win-win proposition. It will be great if the trucks roll into the city in the next week, bringing the presses and other equipment for the company. This is certainly a win for the citizens, and there is a further win for the future to be able to respond to other such opportunities to bring other companies.

To many, the aircraft parts company is a big step toward diversifying the economy here, because it does not depend on agriculture. We see it as a clean manufacturer that can lend its expertise to anything that needs a silicone based seal or gasket, regardless of whether it is an aircraft, automobile, truck or tractor. Having such the company in Kansas will increase its ability to respond to more markets.

In economic development, getting the first company can be the key to expansion. If that company is successful, the economic development effort should be aimed at adding additional jobs.

Our congratulations to the many people who stepped forward to help in moving this project forward. We will be ready to pop a champagne cork the day production begins.

Should the deal fall apart at the last moment over an unforeseen hitch, we will keep the champagne on ice for the next opportunity which will come along in the belief that we now have more of our ducks in order to handle them. — *Tom Betz*

Letter Policy

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N.T. Betz, Director of Internet Services
(nbetz@nwkanssas.com)

Evan Barnum, Systems Admin.(support@nwkanssas.com)

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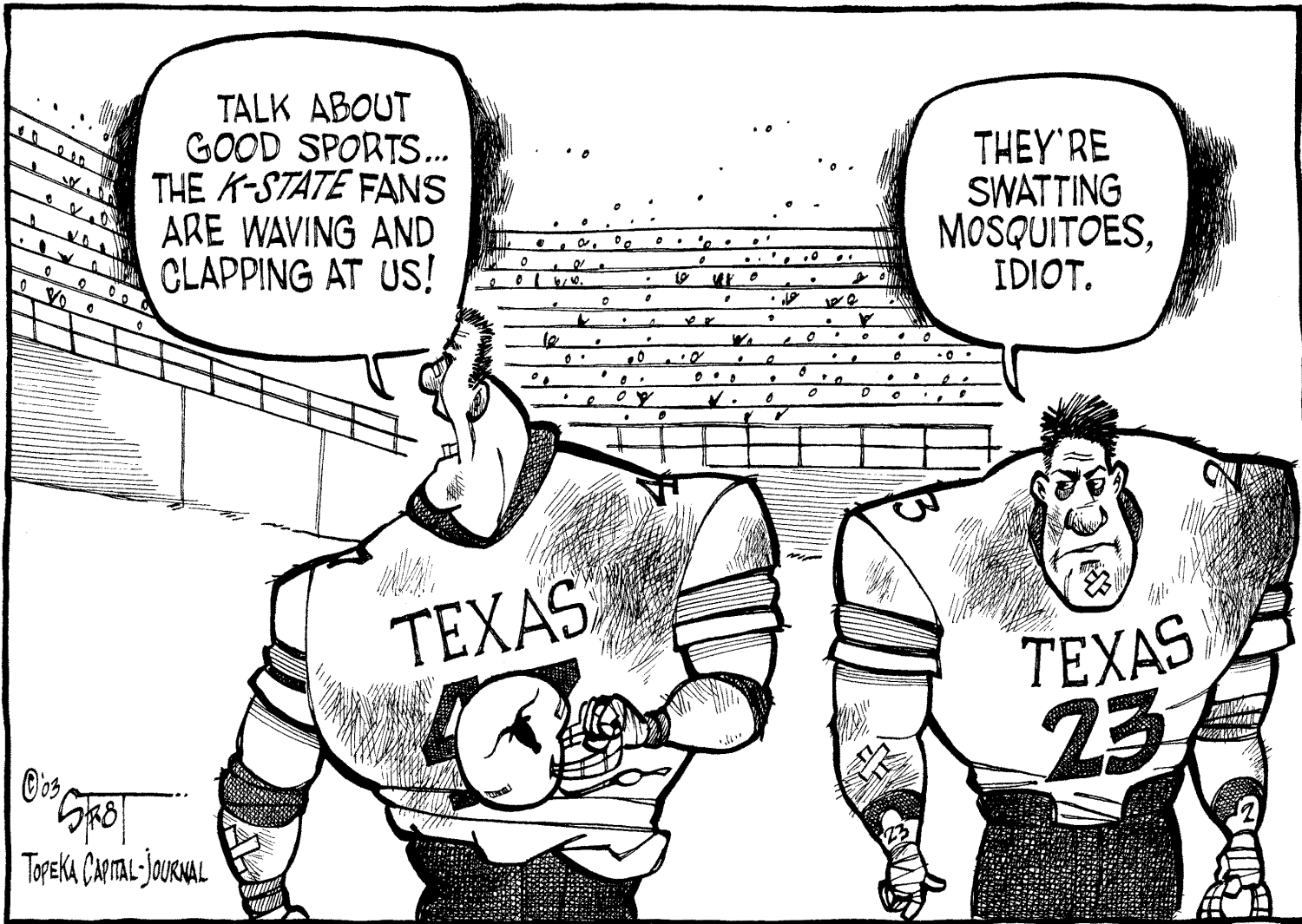
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Confident lady heads state road department

As you enter the room, a slender, dark-haired woman walks up to introduce herself.

You've met her just once, years ago, but she remembers — or has aides and files to help her.

A confident grip, a friendly smile, a steely glance that says she knows who she is and where she's going. You'd think she was running for something, but Deb Miller already has the job she wants.

Miller is settling in as the state's new secretary of transportation, taking the reigns at a male-dominated agency that spawns a vast bureaucracy and spends more of the state's budget than anything but schools and colleges.

Getting a handle on the Department of Transportation is no small task, but Miller says it's fun. She's been touring the state, visiting each of the six districts, going around with each of the district engineers.

She's had her feet on the pavement — highways still take the bulk of the department's budget, though it has small programs for airports, railroads and recreational trails — and meeting with as many of the department's 3,000 employees as she can.

More than that, she's building up a network of friends and supporters that she'll need to keep the department and its programs intact.

Employees say they sense a marked difference from the tenure of Dean Carlson, who ran the department through the Bill Graves era. They think that they have a boss who will challenge assumptions and not be afraid to stand up for their agency.



steve haynes

• along the sappa

Miller is no stranger to the department. She was director of planning and development from 1984-1997, when she left to work as a consultant with a private engineering firm. Gov. Kathleen Sebelius brought her back to run the road program earlier this year.

While she's an engineer by trade, her political skills will come in handy over the next few years.

The state's budget crisis the last three years has pinched the highway program, but Miller says so far, she expects to be able to complete all the projects people have been promised.

That's important, she said. If you go back to the 1970, in the Bob Bennett era, the state promised an expansive freeway system that was never built.

"I believe without question that we can complete all the projects under the Comprehensive Transportation Program," she said, referring to the state's 10-year, \$10 billion program. "But we cannot sustain any more losses."

The Legislature took away the sales tax "demand transfer" money the road fund was supposed to get a couple of years ago, then raised the motor fuel tax 2 cents per gallon to make up for

the loss. This year, though, the department was saddled with the Highway Patrol budget, for a \$200 million cut. (The patrol used to be part of the old Highway Department, but now reports directly to the governor.)

No one expects the state's budget situation to improve much for a couple of years. Where once there was money to spend and room to cut taxes year after year, now there is a fight for every dollar. Miller says it's important to keep the transportation budget up both because the state needs good roads and because the projects create a lot of jobs. That's vital in a recession, she said.

If worst comes to worst, and there have to be more cuts, she'd consider extending the program, but that's not her favorite idea. Ten years already is a long time.

"We're getting a long ways out there already," Miller said. "There are new needs coming up all the time."

But, she says, extending the program would be better than breaking the state's promises.

"It's imperative to meet our commitments," she says. "Latently, if the department has announced a project, we have built it."

And no one, she adds, wants to go back to the bad old days of the 1980s, when Kansas roads were falling apart — or wind up like — shudder — Missouri.

"The No. 1 priority has to be to maintain the system and preserve the system," she says.

Backed by a loyal corps of employees and supporters, no doubt she'll do just that.

Kansans should take control of health care

Insurance Commissioner Promotes Consumer Education Campaign

I am pleased to announce the Kansas Insurance Department is kicking off a new consumer education program to help Kansans understand factors affecting the costs of health care and health insurance. The campaign, Take Control: It's Your Life; It's Your Health; It's Your Money, is designed to provide health care consumers with tips that can help reduce the overall cost of health care without affecting quality.

Consumers know their health insurance rates are increasing and the cost of medical care is



sandy praeger

• insurance comm.

on the rise. We want to educate Kansans about some of the reasons costs are rising and share some strategies to help control those costs.

Simple tips for controlling health care costs include asking about generic equivalents for prescription drugs, avoiding unnecessary diagnostic testing and asking your physician

where to write

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774; web address — roberts.senate.gov

U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. (202) 224-6521; web e-mail address — brownback.senate.gov/CMEmail.me

U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 1519 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 225-2715; e-mail address — jerry.moran@mail.house.gov

State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building Rm. 174-W, Topeka, KS 66612. (785) 296-7676; e-mail address — morrison@house.state.ks.us

State Sen. Stan Clark, State Capitol Building Rm. 449-N, Topeka, KS 66612. (785) 296-7399; e-mail address — clark@senate.state.ks.us

Kansas Attorney General Phil Kline, 301 S.W. 10th, Lower Level, Topeka, KS 66612-1597 (785) 296-3751 Fax (785) 291-3699 TTY: (785) 291-3767

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