

from our viewpoint...

Tough decisions bring us together

Day to day decisions are the easy ones, and people make dozens of them each day in their lives and business.

The tough decisions come along rarely, but when they do they bring people together once a choice has been made.

The Goodland School Board has been facing a tough decision to close a school, and at their meeting last Monday the board members came together to follow the recommendation of Superintendent Shelly Angelos and vote to close North Elementary School.

The board members each expressed their feeling about not closing a school, and looking for other ways to handle the cuts coming down from Topeka. Once the motion had been made the board members showed great courage and solidarity by voting unanimously to close North.

Closing a school is a tough decision for any school board member to face. In years gone by the idea of closing a school had been the subject of discussion, but each time the school district people found a way to keep the schools open.

Facing a declining school population made keeping the schools open an unrealistic goal coupled with the dwindling amount of money available to operate the district. More cuts probably can be made to help the district handle the cuts in state money, and we are sure closing the school is a first step.

Moving students to other schools will take coordination and cooperation of the staff at North and those of the schools where the classes will be next year.

Some district employees will find they no longer have a job, and having to make those decisions will not be any easier than the one to close the school. Hopefully the number will be small, but in this economy no one wants to cut any jobs.

School staffs are important in the lives of our children and are the people we trust to enlighten and educate our children to face the future and become productive citizens who will eventually take their positions as leaders of our community.

The school board will hold a public hearing on the vote to close North at 7 p.m. on Monday to explain the decision and to hear from parents and citizens in the community. The decision is not likely to be reversed unless someone has a magical way of getting the district more money.

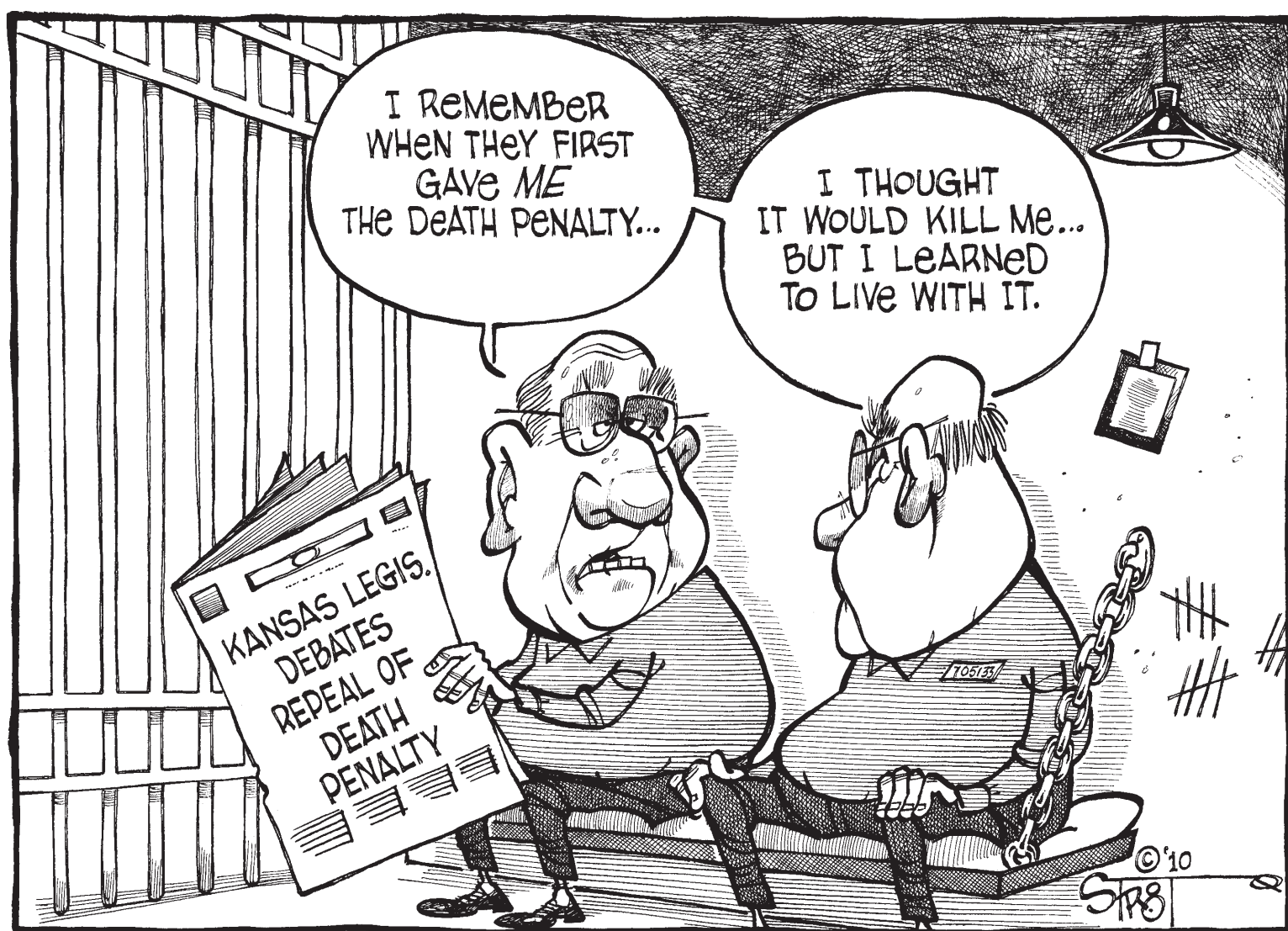
The next question will be what the school district does with the building, and if it should be moth balled and saved, leased to one or more organizations or sold off in pieces or the whole two blocks.

Recessions have a predictable curve down and curve back up to where the economy is growing again. Signs are beginning to show the downward curve has reached bottom and the curve has begun turning up. However, the upward curve is flatter and slower than the fall. Expectations are the positive signs will continue with the red ink beginning to disappear by the second half of the year.

Closing North may be the first of several steps the district may face, and exploring all avenues for the future development and organization of the school buildings could help the board face those decisions with a bit less pressure than the present decision.

We salute the board members for facing the tough decision and showing a united front in moving ahead with the recommendations to bring the district through this belt tightening process.

— Tom Betz



Rodeo team gift receives thumbs up

Thumbs Up to John and Loretta Boyington, for their generous contribution of land and arena to enhance the addition of a rodeo team at Northwest Tech—(telephone request); to the school board, for standing united in its decision to close North Elementary School—(e-mail request); and to everyone involved in the county health fair held Saturday—(td). To render a Thumbs Up, simply e-mail tad1@st-tel.net, or call (785) 890-2475, my home, or the office at 899-2338.

—td—

Let's see if I have this right:
 1) Prior to President Obama's State of the Union address last Wednesday night, the cable news networks told me what I was going to hear.
 2) Then I heard the president speak.
 3) Then the cable news networks told me what I heard.
 I had no idea I was so stupid.
 But here are the facts:
 1) What they told me I was going to hear is not what I heard.
 2) What I did hear was what the president said.
 3) So, what they told me I heard was a bunch of hooley!
 The only good thing coming out of all of this is the fact I'm not the stupid one.



tom dreiling

• time out with td

So, friends, that wraps up my take on President Obama's first State of the Union address.

—td—

What a whale of a game in Manhattan Saturday evening. KU prevailed over K-State 81-79 in overtime. You couldn't have asked for a more exciting game. I'm a K-State fan, and watching that game unfold didn't deflate by enthusiasm for the Wildcats one bit. Many games are yet to played.

—td—

The countdown continues for Super Bowl 44. My coins are on the Colts.

—td—

The more all of us read and hear about the good things going on at Northwest Tech, the more the community should get behind the efforts to help grow its numbers. It's one of those GOOD things for GOODland that we must not lose sight of. Sometimes a gentle nudge is necessary, so consider this that 'nudge.' When you are talking with people who live elsewhere, but

might have kids nearing the age of picking a school to further their education, keep the name "Northwest Tech" in the conversation. Consider yourself a recruiter.

—td—

I might be talking out of turn, so correct me if I am. But I have a safety concern I would like to talk about, and it involves the portion of the roadway from the intersection of US24 & K27 (controlled by stoplights) near Walmart. I know some of that roadway is due for a work-over sometime in the future if there are ample coins left in the state's piggy-bank. But my immediate concern is the inability to barely see the white and yellow stripes that help move traffic safely. They are well worn and at nighttime it's nothing short of a guessing game. I'm just wondering what it might cost to re-stripe just the part of the road from the stoplights south to the Walmart entrance. It would certainly help. And like I say if I am talking out of turn, correct me. And thanks, in advance, for any consideration you might give this safety issue.

—td—

Have a good evening! And in case you missed it, as I did, I don't know if the groundhog saw its shadow this morning or not. (tad1@st-tel.net)

Agriculture's priorities

Heading into the New Year and new decade several key issues remain at the top of the priority list for Kansas farmers and ranchers. Health care, climate and environment, animal agriculture, balancing the federal budget and ag sales tax exemptions remain among the most important.

Health care is on everyone's minds today. Most Kansans and their fellow Americans are either adamantly for or against proposed health care changes. This has ignited a national debate with a passion and fervor rarely seen on legislative issues.

The health care issue is very personal for every American. It carries two overarching factors important to ag producers and rural America — reducing health care costs and improving rural access.

To help ease the burden on producers and rural America, tax credits could help the self-employed purchase health insurance. This would also allow farm and ranch employers affordable insurance for their employees.

Mandating that individuals purchase health insurance will only work for rural America if costs are brought under control and if tax credits are generous enough to make insurance affordable.

Turning to the climate and environment, most farmers and ranchers oppose cap and trade climate legislation because it would raise their production costs. The potential costs of such legislation are far greater than any benefit to producers.

Congress must focus on renewable energy



Insight this week

• john schlageck

that is far better for the environment and this nation's domestic energy security. It should not tie the hands of U.S. producers whose productivity provides the world's food.

In the livestock arena, producers have already waded through several years of lean prices for their animals. These producers cannot withstand the mounting pressure to restrict the use of antibiotics because some believe the use of such drugs result in disease-resistant strains.

Anti-animal agriculture activists continue to attack livestock producers at the state level after being defeated by organized groups in Ohio. The Humane Society of the United States will propose ballot indicatives in Missouri this year.

Like so many segments of our society, Kansas farmers and ranchers believe it's time for government to live within its means. Simply put, don't spend money you don't have.

Ag producers who belong to Farm Bureau in Kansas recently called for a reduction in the federal deficit each year — reaching a fully balanced budget by 2019. Government services and entitlements must be reduced.

Farmers and ranchers would also like to see meaningful relief from the estate tax, with no

conditions or qualifications. They want to see an overall exemption. They also support full stepped-up basis at the time of death in order to reduce the capital gains tax burden on farm and ranch heirs.

Expanded world trade remains a key for prosperity in farm country. Movement on pending trade agreements with Colombia, Panama and Peru would be a step in the right direction.

Trade with Cuba could be another bright spot. There is growing interest, led in part by Kansas Congressman Jerry Moran, to ease travel restrictions and promote broader trade in commodities and other goods to Cuba.

The state budget and tax policy will be the main focus during the 2010 Kansas legislative session. Lawmakers will look for any way possible to balance the budget including tax and fee increases. This could impact agriculture in the following ways:

Ag sales tax exemptions — most ag tax exemptions apply to ingredient/component parts or farm machinery essential to production. Elimination would significantly hurt ag producers, and place Kansas at a competitive disadvantage to producers in neighboring states.

Dedicated program fees — are collected by certain participants of an industry to fund regulatory programs specific to those that pay the fee (license, inspection, registration, etc.). Often these programs have a statewide benefit far beyond those paying the fee. In tough economic times, the legislature often "sweeps" these fees to fund other areas of state government. This tax increase would not be affordable.

Property tax — increases in property tax disproportionately affect landowners who are particularly concerned with the steady creep of increased Local Option Budget Authority to fund schools.

Buckle up — 2010 will be a bumpy ride. John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau has been writing about farming and ranching in Kansas for more than 25 years. He is the managing editor of "Kansas Living," a quarterly magazine dedicated to agriculture and rural life in Kansas.

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