

from our viewpoint...

# Barriers block cooperative efforts

The “C” word — consolidation in this case — came up during the recently completed Kansas Prosperity Summit as something that should be examined to see where more regional cooperation might be possible.

Suggestions for possible consolidation included everything from counties to combining city police and sheriff departments and more cooperation between school district where possible.

Some of these were trial balloons to get people thinking, and most of those present knew the idea of consolidating counties was not something that would happen overnight — or even in a few years.

Many school districts already try to work together on cooperative programs. The Northwest Kansas Educational Service Center in Oakley is an example, and a number of school districts help pay for its budget and use the programs the center provides.

Another example of cooperation is the Cowboy and Cowgirl cross country teams, which have runners from Sharon Springs who drive to Goodland each day to practice and arrive early to be part of the team when they travel to meets.

This started three years ago with one girl from Sharon Springs, Charlie Short. Now there are three girls and one boy making the trip to be on the Goodland team. Mara Sloan has joined Short and Kali Smith — who was on the team last year — with the Cowgirls and Kyler Knobbe is on the Cowboys team.

There just are not enough cross country runners in Sharon Springs for a team. On the Goodland side, there are barely enough boys for a competitive team, and for the past two years there have not been enough girls for a team. Girls cross country seems to be losing a bit to the new tennis and golf teams.

While the kids from Sharon Springs are allowed to practice and run with the teams during the regular season, they have to drop out when it comes to the regional and state meets. The Kansas High School Activities Association apparently feels that having the two schools run together gives someone an advantage.

The Cowboys and Cowgirls came together as a team this year, finishing first and second at the Oberlin meet. Coach Don Smith said the contribution from the Sharon Springs kids made this possible.

They will get to run together for the last time on Saturday at the Lakin meet. They will not get to count in the league meet at Sugar Hills Golf Club on Saturday, Oct. 18, nor the regional or state meets.

Instead of being a part of a competitive team and having the support of the teammates they ran with this whole season, runners from both schools will be down to individual participants for the final meets of the year.

It seems counterproductive to talk about cooperation when these two schools are doing it, and then when it comes to the crunch of the final competition, they are cut off and now both schools have to pay to send the individuals to separate meets rather than the combined effort.

The kids from Sharon Springs say they have enjoyed running on the Black and Gold teams. They have enjoyed the support and camaraderie of having the teammates, both for the meets and at daily practices.

Cross country is a tough sport. We have enjoyed watching the kids develop and improve over the year, and admire the effort it takes to be part of this sport.

We can hope as the talk about consolidation continues to bounce around, that those who make the effort like the cross country team are given an opportunity to run together through the entire year and be part of the team they started with. — *Tom Betz*

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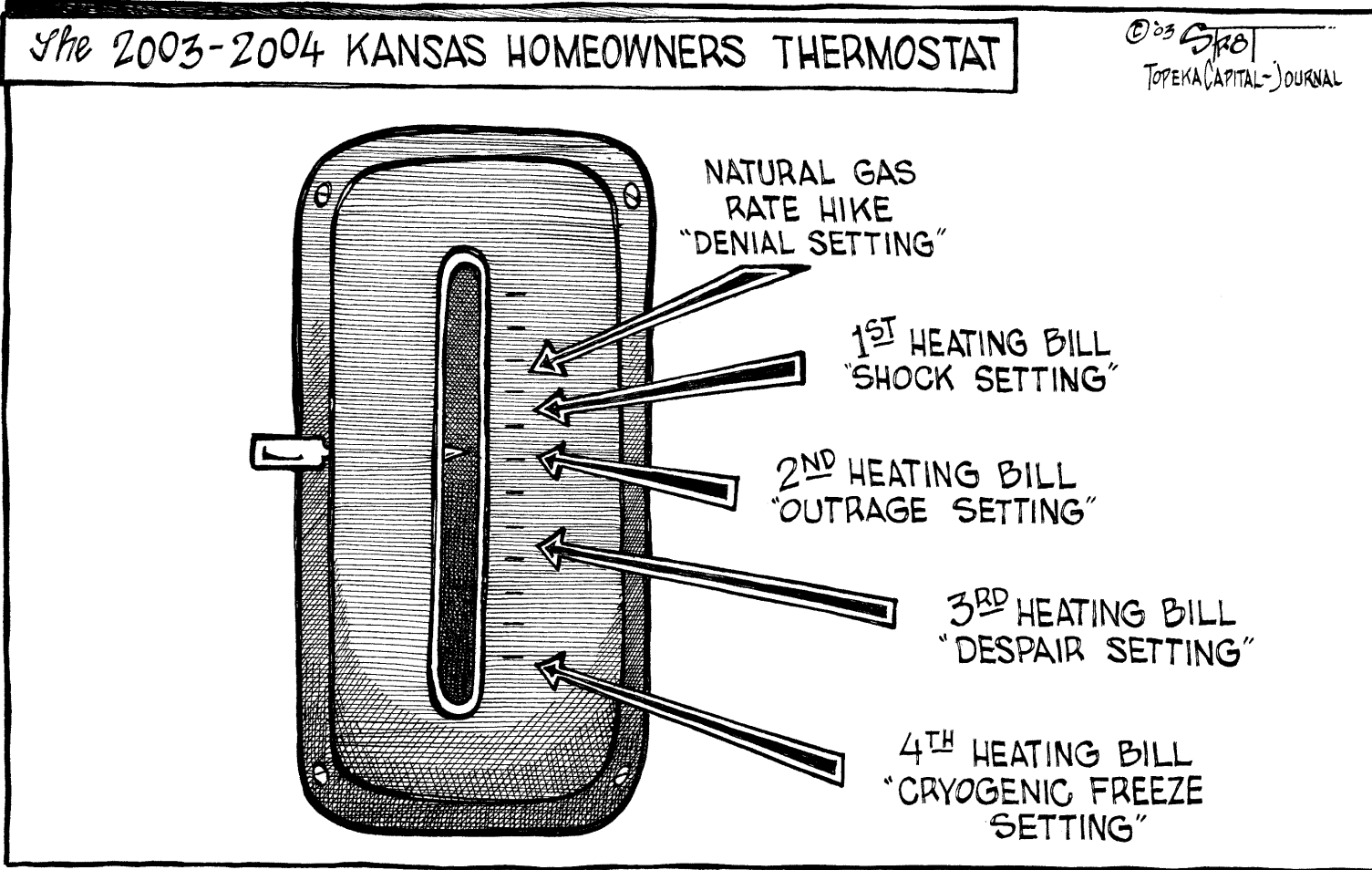
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**The Sherman County Herald**  
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1935-1989

**Nor’West Newspapers**  
Haynes Publishing Company

**THE SHERMAN COUNTY STAR**  
Founded by Eric and Roxie Yonkey  
1994-2001



## Made up stories make editors squirm

“So,” he said, slapping me on the back, “what about that Jayson Blair?”

Ouch.

I liked it better when “the media” was just a buzzword to be trotted out when people were mad about something. Jayson Blair has given reporters everywhere a bad name.

In an odd sort of way, that might be a good thing for the news business. It has made a lot of editors and news directors sit up and take notice of their problems.

If there is something wrong in “the media,” Jayson Blair did it. The former *New York Times* reporter is the poster boy for an unfair, unfeeling, untruthful media.

And while Mr. Blair is an egregious example, he is a symbol for much that is wrong with the news business.

He made up stories, and no one noticed.

When sources complained, his editors didn’t call them back.

He invented quotes, packed his stories with lies and fiction, even submitted travel vouchers while creating “on-the-scene” reports from his grandmother’s New York apartment.

When other employees blew the whistle, *The Times* glossed it over.

Instead of a reprimand, Mr. Blair got a promotion or a transfer.

It’s not like his bosses hadn’t been warned. Maybe they just wanted to believe in Jayson Blair. He was a con artist through and through. They wanted him to be as good as he told them he was.

Some people claim that he got away with what he did because he was young and bright and black, but that’s not the whole story. Mr.



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Blair bragged later that he conned the best news organization in the world.

“I fooled some of the most brilliant people in journalism,” he claimed.

His bosses eventually paid the price with their jobs, “resigning” and fading into obscurity. How they let him get away with what he did for so long is another story.

Reporters who fabricate stories are not the problem, though. It’s rare. There have been a few notorious cases at big papers, mostly columnists who thought it was OK to make things up. They argued that a column isn’t a news story, but they passed their fiction off as truth.

When a reporter in Goodland used quotes that didn’t belong to an area school superintendent, management listened. The reporter disappeared before the investigation could be completed, but he wound up in court.

Jayson Blair probably will wind up with a book deal, but if I were publisher of *The Times*, I’d sue him for every penny he makes.

Jayson Blair could happen anywhere, because most of us like to trust our fellow man, but most people are smart enough to know they’d get caught eventually. The real problem is reporters who are careless, ignorant of the subject, lacking the curiosity needed to find things out, or just plain don’t care.

They make mistakes, dozens, hundreds,

thousands of them. They ignore or mis-file people’s news, they’re rude and uncaring, they botch stories and don’t want to admit it.

The problem is editors who don’t listen to complaints, don’t enforce rules, don’t insist on accuracy and don’t care about readers.

It happens everywhere, at the tiniest papers and the biggest, at the worst and even, as Mr. Blair proved, at the best.

It’s not something the industry has ignored. A national foundation known as the Freedom Forum has generated a discussion on what news people usually call credibility, but readers call “fairness.”

To readers, the Freedom Forum found, fairness means accuracy and a willingness to admit errors. The best editors have been listening. That’s a huge change from 30 years ago, when the attitude was that newspapers should never, never admit mistakes.

We have tried to take the lessons of the Freedom Forum study to heart. Our reporters and editors have been meeting monthly, going over the study and a “best practices” guide that goes with it.

We’re hoping to reduce the number of mistakes that get into the paper, and just as important, to increase the number of corrections.

It’s not that we really *want* more corrections, but we know we’ll never be perfect. We want to correct our mistakes and leave an accurate record. More important yet, we want readers to know that we are human and that we are able to admit that.

Dealing with those day-to-day things is a lot more important that Jayson Blair, who, thankfully, won’t ever work in western Kansas.

## Death penalty a way to protect the public

In Friday’s *The Hays Daily News*, I read about the kidnap and murder, in Waterville, Maine, of a Colby College senior. Her “alleged” killer is a parolee from Utah.

According to the article, police said this was a random act. Once again, a preventable evil has forever changed what was once known as a quiet, safe small town into one of fear and shattered dreams.

In 1994, this “person of interest” was sentenced to from one to 15 years for burglary and kidnapping in Utah, but was paroled last March with the condition he undergo therapy and that his progress be monitored. So far, the reaction from Utah officials is to shift blame to Maine. No one seems to even know whether this man left Utah legally or not.

What’s done is done. He was paroled and she is dead. It will probably take a year or two to decide his case, but I’ll go out on a limb and consider him guilty.

What happens now?

Maine does not have the death penalty, so if he is found guilty, what is his sentence going to be? Chances are eventually this man will be released, again, and be a threat to society.

Some claim the death penalty is cruel and unusual punishment. I can accept the concept of the death penalty as punishment, but the real



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reason I support it is public safety. One of the few things that can get me worked up is reading about a convicted murderer who is paroled and within a short time kills again.

There are too many murder victims on file in this country who were killed by people known to be a threat but released early anyway. I remember a case about four years ago when a man convicted of killing a Kansas State student was sentenced from three to eight years but was paroled after about 45 days, and less than 30 months later murdered a child.

I’m not saying the death penalty should be applied in all cases. I believe each case must be considered on an individual basis. If the facts prove, beyond doubt, the person is guilty, then let him or her face the consequences as determined in court. Punish the crime and, more importantly, protect the public.

I am not being bloodthirsty. I could accept life without parole if that really meant what it said. But in today’s justice system, life without parole in some states means as little as eight years in prison.

I know there are cases of innocent people being sentenced to death where the legal system was guilty of improprieties, but that doesn’t make the death penalty wrong.

In the meantime, I will mourn an innocent victim who I didn’t know and is now dead because of a system designed to protect the public failed to do so.

### Letter Policy

The Goodland Star-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. We encourage letters, with address and phone numbers, by e-mail to: [<star-news@nwkanssas.com>](mailto:<star-news@nwkanssas.com>).

### garfield

