

from our viewpoint...

State to lose good advocate in Miller

News that Secretary Deb Miller is leaving the Kansas Department of Transportation to work for a private consulting firm does not gladden the heart, because Deb Miller has been good for Kansas.

You could argue that the fact she served three governors over eight years proves she was the right person to lead the agency during a difficult time. Consider especially the fact that those three – Democrats Kathleen Sebelius and Mark Parkinson and Republican Sam Brownback – agreed on almost nothing else.

As secretary of transportation, Ms. Miller has at least two outstanding accomplishments: she shifted the culture of the department from an agency that listened mostly to engineers, to one that tried to listen to people, and she managed the almost impossible when she shepherded a new transportation program through the Legislature in the midst of a recession and massive state budget cutbacks last year.

Ms. Miller did much more than that, of course. She brought a new sense of mission to the department and she brought many ordinary Kansans in to advise the engineers. She lifted the “glass ceiling” for the agency’s women with the appointment of the first woman district engineer, among others. She sent teams out to listen to local public officials about their highways, and made it a point to get to know the movers and shakers across the state.

In our area, after listening to the people, she championed a plan to make low-cost “practical” improvements to rural secondary highways, starting at K-23 south of Grainfield. Paved shoulders replaced steep dropoffs into the ditch. The department stressed citizen involvement. Local officials helped set priorities for improvements.

It’s high time, we’re sure, that she get out in the private sector and make some money. The state cannot pay leaders of her calibre what they are worth, but in a sense, her contributions have been priceless. She always took time to listen to people’s ideas, incorporating the best of them into the department’s planning.

That alone was a seismic shift in an agency where thinking had become ossified after the last great upheaval, when after years of political influence, the engineers were put in charge and the old state Highway Commission put out to pasture.

If that had to happen, then so did the new revolution of meshing people’s desires with sound engineering.

So, hats off to the departing secretary. She has led the department well, with the good of our state always in mind, and leaves a legacy of good roads, improved rail and airport programs, and strong planning for the future. Those plans range from a network of four-lane expressways to carry ever greater traffic to improved rail lines, a major intermodal hub outside of Kansas City, preliminary talks to extend an Amtrak train from Oklahoma to Kansas City and continued strong emphasis on keeping all Kansas highways in top condition.

So long, madam secretary. And thanks. – *Steve Haynes*



Enjoy the sun, winter coming soon

On an Indian Summer afternoon, it’s hard to think about work or columns or news.

It’s hard to think about anything except, perhaps, nestling into the hammock to read a good book. Heck, even a mediocre book would be OK on a day like this.

We’ve been blessed so far with a warm and comforting fall, but winter cannot be far away. In fact, by the time you read this, it could be snowing outside. That’s the forecast, anyway.

And while the sun should return for the weekend, the days of balmy, summer-like weather may well be over. In just a few days (on Sunday, Nov. 6), Daylight Saving Time will end and sunset will start coming before 6 p.m.

Before you know it, winter will be here to stay, with it’s cold north wind and long, dark nights. Many days will be sunny, but we’ll hardly notice as the shadows grow long by 3 p.m. and Christmas lights start to go up.



steve haynes

• along the sappa

Many people, in fact, are getting a head start on the holiday lighting with orange Halloween lights and big decorations out in the yard. That’s OK, I guess, but it’s hard for me to get worked up to decorate for a nonholiday.

Halloween, after all, is just the evening before All Saints Day. Candymakers are the only ones with a real reason to celebrate. Little kids have a great time and adults have fun watching them, of course. Our granddaughter is going as a little monster, which her mother says is typecasting, but cute.

At least we got to spend Sunday working in the yard – after the nap, anyway – and parts of Saturday outside, enjoying the weather. The

last few weeks have amounted to a wonderful October.

Gardeners have had time to work in the yard, farmers to pick their abundant corn. We’ve had lots of sunshine and plenty of excuses to be out in it.

Sunshine may return for the weekend, but it won’t be quite the same, not until spring. Warm days will be in the 50s and 60s from here on out, and cool nights will get a lot cooler. If you haven’t picked all the tomatoes and squash and peppers, my advice is to get out there today and beat the coming freeze.

Our growing season has about reached the end of its string.

The dark months are coming. Christmas lights and holiday bustle will help us get through the rest of the year, but three months of winter can be a long time.

Here’s hoping you got out and enjoyed the warm sun while it was with us.

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Law protects private property rights

The Kansas Audubon Society is pressuring the State of Kansas to repeal the 1901 prairie dog statute that gives counties the power to treat prairie dog infestations without the consent of the landowner.

I feel strongly this statute is needed and should NOT be repealed.

The so called conservationists have incorrectly labeled this statute as one that weakens property rights when in fact the inverse is true. This statute effectively ensures that should a neighbor decide to harbor prairie dogs it is in his best interest to ensure they don’t become a nuisance to others.

This statute protects property rights, and since the protection of property rights is one of the primary purposes of government, it is completely reasonable for this statute to remain on the books.

This prairie dog statute is much like the constitutional basis for fire code laws. These laws protect your house from damage by ensuring that your neighbor’s house is not built or maintained in such a way as to endanger yours.

We ranch and have prairie dogs on our land. For a time the prairie dogs became so bad in our part of the county many ranchers’ livelihoods, including our own, were in jeopardy.



guest columnist

• ken klemm

To address this, I spearheaded a local prairie dog control district to facilitate the control of prairie dogs in our little valley. The threat to landowners that the county had the power to control these animals – at the landowner’s expense – was vital in bringing our problem under control. We now enjoy a much reduced prairie dog population.

From a wildlife management viewpoint, it is important to consider we have a responsibility and a desire to manage our lands in a manner that is sustainable. Prairie dogs can become so numerous as to decimate grasslands, spark wind and water erosion and threaten the landowners ability to survive on the land. These factors make it imperative that land owners have the necessary tools to effectively manage this threat to their operations sustainability. This statute is one of the important tools responsible land and wildlife managers, such as myself, need in order to deal with the problems

posed by prairie dogs.

If landowners cannot be assured they can effectively manage their lands in a manner that is profitable and sustainable they will be forced to move. The only buyers for lands such as these are the so called conservationists. These folks, from their city perch, feel good the lands are no longer producing marketable meat but instead supporting prairie dogs. They assuage their guilt of the very real damage this causes to the local economy by clinging to the false pretense that tourism dollars will replace the lost production revenue.

John Locke, one of the great inspirational philosophers of our Founders said, “The great chief end therefore, of Mens... putting themselves under Government, is the Preservation of their Property.”

I implore Gov. Sam Brownback to maintain the power needed to help landowners protect their property rights and thereby help suffering rural communities to protect their economic base.

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