

from our viewpoint...

## Two-step ends county bill effort

Relying on information on the Kansas Legislature's web site left us with some egg on our face this week.

Technically, House Bill 2307 did pass both houses unanimously Saturday afternoon. That should mean Sherman County voters will be deciding whether to elect county commissioners at large this fall.

The problem is none of the language of the bill as passed had anything to do with allowing Sherman County voters to consider the issue of at-large voting.

The bill status on the state web site Sunday said the conference committee report for HB2307 had passed both the House and Senate. Checking the full text of the bill on the web site showed the language about the at-large voting for Sherman County commissioners which passed the Senate in April.

What we did not do was check the House and Senate journals to see what had been done to the bill when it was brought up Saturday afternoon and both houses suspended the rules to consider changing the language.

Apparently, we weren't the only ones who were taken in. Rep. Jim Morrison (R-Colby) said Wednesday he was surprised to find the bill he had voted for on Saturday was not the Sherman County bill as listed on the web site.

Morrison said apparently the conference committee had used the bill number to fix a previously passed bill which the governor's office had found an error in. He said when the bill was brought up on Saturday, he thought it was the Sherman County bill with a few technical changes.

The at-large voting bill is dead for this year, but depending on the outcome of the election in November, the people of Sherman County could decide the issue is important enough to ask the Legislature to give it another try next year.

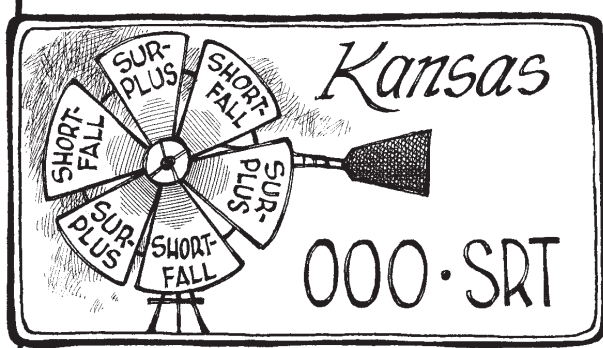
Rep. Morrison and Sen. Ralph Ostmeier (R-Grinnell) worked to get the bill passed over the past two sessions, but in the end, the legislative needs for an open bill number superseded the efforts of Sherman County, and left a bad taste in the mouths of many Sherman County citizens who had backed the at-large plan.

Confusing signals sent to Topeka by Sherman County officials should be a point of concern during the fall election campaigns. It is one thing to discuss an issue and not support it, but when the commissioners pass something unanimously asking the Legislature to pass a law, it hurts our credibility if those same officials are sabotaging the effort behind the scenes.

The at-large voting issue undoubtedly will be brought up during the campaigns this year. The issue should be part of a public forum, to give people a chance to give their point of view and give candidates a chance to explain their positions.

In the meantime, we will scrape the egg off our face and file this one away as a learning experience about Topeka and Kansas politics. — Tom Betz

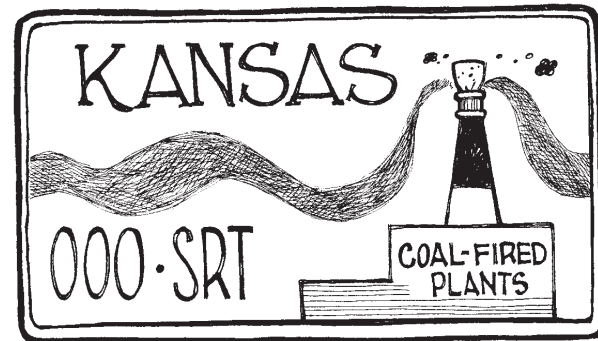
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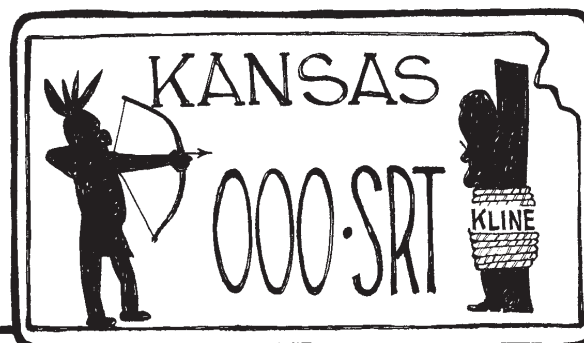
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## Using dollar bills hard habit to change

The government is trying again to get people to use coins rather than printing more dollar bills, even though the last three attempts failed miserably.

The new dollar, featuring four U.S. presidents a year, is a noble effort to get people back to using coins, but probably no more popular for spending.

Americans cling to their coins, it seems, though a dollar today is worth just 15 cents in 1960 money.

Back in those days, we carried five sizes of coins in our pockets and pocketbooks: pennies, nickels, dimes, quarters and half dollars. The bulky silver dollar, even then, was little used, seen mostly at race tracks, casinos and the like, but you could get them at the bank.

The mint last issued big "silver" dollars around 1970, a "sandwich" coin like the quarter containing no silver and bearing a likeness of President Dwight D. Eisenhower. Those never caught on, nor did the Susan B. Anthony "silver" dollar, a smaller coin designed for vending machines a decade later.

People didn't like the Anthony coins because they looked and felt too much like a quarter, experts said. Businesses had long since converted cash drawers to just four kinds of coins and



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claimed they had no place to put the dollars.

Never one to stand back from a challenge, despite repeated failure, the Treasury Department came up with another attempt, the small-sized Sacagawea dollar, themed to the Lewis and Clark bicentennial and tinted gold.

Despite cash-drawer support from Walmart, the results were pretty much the same. Bank vaults filled up with dollars which people wouldn't spend or carry.

This time, the mint took a hint from the wildly successful state quarter program and decided to issue a series of coins, featuring four presidents each year.

Of course, the government hopes that millions of people will collect the coins. That won't improve their circulation, but it will make money for the government — as the quarters have — as long as they can be produced for less than face value.

Will Americans take to their new 15-cent

coin? You'd think so, given the low value of the dollar bill today, but history suggests otherwise.

Americans don't accept new coins or currency well. They rejected the \$2 bill when proffered as an alternative to the lowly dollar, and never have accepted dollar coins, at least not in this century.

Heck, we won't give up the little penny, now worth just .15 of a cent in 1960 money, only a little more than the "mil" tokens once given in change by some stores.

Any suggestion to get rid of pennies meets with a chorus of jeers, but they're worth so little, you wonder why we bother. People seem to think they will be cheated if transactions take place in five-cent increments. And maybe they're right.

But why should the government spend billions making such a worthless coin?

And why won't we carry the convenient little dollars, worth less than the quarters many people grew up with?

Go figure. Seems like a waste of good paper printing all those \$1 bills to me, but Americans just don't seem to like change.

## The Goodland Star-News

(USPS No. 222-460. ISSN 0893-0562)

Member: Kansas Press Association  
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National Newspaper Association  
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Published every Tuesday and Friday except the days observed for New Year's Day, July 4th and Christmas Day, at 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

Periodicals postage paid at Goodland, Kan. 67735; entered at the Goodland, Kan., Post Office under the Act of Congress of March 8, 1878.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Goodland Star-News, 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

TELEPHONE: (785) 899-2338. Editorial e-mail: [star-news@nwkansas.com](mailto:star-news@nwkansas.com). Advertising questions can be sent to: [goodlandads@nwkansas.com](mailto:goodlandads@nwkansas.com)

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SUBSCRIPTIONS: In Sherman County and adjacent counties: three months, \$29; six months, \$46; 12 months, \$81. Out of area, weekly mailing of two issues: three months, \$39; six months, \$54; 12 months, \$89 (All tax included). Mailed individually each day: (call for a price).

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## Ready for the fall

The greatest myth perpetrated this election cycle is that the nasty, bitter Democratic presidential campaign will leave the party divided this fall.

Sure, supporters of the losing candidate will be angry and disappointed and may sulk a bit, but any notion they will go for Sen. John McCain in November is Republican fantasyland.

When the Democrats leave Denver in August, their presidential nominee will have a double-digit lead and the "battle" over lapel pins and Bosnian snipers won't even be a blip on the voter radar honed in on Iraq, the economy and eight years of Republicans Gone Wild.

No matter how many times McCain says "my friends," he will have few of them among general election voters when they give unbridled attention to his position on issues they care about.

Soaring gas prices, stagnant wages and the housing collapse have our economy in tatters, and McCain concedes this isn't his strong suit even though "I've got Greenspan's book." Our failing economy is one of the casualties of the Iraq War that McCain continues to strongly support. At long last, the media are beginning to ask some hard questions about the cost of the war.

Ron Brownstein of National Journal poses this question for McCain: "If the war really is crucial to America's security, shouldn't today's taxpayers finance it?"

As has been pointed out numerous times, Iraq is the first major war this country has fought by transferring the entire cost to future generations through government debt. Presi-



from  
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dent Bush never proposed raising taxes to pay for the war. Worse, in 2003 he substantially cut taxes, unprecedented in war time.

Expect more of the same from a McCain administration. McCain has already endorsed tax cuts that would cost more than \$300 billion a year, including reduction of the corporate income tax from 34 percent to 25 percent. And, of course, he wants to make the Bush tax cuts permanent, another \$110 billion.

A constant worry to families across America is our deteriorating health care system where rising costs leave nearly 50 million with no insurance coverage and millions more underinsured. The current system cherry-picks the healthy and tells those with chronic diseases to get lost.

When a journalist asked if the Senator's skin cancer might make him sympathetic to the idea of requiring that insurance companies offer

policies to those with such conditions, McCain responded: "That would be mandating what the free enterprise system does." (He is referring of course to a system that does indeed allow insurance companies to choose the healthiest people and refuse coverage to those who are sick.)

McCain told the Boston Globe he would give people with preexisting conditions "an extra tax credit" to help pay for insurance funded by savings in the Medicaid program. The Columbia Journalism Review made this observation: Where does McCain think the Medicaid savings will come from? Does he mean cutting benefits to poor people who depend on Medicaid for health care? Or from middle-class families who rely on Medicaid to pay for nursing home care?

Real issues like these keep people awake at night, and only the Democrats offer real solutions. I think I'm really going to enjoy the fall campaign.

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### Letter Policy

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