

from our viewpoint...

Municipal league should be ashamed

Plans by the League of Kansas Municipalities to spend nearly a quarter of a million dollars to commemorate its centennial should come as a shock to Kansas taxpayers.

It's their money, after all, but they won't be invited to the party, planned for the group's annual conference this October in Overland Park.

This is just one small example of the cavalier manner in which some public officials spend your money.

On top of the \$240,000 budget, the league is asking cities to donate \$1,000 to \$5,000 to help sponsor this "gala celebration" of the anniversary. This must be some party they're planning.

With many Kansans out of work and others just scraping to feed and clothe their families, throwing a quarter-million-dollar celebration might be seen as excess, and indeed, the league says so far, no cities have signed up as "sponsors."

A report in the *Lawrence Journal-World* noted that the league provides many services, including training, lobbying and legal expertise, to member cities. It also provides a forum for city officials to gather, network and exchange ideas.

All of this is done at taxpayer expense, however, and taxpayers should demand that it be done with frugality. The legal says it already has spent \$66,000 on preparations for the gala, with \$174,000 in the budget for this year. Part of the money will go for television commercials extolling the league's history.

And this at a time when cities across Kansas have lost their state money and have to scrape to pay expenses — or raise taxes.

Any city that makes a donation to this event would seem to be risking the wrath of its taxpayers. Taxpayers ought to question officials about the dues they pay to this organization.

It's not that cities shouldn't have an association. The league performs many useful functions, helping to train city officials and guide them through legal issues.

Its lobbying function can be another matter. Sometimes, the league takes taxpayers' money and uses it for causes that many citizens might not agree with. These have included undermining the state's public notice and open government laws.

Cities have not sued the state over money as some school districts have, and that's a plus. However, we feel public officials need to be careful to take the interests of everyday citizens, and not just public officials, into account when they go to the Statehouse and spend tax money.

Sometimes those two are not identical. Officials often want to see more secrecy and more freedom to spend money than many citizens would like. That creates a duty for those spending taxpayers' money to influence public affairs to be sure they're working for the taxpayers, not just those who spend tax money.

A tax-financed gala in the middle of the Great Recession, with thousands out of work?

It's not a tasteful use of our money, frankly, not when taxpayers are outside looking in.

Send it back to the cities for tax reduction, we say, knowing full well it's just a drop in the bucket. Every tax dollar, taken from someone supposedly for the public good, should count. Every one. — *Steve Haynes*



Remember folks, every face counts

FALLING NUMBERS...

If you haven't had access to the 2009 estimated population count of Sherman County and all the other counties in Kansas, courtesy the U.S. Census Bureau, then read on. It isn't a pretty picture.

In the year 2000, the last time an official count of the United States was taken (they are taken every 10 years), Sherman County's official population count was 6,760. The estimated population count for 2009 is 5,860, a loss of 900 people. Gulp!

That, in itself, should be reason enough for you to fill out your 2010 Census Form and get it mailed within the next couple of days. Lord only knows how many people might not have filled out a census form in 2000, even though it is mandated by law that this must be done. There will always be any number of people who fall through the cracks, so please make sure you are not one of them. Your form is so important to the future of our county.

Here are some other estimated population counts for our immediate area:

- Cheyenne County, 3,165 in year 2000; 2,700 estimated 2009
- Decatur County, 3,472 in 2000; 2,856 estimated 2009
- Rawlins County, 2,966 in 2000; 2,425 estimated 2009
- Thomas County, 8,180 in 2000; 7,343 estimated 2000



tom dreiling

• time out with td

• Wallace County, 1,749 in 2000; 1,408 estimated in 2009

Ellis County is the only northwest Kansas county to show an increase, from 27,507 in 2000 to an estimated 27,739 estimated in 2009. And the gain wasn't much to brag about.

Here are a few others to toss into the mix: Logan County from 3,046 in 2000, to 2,549 in 2009; Norton County, from 5,953 in 2000, to 5,330 in 2009; Sheridan County, from 2,813 in 2000, to 2,435 in 2009; Trego County, from 3,319 in 2000, to 2,920 in 2009.

The importance of an accurate count cannot be overstated. We must not miss even one face in this 2010 Census count.

Please mail your form in today. It's postage free if mailed back in the envelope provided by the Census Bureau. How easy is that?

When the wind blows the way it did again over the weekend, that's when I'm glad I don't have any hair. But I do wear a cap that sometimes is robbed from my top!

I have a friend in the Topeka area who looks at things much differently than most of us, thus

his e-mail after Obamacare was approved: "This thing is supposed to insure many millions of the uninsured. But by the time it is fully implemented, how many of those people will still be alive?"

WAKING TO JAY...

I usually start my mornings with a fresh cup of coffee (is there any other kind of coffee to start the day with?), while listening to Jay Sanderson on the local radio station maneuver himself through some interesting issues. I am not always in agreement but enjoy the challenges he tosses out. People who talk to the public, like those of us who write for the public, should always leave our audience with something to think about. That's our job. I don't know Jay's background but he reminds me of a young man who worked several months for KWCH-TV, Wichita, as a sports reporter and an analyst on their Sunday night sports program after the news. I always enjoyed that young man's perspective. I think he and another young guy were "auditioning" for a permanent spot on the sports staff and I was disappointed when my choice didn't make the cut. Pardon me for straying from my point, which was how I start my day.

Have a good evening! And let's get together for another chat later in the week. (td1@st-tel.net; 890-2475)

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Traveling to Sherman, Norton and Grant counties the last couple weeks, I became reacquainted with an old friend, nemesis, nuisance that is very much a part of the western Kansas landscape.

While being buffeted about by 40 mile-per-hour northerly breezes, countless tumbleweeds rolled across Highways 24, 36 and 160. While I missed many of them, I occasionally nailed a two-footer while bumping a few others out of my path.

Tumbleweeds first gained notoriety when the Sons of the Pioneers romanticized them in song back in the late '30s. I remember seeing my first ones in the early '50s. In the early spring, summer and fall when winds howled across roads in my native Sheridan County, tumbleweeds raced across the flatland. Incidentally, I recall singing along with the Pioneers and I still remember the song well.

This plant is as much a symbol of the old Wild West as Wyatt Earp, cattle rustlers, the coyote and the rattlesnake. The image of the lonely rider and the ghostly shape of the tumbleweed bounding in silence across the endless plains has inspired a certain misty-eyed nostalgia even in folks who have never journeyed west

Tumbling Along



Insight this week

• john schlageck

of Kansas City — except to travel through our state to ski in Colorado.

In truth, this weed is a blasted nuisance. Even its Latin name (*Salsola pestifer*) identifies it as a menace.

The tumbleweed is known as the Russian thistle. This plant was brought to the continent in the 1870s as a contaminant in shipments of flax seed imported to western Canada. By the turn of the century, the weed had a foothold from coast to coast.

The tumbleweed can survive and grow almost anywhere. It remains one of the hardest plants in the United States. Unfortunately no one has found a good use for this thorny weed.

Tumbleweeds can cause problems for farmers and ranchers. This nuisance weed clogs irrigation ditches, catches and accumulates litter, disrupts traffic, causes fires, poses a health

threat to some livestock and even breaks down fences on windy days.

In Kansas and other western states, thousands of man hours are spent each year clearing tumbleweeds from irrigation ditches and railroad tracks. In the spring the weeds are fought with herbicides and in the fall the dried plants are sometimes burned.

Fighting tumbleweeds is a constant battle. Nearly every breezy day they bound across the prairie and every spring they sprout by the millions.

Although tumbleweeds have been in this country for nearly 150 years, no one has found a reason to cultivate this plant. One thing is certain; this nuisance weed is here to stay unless our plant scientists can find a use or method to eradicate the tumbling, tumbling tumbleweed.

So why not romanticize them?
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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