

from our viewpoint...

## Finding answers for our schools

This week the Kansas Legislature is trying to wrap up their session and agree on a budget for next year.

That effort has brought more questions for our education system as one legislator made a suggestion to make another cut of the state base aid to give the state a bigger balance to be available at the end of next year.

The cuts to education this year both by Gov. Sam Brownback and those proposed and approved by the legislature are causing school districts across the state to scramble and find ways to reduce classified staff and in many cases cut teachers.

Cuts in education are not unheard of in recent years, but in this state the tug of war has been between the legislature and the courts about who decides how much money goes to education.

Years ago the state legislature got involved in the education process in the name of equalizing large and small districts and saying a state funding formula was a good way to even the playing field between the large and small school districts and between the city and rural schools.

Then the federal government under President George Bush decided the schools ought to follow the theme "No child left behind," imposing a whole list of programs and regulations without giving the states or schools any money to carry those out.

The program has been widely criticized, and the proposed outcomes have put more pressure on teachers and administrators to teach the kids how to take the required tests.

Educating every student is the goal, but the system does not seem to have the flexibility to adapt to what is happening in different size school districts and in different parts of the state.

The state school funding formula has grown dramatically over the past few years, and is at a point where the state cannot continue to increase the student aid money in large amounts each year.

At the same time many districts across the state are reaching the maximum on their local option budget adding more burden to the taxpayers. Originally the local option budget was to give the local districts flexibility to help with special projects designed for the local district. With the state finding it necessary to tighten the budget many school districts are now depending on the local option budget to supplement the general fund and fill in the hole left by the state cuts.

This becomes a vicious circle putting both the state and local districts on a collision course for disaster.

The legislature will find a way to agree on a budget for next year, and the hope is the schools will not see further cuts in state base aid.

A budget for next year will not solve the education funding problem, and we hope educators, administrators and legislators can spend time this summer and fall to find a way to stabilize state funding. The leaders need to find a way to give the schools a reasonable system to be able to plan for the education of our children with less stress on the local systems.

Our system needs a better approach for meeting the needs of those who graduate in the future to help them handle the global economy. The goal should be to give the students the tools and knowledge to be able to contribute to the need for better educated and skilled workers who can be our next leaders. — Tom Betz



## I carry four vital documents in my wallet

Unlike the president of this great country, the contents in my wallet include four vital documents:

1. A copy of my Standard Certificate of Birth
2. A copy of my Certificate of Baptism
3. An official notice of my confirmation, and
4. An official notice of marriage

President Obama is under fire, and will continue to be under fire, until he comes up with and displays publicly his certificate of birth. And although he did exactly that this week, that even raised questions, such as, "How many different versions of his birth do they have?" I happen to believe him when he tells me he was born in Hawaii. I am not a birther, but a believer.

If this Man of the Plains can carry four things that tell of his birth, baptism, confirmation and marriage in his wallet, surely the commander-in-chief can carry one — his birth certificate. He should and every time the issue is raised, all he would have to do is pull out his wallet and show the doubters.

The more the birthers drag this issue around in these many months leading up to the election, the better it is for him. It's all about the economy, about jobs. Not where the president wore his first diaper.

Yes, birth certificates can have inaccurate information. Take mine as an example. It lists me as being born at home while my mother had said several times I and the other two youngest kids in the family were born at the hospital. My mother's maiden name on the birth certificate is Mary Eichman. Actually her name was Molly or Mollie (the spelling of her first name differs in our family). But when she joined the Catholic faith in order to marry my father, she had to pick out a saint's name in order to be baptized. She chose the name "Mary."

The thing that really caught my eye when the copy of the certificate came into my possession in the mid-1950s, was the date of my birth. Family records would show, and mother would recall, I was born in 1935. An aunt who



tom dreiling

• man of the plains

maintained records of everybody's birth, death, anniversaries and other pertinent dates in the relationship, also dated my birth as 1935. But the birth certificate, filled out and signed by the attending physician, noted my birth as November 25, 1934. So, each November 25th, I can be older or younger, my choice. Cool! Some family members will send me cards with two ages, and ask that I circle one.

And the marriage thing lists me as marrying Edna Jean (Eberle) Schroeder on June 17, 1967. Edna? Don't think so. I truly loved and married Elva.

Yes, records contain errors, as you just read. And the president's birth certificate might also contain errors, too.

And one more note: Sen. John McCain, if you remember, was not born in the United States of America. He was born on foreign soil. But because his parents were citizens of this country (his father was in the military) he automatically became a citizen and qualified to be president. I would think the same rule would apply to the president if, in fact, he was born outside the U.S. of A.

Speaking of snow... The television weather folks out here in the Denver area, reported that Vail, up high in the mountains, received 532 inches of snow this season — a record! They said the snow pack was still around 100 inches, and as it begins to melt (as it is now starting to do) massive flood problems are the concern. The ski slopes, for most part, shut down for the season two weekends ago. These snow invasions have allowed the slopes to extend their seasons this year. The immediate Denver area measured somewhere around 20+ inches, some 30+ inches below normal. Moisture has been the chant, and it must have

paid off because this week we've had a couple of beneficial rainfalls.

Snippets: "Libya. Syria. Egypt. Afghanistan. Iraq. Pakistan. If the bad guys can suck us into two more wars, we won't have any military left to protect us on the home front and that's when the bad guys will do us in."

"I take it you don't like Gov. Brownback. While you patted him on the back in a recent column for his rural incentives law, a sentence or two later you criticized him for not moving some of his family into far western Kansas, one of the areas that law was intended to help. You can't have it both ways."

"I read a while back where you said Aurora was the third biggest city in Colorado. Although I don't live in Colorado anymore, Kansas now, I can remember as a young man you could toss a baseball from one end of that town to the other. I'm 86."

"The smart voter will elect Congressman Ron Paul president in 2012. His vice president hopefully will be Congressman Paul Ryan. Conservative leadership at its best."

"Those air traffic controllers who sleep on duty, should be locked up for a while without pay for endangering the lives of people who depend on them to keep them safe taking off and landing."

"Can I wish all the 2011 high school graduates in the Aurora area the best as they go forward?" (You just did)

Snippets to <mailto:milehitom@hotmail.com> <mailto:milehitom@hotmail.com>

I might mention my column has a new name: Man of the Plains. It's something I use at least once in each column and it is catching on with the readers. Pretty much describes me.

Tom Dreiling is a retired journalist, now living in Aurora, Colo. He edited and published newspaper in Kansas and Wyoming during his 44-year career. E-mail is milehitom@hotmail.com

## The right thing



Insight this week

• john schlageck

The real issue — or mission — for livestock producers today must be to reclaim their rightful position as a noble profession. To reclaim this position, farmers and ranchers must continue to take care of their animals and preserve their freedom to operate and maintain successful animal agriculture here in Kansas and across this country.

To do so livestock producers must understand how consumers think and feel. Get inside their heads, if you will.

Today, consumers consider farmers responsible for the humane treatment of farm animals. In recent consumer surveys, people rated animal well being higher than the care and well being of workers in the food system. It did not rank as high as food safety however.

It is not science, technical capacity or ability that drives trust. Instead, it is whether consumers believe agriculture shares their ethics and values.

Livestock agriculture needs to talk about our commitment to doing the right thing — our commitment to values and ethics not just science. Our industry is strong in science. We have plenty of evidence to demonstrate we're doing the right thing, but we rely too much on that language. We need to reengage the public on a value's basis.

The most important job is to communicate in a way that helps people have trust in what we say and do. Too often livestock producers take for granted rural neighbors know and un-

derstand who they are and what they do.

Agriculture can no longer take this for granted. Agriculture continues to change and evolve and still most of the people in the United States today are not involved in farming and ranching.

Americans know very little about where their food comes from today. What they want is permission to believe what we are doing is consistent with their values and ethics. Telling our story to consumers may move to the point where we have to show people what is taking place on our farms. Unfortunately the perception is when we don't show them — we're hiding something.

That said, there clearly remain legitimate reasons, from disease prevention to biosecurity, not to allow unfettered access to farms and ranches.

Livestock production or animal agriculture in the most affluent country in the world is faced with special challenges and opportunities. Among those challenges is Americans spend such a small percentage of their income on food they can demand food where they want it, when they want it, in the proportion

they want it.

Many food stores and food retailers have announced implementation of third-party verification measures to ensure the animals from which food products are derived were treated humanely. In the near future, customers will demand third-party verification and if it doesn't exist, the store providing the food is not going to be credible with the public.

Agriculture can win this battle for the hearts and minds of consumers. Farmers and ranchers must remember whom they are trying to influence. Customers and consumers need to hear from livestock producers.

It is not productive for the agriculture community to attack activist groups. Instead, agriculture must retake its rightful position as the people in charge of ensuring the humane treatment of animals.

Agriculture must inform people we share their concerns and we work hard every day to make sure our animals are treated fairly and humanely. Follow that by sharing with them how we meet our obligations to the humane treatment of the animals on our farms.

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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