

from our viewpoint...

Program to help habitat, access

Good news for rural America is a new U.S. Department of Agriculture program to help states lease land and improve habitat for public access.

Called the Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program, the effort is authorized by the 2008 Farm Bill. It offers states and tribal governments up to \$50 million in grants through 2012 to expand or create public-access programs for hunting and recreation.

"We believe that encouraging outdoor recreation activities in rural communities represents a real opportunity," said Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack.

The number of hunters and fishermen has been declining for years as America becomes more urban and less rural. Once, hunters could knock on the door and expect to be welcomed by a farm owner. Today, with many farmers living in town or miles from their fields, it's increasingly difficult to get permission to hunt or fish. Private leases take more land out of the pool.

But \$50 million isn't much money in this day and age, so why is this important?

First, with much land coming out of the Conservation Reserve Program, farmers may be able to use a little cash. The federal money might preserve some habitat that would otherwise be lost to the plow.

Second, rural America needs all the friends it can get. Face it: there aren't many of us compared to our brethren in the city. We don't vote in numbers anymore. So anything we get from Washington will be the result of partnerships with city folk.

We need them on our side. We need them to understand our positions, our needs. We need them to care. And hunters who visit the farm and get to know farmers are just the type of supporters we need.

We should make them our friends.

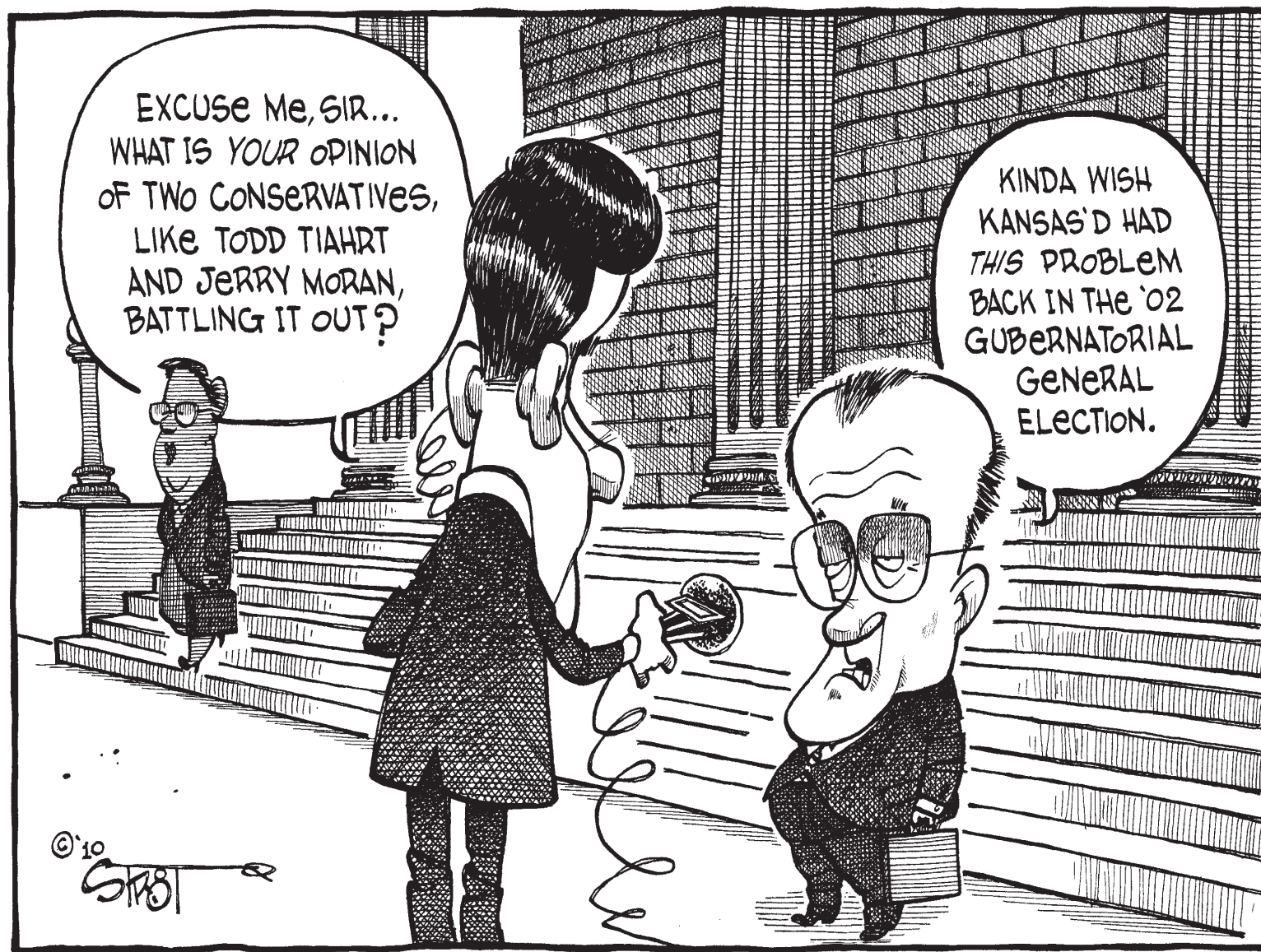
What we loosely call the Farm Bill today really is a welfare bill. Most of the money goes to urban programs. We've seen what happens when city-bred environmental interests get their hands on this money: Conservation Reserve cut, ethanol programs under attack, cheap food always in the forefront.

Rural Americans, as few as we are, cannot go to Washington and force anyone to do anything. Not enough of us. Farmers are fewer still. So we need all the allies we can find.

Third, hunting, fishing and recreation are big business. Secretary Vilsack estimates and people using public lands under his department spend \$12 billion a year in nearby towns, creating a quarter-million jobs. The department sees a chance to spread that around, and those of us surrounded by private land could use some of that business.

Kansas officials, knowing how little public land we have in this state, welcomed the new program. Kansas already has 1 million acres under lease and might be able to do more with some federal money.

We wouldn't say \$1 million per state was enough to change the world, but it's a start. To really help us, this program needs to grow and expand. But anything Washington does to help us is welcome. — Steve Haynes



Kansans don't know the fix we are in

You just can't make this stuff up. After reading the Friday edition of *The Goodland Star-News* it is abundantly clear that the bulk of us Kansans just don't get the fix we're in.

Headlines: 'State has responsibly handled budget crisis' and, 'City applies for 3 airport grants.'

The budget article was written by our Governor, Mark Parkinson. He congratulated himself and the Kansas Legislature on how thrifty and resourceful they were in balancing the budget. They trimmed a little here and trimmed a little there and then increased our sales tax by an amount second only to one other tax increase in the history of Kansas.

Kansas is broke and taxed to death. It has promised its employees far more retirement, healthcare and other benefits than it, than we, can ever provide. Promises made to Medicare, Medicaid and our public school system makes it even worse.

Governor, the current budget is nothing but a quick fix. It kicked the can down the road and took the path of least resistance. Furthermore, it raised taxes on every single citizen in the state while in a recession! Raising taxes in a recession is a sure-fire way to increase the length and severity of a recession. Additionally, a sales tax increase hits the working poor and middle class harder than everyone else. Thanks a lot.

In the next article we learn how the State of Kansas is encouraging Goodland to submit as many building projects as they want. This is Kansas's version of a stimulus program. Are these guys nuts? Are we broke or not?



from our readers

to the editor

I'd accuse the state of spending money like a drunken sailor but that wouldn't be an accurate accusation. Drunken sailors always quit spending when they run out of money. Not Kansas. I thought Kansas was a republican state?

Of course, our local city representatives are eager to line up like pigs at the trough and get what they can while the gettin's good.

Does not anyone question where the money comes from? Are we all too self-centered, too greedy, too desperate to face the fact the money for these projects is coming from our children, and our children's, children. Do we really think by blowing the next generations money on worthless projects with little or no real return, projects will not increase the productivity of our state by one dollar, we are doing the future a favor? I think we're insanely selfish and so hooked on the welfare state mentality we can no longer even devise a real plan to create real wealth.

Count me out when you're running to the trough. I'm an American who believes in free enterprise, limited government, private ownership of property and in paying my own debts in my own generation.

Ken Klemm
Goodland

To the Editor:

The headline should have read "Jury gives message, sexual child abuse will not be tolerated in Sherman County."

Of course there was conflicting testimony. But the Jury, with their wisdom could see right through the well rehearsed, fabricated testimony of Micha Wayne Seamens.

They sat through two days of testimony. That's one more day than the reporter chose to attend.

They heard about the defendant, a self absorbed, narcissistic man that thought he was above the law. In his arrogance he believed he was entitled to use and abuse anyone in his reach.

But even this egotistical man knew he may have to pay-for his crimes. He tried to strike a plea deal not once but twice.

Mercedes, who started out as his victim over two years ago, is now a survivor and refused any plea agreements.

She wanted justice, and for others to be warned of this child sexual predator.

We have a lot to be thankful for, as the people of Sherman County let it be known, there will be zero tolerance for such behavior.

Now I have only two more things to ask. I ask that you pray for our family, so that we may continue to heal, and leave this all behind us.

But most of all, pray for Micha's fourth wife. Pray that her family will not fall victim to him.

Lana Hunn
Goodland

Hearings are not about the witness

Even before Tony Hayward, the embattled CEO of BP, appeared in front of a House investigative subcommittee on June 17, everyone knew why he was there. It was not to apologize for the Gulf oil spill or to explain his company's behavior — though all of this was expected of him. He was there, in large measure, so that members of Congress could vent their outrage — and that of their constituents — over the spill.

They did this for hours, accusing BP of taking shortcuts that increased the chances of an oil-rig explosion and its chief of "stonewalling" efforts to understand what had happened. It was a bipartisan pile-on — with the notable exception of the Texas Republican who apologized for the White House's efforts to secure a \$20 billion compensation fund from the company. By the end, *USA Today* was comparing Hayward to a piñata.

All of this was a fine example of the drama inherent in a high-profile congressional hearing, which, for better or worse, is where the American public often builds its impression of Congress. There are plenty of tedious hearings on Capitol Hill — though they are often just as important, if not more so, as the ones that attract a media scrum. But the hearings that rivet the public's attention, play to a packed room, and command that evening's news cycle showcase Congress at both its best and worst.

Members can appear deeply knowledgeable and appallingly ignorant, angry and sympathetic, impressive and lackluster. They can pander to mass opinion, showboat, ask silly questions, and ignore or misstate the facts. They can also ask tough, penetrating questions, hold public figures to account for their actions, and build Americans' understanding of thorny national problems. Sometimes you can see all of this in the space of a single hearing — and, from time to time, in a single member.

For the witnesses in the limelight, the stakes are high. Careers and reputations get made and broken in congressional hearing rooms, and



lee hamilton

commentary

causes advanced or destroyed. Yet in the end, hearings like these are part of the work of the Congress — staged and run to serve the purposes of members.

Indeed, if I were to offer one piece of advice above all to someone called to testify, it would be to remember this overriding fact: The hearing is more about advancing the interests of the members attending than about you. The cameras may all be trained on you and the reporters jotting down every word you say, but you are there to serve the purposes of the politicians arrayed in front of you — for publicity, for channeling public sentiment, for scoring political points, and even for digging deeply into a problem in a praiseworthy effort to build public understanding.

With that in mind, here are a few pointers for people who find themselves on the spotlight side of a witness table:

- Prepare carefully. I mean this both in an intellectual sense — you want to have your thoughts, arguments, and facts composed before you get to Capitol Hill — as well as a physical sense. A high-profile hearing can go on for hours without any break. All witnesses are advised to drink liquids sparingly, or not at all, to prepare for a long ordeal. My guess is that advice led to Gen. David Petraeus fainting at a recent hearing.

- Be confident and credible, and advocate your position as clearly and forcefully as you can while remaining polite and respectful of the committee. Members of Congress will undoubtedly challenge you, and you need to remember they're doing their jobs, not just seeking 15 seconds on the evening news. Don't get upset if you're contradicted; just focus

on the message you want to get across, and remember to keep it simple.

- Always remain calm and polite, no matter how explosive or provocative members become. You won't harm your cause by keeping your temper; you almost certainly will by losing it. Remember hearings set the stage for the future: If you pick a fight, you may very well win it at the moment, but you'll almost certainly lose it in the legislation that emerges.

- Answer the questions you're asked; don't dodge or ignore them. If you don't know the answer, just say so, and afterward look up the answer and furnish it to committee staff and members. That's how you build credibility.

- Finally, while this might seem an odd admonition, enjoy yourself. High-profile hearings are political theater on a national stage, and while the stakes may be high, taking a step back to appreciate the drama of the moment will help you savor a singular experience.

Lee H. Hamilton is Director of the Center on Congress at Indiana University. He was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives for 34 years. E-Mail: congress@indiana.edu.

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The Goodland Star-News

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

Member: Kansas Press Association

Inland Press Association Colorado Press Association

National Newspaper Association

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Published every Tuesday and Friday except the days observed for New Year's Day, Memorial Day, July 4th, Labor Day, Thanksgiving 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. Advertising questions can be sent to: goodlandads@nwkansas.com

The Goodland Star-News assumes no liability for mistakes or omissions in advertising or failure to publish beyond the actual cost of the ad.

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).

Incorporating:

The Goodland Daily News

1932-2003

The Sherman County Herald

Founded by Thomas McCants
1935-1989

THE SHERMAN COUNTY STAR

Founded by Eric and Roxie Yonkey
1994-2001

Nor'West Newspapers

Haynes Publishing Company