

from our viewpoint...

## Our schools outside Post-Audit options

Consolidating school districts has been a perennial subject for the state legislature and with the financial conditions facing the state the subject surfaced last week.

The Legislative Post-Audit Committee released a report on consolidating smaller school districts to save the state money. The options could save at least \$18 million and perhaps as much as \$138 million.

The committee had their staff research possible savings from reorganizing the school districts, and looked at the options on a statistical basis.

Consolidating small school districts could close 32 districts under the first option with the Brewster, Weskan and Winnona districts the ones that could be affected in this area.

The second and more extensive option would reduce the number of districts from 295 down to 152 with the potential to save \$138 million by cutting 1,532 teaching and administrative positions and close 304 school buildings.

Maps showing the two options were included in the report, and Goodland would not be affected by either plan. Part of the reason is that one of the limitations on combining small districts would be the size limiting the school districts to 1,000 square miles. Currently Syracuse school district is the largest in the state at 998 square miles.

The report does say that the second option would increase the number of students who would have to be bussed by 7,000 students and add 104 bus routes.

While the report made headlines and got the consolidation talk going across the state the legislative committee did not recommend the legislature adopt either of the proposed options.

The committee report did recommend some small changes expected to encourage school districts to voluntarily consider consolidating without having the legislature force a large reorganization.

The report does say that following either of the two choices would be a long term investment, and the savings might be less as some districts would have to build or expand buildings to accomplish the consolidation.

While the legislative committee ducked the major issue facing the state about financing schools, the proposals do show most of the consolidation would be in the eastern part of the state where the towns are closer and the districts are smaller.

Pundits are making a lot of the committee report on school consolidation, and as the legislative process goes forward more will be made of the report to push for more consolidation.

For once it appears being out on the west edge may be good as the legislative committee could not find a way to slice or combine the small districts in our area.

On the local level we felt the Goodland school board handled the tough decision on Monday to close North Elementary in the best possible manner. We hope people attend the public meeting on March 8 to discuss the future of the North school building and property.

With the denial of the schools lawsuit by the Supreme Court will make it tougher to get the school finances into the courts. The process may not be over, but it will probably take longer than the legislative session to move through the court system.

The state must find a solution to the school financial situation without cutting the schools to the point of reducing the quality education we want for our young people. Cutting is not the answer any more than throwing more money at the problem is an answer. — Tom Betz



## Don't punish the victim

By Ava Betz

There have been five letters to the editor regarding coverage printed in this paper of a recent trial held in District Court. The general content of the letters is that the writers think the newspaper should have ignored the trial or covered it in some brief, vague and euphemistic manner.

I am new to the community, so I can understand some nervousness as to my ability to cover such a trial. Let me give some of my background pertinent to the situation.

In addition to more than 20 years as a reporter and/or editor of community publications, for 15 years I served on a multi-county domestic violence victims assistance board, leaving that position when I moved to Goodland. As part of serving on this board I attended Colorado Victims Advocates (COVA) conventions, held annually, at which I attended workshops and sessions which are attended by law enforcement personnel, legal practitioners, social service providers and victim's advocates as part of earning and maintaining their ongoing professional accreditations.

For 10 years I managed a privately-owned HUD Section 8 affordable housing 50-unit complex and for three years served as com-



from other pens

• commentary

missioner on the local housing authority board which over saw the operation of several hundred units in a several county area. I left both those positions when I moved to Goodland.

As both a housing manager and commissioner I occasionally had situations arise where victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse were involved. These victims were of all ages and both sexes.

And finally, when I was 21, I was the victim of an attempted rape attack by several perpetrators. The attack broke off when I held my breath and went limp. The attackers thought I was dead and ran off. I was hospitalized and carry a scar from the attempt. The attackers were never identified.

So I am familiar with the plight of victims. In the case of this local trial, the courage and intelligence of the victim should not be undervalued. Her strength in dealing with the situation, collecting evidence and having the

fortitude to go through the process which culminated in bringing the perpetrator to justice should not be belittled.

To report on that evidence and the heinous nature of the crimes committed, it was necessary to use language for which no dignified euphemisms exist. Those who were at the trial realize the newspaper stories did not and could not go into great detail about the crimes or the evidence. However, to ignore the trial would be to imply there is some shame attached to the victim or to infer the crime was so trifling as to not be worthy of bringing to the attention of the community. The shame rests solely on the perpetrator who was convicted, not on the victim. Her courage and resourcefulness should serve as an example for other potential victims.

Which leads to an observation: news stories about murder trials never seem to call forth cries of "obscenity!" Yet depriving a person of life would seem to be one of the most obscene acts of which humanity is capable. There seems to be a fairly universal acknowledgment that families of murder victims gain some sort of "closure" from seeing a murderer held accountable for his acts in public, both at trial and in the media. Victims of other crimes also deserve that closure.

## Consider the big picture

If today's crop of young farmers and ranchers plan to play a part in the future of agriculture, they must position themselves where this industry will be — not where it is.

It is especially important for those in agriculture to focus on the future rather than the past. Sometimes, farmers and ranchers tend to look wistfully to yesterday and that's not reality. Those in the industry must look at their industry and say, "This is what agriculture will look like."

There are four key considerations young farm and ranch couples must take to heart and mind if they are to reach their full potential in the agricultural industry. These include: be willing to change; be part of something bigger than yourself; accept the future; and give up your own independence.

Addressing change is something young farmers and ranchers are familiar with. They have no trouble recognizing change — it's doing something about it that is so difficult.

Everyone tends to give change a chance but when difficulty pops up all of us tend to revert back to our old ways of doing things. To change we must develop a new process of thinking and implementing change.

Secondly, we as humans, especially young farmers and ranchers must strive toward something greater than self-actualization to fulfill our own unique potential.

This means providing ourselves with something bigger than we are. To accomplish



Insight this week

• john schlageck

anything of greatness, we must work with others.

Agriculture is not just about the local community, the family or the farm and ranch operation. It is not just about growing corn, wheat or raising livestock. Producers must see themselves as part of the food industry which remains the most critical industry in the world.

As far as accepting the future, some people will continue to dig in their heels and think, "That may be what the future is like, but I want no part of it."

What alternative is there?

We can't recreate the world in the image we want. Instead, we must identify the world as it's going to be. In agriculture we must focus on the consumers of our products and not make this an issue about what we're doing on the family farm. It's not about us, it's about the customers we serve.

If farmers and ranchers are just trying to survive, they will fail. If agricultural producers strive to serve, they will succeed.

The fourth block on which to build a future in agriculture includes giving up independence.

Americans revere their independence. The United States was born out of independence.

However, unless farmers and ranchers move to interdependence they will not survive.

In today's world no one is an island. We all must work together.

We can't be focused on a single issue. We must look at the bigger picture and understand that we're all in this together. We're in the food industry and it's bigger than any of us.

Those who remain independent continue to work on the principal of rewards and punishments. That's the same system animals toil under and if humans continue down that path, they are destined to fail.

A farmer and rancher cannot remain independent and farm in the future. Producers must be willing to give themselves to something bigger for a common purpose and impact the world with the help of others.

While these four building blocks may sound simple, implementing them is extremely difficult. Many will fail and start over. Some will not make it. For others it will remain a life-long commitment. The important thing is to begin.

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.

## where to write

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