

from our viewpoint...

## Budgets, football signal summer's end

A sure sign of the end of summer is the Cowboys running through football drills, the Tech College is in session and the county is continuing the budget review.

For the Cowboys the weather was cool as they began their football drills looking forward to the opening game at Hugoton on Friday, Sept. 3. The football and cross country soap scrimmage will be at 6:15 p.m. on Friday, Aug. 27.

Northwest Tech opened classes Thursday and Dr. Ed Mills, college president, was all smiles as he reported 352 students had enrolled. He said that was 100 more than the college had finished the year with in May. He said the athletic programs are ready to kick off, and everyone is enjoying the iPads.

Over at the Sherman County courthouse the commissioners are hearing from more of the "special interest" groups who had been notified their budgets were being cut.

The day long session on Tuesday was fruitful and the commissioners said they had learned a lot in hearing from the various groups.

For the commissioners it was a first time to hear from each of the groups and be able to judge the worth of each program.

Commissioner Cynthia Strnad had defined a special interest group as one with supporters, but not directly a function of government.

She said it was good to hear from the groups, and said she had learned a lot about what each group does in the county.

The commissioners agreed to revise many of the cuts, but told each group they were having to make some cuts to keep from having to raise property taxes.

County governments unlike city governments have almost no flexibility in raising money as the property tax is the main source. In the case of Sherman County the people have helped out by approving a one-cent sales tax that is split between the county and cities for general purposes and a quarter-cent sales tax the county uses to help pay for health programs.

For the cities the options are a bit broader depending on the services the city has developed over the years such as electrical power and distribution. Goodland is fortunate that many years ago the city purchased and built the existing power plant and distribution system. This has been a way to infuse money into the city, and giving the city a major income stream.

Water and sewer are two more programs cities have to provide income streams, but in both cases most systems usually do not make huge amounts of money. For Goodland the sewer system has been slowly increasing reserves, but when a major project hits the major option to pay for the project is to raise the monthly fees.

Goodland is in the middle of a major water improvement project, and is expected to raise the monthly minimum by \$5 in the next month. However, people should understand that is a down payment on what will be needed to pay back the more than \$5 million the project is costing.

Thanks to a buildup of reserves the city is in a position to save the taxpayers about \$1 million by paying the loan off directly. That savings would have to be paid back to the city reserves to have it available for future projects.

We applaud the efforts of the county commissioners to hold down the taxes, and to listening to the various interest groups who represent the taxpayers who pay both the property tax and sales taxes to help raise the money for government to operate for the next year.

And a cheer Go Cowboys! Go Mavericks! — *Tom Betz*

## The Goodland Star-News

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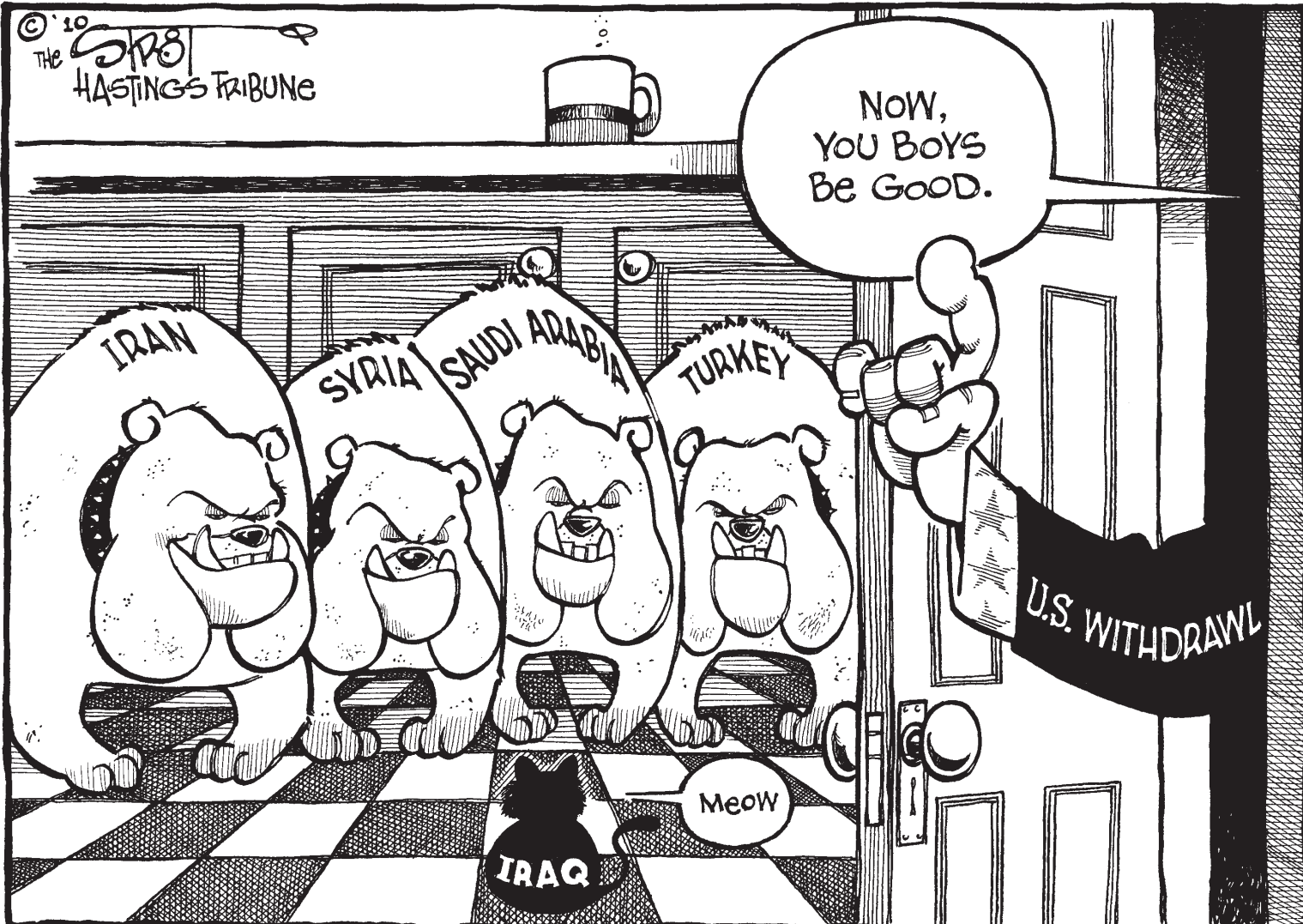
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## Universal Service Fund fee is needed

Letter to the Editor:

I read the Friday, Aug. 6, editorial Mr. Steve Haynes wrote about the different and confusing fees we all see on our local phone bill.

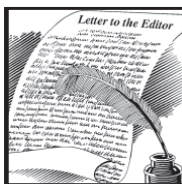
I too find these fees to be frustrating and hard to understand.

But I am writing because of Mr. Haynes' misrepresentation of the Universal Service Fund fee.

Mr. Haynes seems to think this fee is to provide "improved services" to rural areas and since he's pretty happy with his current level of service he'd much rather keep his current service, remove the fee and pay less per month.

Based on that logic, and since I live in Denver with very good service, I am sure the 2 million people along the Denver Metro corridor would love to stop paying that almost \$6 a month fee.

Plus in Denver, if we stopped paying that fee I can guarantee my monthly bill would go down. I can also guarantee if we all stop paying and you stop paying here in Goodland, then you will see your monthly bills increase dramatically.



from our readers

• to the editor

Why would my bill go up if I remove a fee you are asking?

Because the Universal Service Fund was established to help provide "quality and reasonably priced services for Rural America." Without these fees, the monthly bill to receive a phone service in Rural America would be prohibitively expensive and forget it if you live in a farmhouse outside of town. It would cost thousands or tens of thousands of dollars to run the phone line out to the farm.

Without the Universal Service Fund I suspect many small towns would not have phone service because no company could stay in business providing service in those areas. Now with the growth of cellular networks, the cost associated with providing phone service is de-

creasing, but where does much of the funding come from to improve Rural cellular coverage, yes that's right it comes from the same fees.

Therefore, I agree no one likes to pay fees, but Mr. Haynes since you live and work in a part of the country that has directly benefitted from the Universal Service Fund fees, I would think you should be thankful and not inciting your readers to argue against the one fee they all benefit from because you choose to misrepresent it's past and future purposes.

Dave Pallozzi

Denver

The Telecommunications Act of 1996 was the first major rewrite of the Communications Act of 1934. The act set out some immediate priorities of universal service. These include quality and reasonably priced services, access to advanced telecommunication services, access for rural, low-income and high-cost regions, equitable and nondiscriminatory service, specific and predictable price structure, access of advanced telecommunication services for schools and health care and libraries.

## Sunflower State ranks high on ag list

Without question producing food has been the single most important vocation in human history. Farming and ranching helped pave the way for modern civilization.

Today as in the past, feeding the world is vital to our growth as a community, region, state and nation. Our ability to produce the safest, most wholesome food in the world has allowed us to progress as a civilization.

When we think of food production, our state and the farmers and ranchers who farm our fertile soil rank with the best in production agriculture. The Sunflower State ranks at the top when it comes to crop and livestock production.

In 2009, Kansas's farmers produced crops worth a total value of \$6,896,254,000 according to Bob White, Kansas Agricultural Statistics. Livestock value of production accounted for another \$6,130,339,000.

Kansas's farmers and ranchers produced this bountiful harvest on 65,500 farms last year. The average size of farm is 705 acres.

Kansas led the country in milo production last year when our state produced 224,400,000 bushels. We produced the third most sorghum



Insight this week

• john schlageck

silage with a total of 440,000 tons.

Our state ranked second in wheat production with 369,600,000 bushels. We led the country in wheat flour milled with a total of 125,833,000 cwt. in '09.

The Sunflower State ranks third in the production of sunflowers. Kansas farmers produced 245,200,000 pounds in last year. We placed fifth in all hay produced with 7,225,000 tons and sixth in alfalfa hay produced with 3,665,000 tons.

Kansas corn producers ranked seventh in 2009 producing 598,300,000 bushels. In soybean production, Kansas now ranks 9th with 160,600,000 bushels.

Our state remains one of the most diversified in the nation. Our farmers and ranchers produce dry edible beans, oats, corn silage, rye, barley and summer potatoes. Specialty crops

like pecans, fruits, vegetables and popcorn are produced in our rich Kansas soil.

Kansas ranked third in the number of all cattle and calves with 6-million head at the beginning of this year. Our state ranked third in cattle on feed for processing with a total of 2,370,000 head. Kansas ranked third in red meat processing with 5,283,200,000 pounds. Hog inventories ranked 10th with 1,810,000 head.

The Sunflower State tied for 11th in market sheep with 30,000 head and 19th in all sheep and lambs with 80,000 head at the beginning of the year. Kansas farmers and ranchers also raise goats, turkeys, chickens, buffalo, ostriches and a few other exotic creatures.

Yes, Kansas is blessed with some of the finest farmland and farmers and ranchers in the world. By using this land wisely, with the help of the latest technology and research, we will continue to feed the hungry mouths of the world.

*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.*

## The other side of reform

I'm fortunate to live in a small, rural community with adequate access to health care providers. But research demonstrates that if the health care reform bill had not passed, one in three rural Americans living in communities with fewer than 2,500 people would have been uninsured by 2019.

Affordable health insurance coverage is not the only challenge facing rural communities, however. Much of rural America suffers from a severe health care workforce shortage and an economically fragile health care delivery



from other pens

• commentary

system, ultimately affecting the health of rural people. Declining numbers of primary care providers lead to a lack of preventive care, resulting in more serious (and more expensive) medical problems down the road.

Unfortunately, only 11 percent of clinically active physicians, who graduated from medical school between 1988 and 1997, practice in rural areas.

Access provisions turned out to be a major, but unsung part of the health care reform law. Insurance coverage and health care access represent opposite sides of the same coin. And if we hope to make health care more affordable and accessible — and people healthier — we must address both.

Moreover, access to medical care not only helps improve health outcomes, but acts as an important economic development strategy for many rural communities. I think every rural American concerned about the economic future of their community should read the new Center for Rural Affairs' report — Health Care Reform, What's in It? — which examines the rural health care access provisions in the newly enacted health care reform law.

*By John Crabtree, [johnc@cfra.org](mailto:johnc@cfra.org), of The Center for Rural Affairs. The center was established in 1973 as an unaffiliated nonprofit corporation under IRS code 501(c)3. The Center for Rural Affairs was formed by rural Nebraskans concerned about family farms and rural communities.*

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