

from our viewpoint...

They are at it again, rural cities may lose

It's fashionable for politicians to say they care about rural America. It's fashionable for politicians to say they are going to do something for rural America.

But in truth, hardly anyone in Washington or Topeka knows what goes on out here. There are not very many of *us* any more, and *they* have never been here.

Washington gives a nod to rural America now and then, mostly when the Farm Bill is up. But the Department of Agriculture is more about welfare and cities these days than it is about farming.

In Washington, they pass laws all the time, one-size-fits-all laws that might work in cities (though it's doubtful) and just mess things up in rural areas. Now we have the Helping America Vote Act, passed after the ballot-counting fiasco in Florida four years ago.

The voting act strikes out at some real problems, but it grew to include comprehensive federal standards which just won't fit rural America. It will centralize voting and may well mean the end of democracy in small towns all over the country.

Naw, *they* wouldn't do that.

Sure.

Helping America Vote may have started out as a good idea, but that was before all the special interests and pressure groups got a hold of it. As passed, it requires all voting places to be in buildings which meet standards of the Americans With Disabilities Act. All polling places must have fancy new touch-screen voting devices to help handicapped people vote.

Neither requirement has much to do with the problem the law started out to solve, but now that there are federal standards, they have to be politically correct.

But there are no ADA-compliant buildings in most small towns. The economy is so bad, no one has built any new buildings. And rural counties can't afford more than one of those touch-screen computers, which may cost \$10,000 each and haven't really been invented yet anyway.

The government *may* put up some money to buy them and the state *may* put up some money, though it has none. And the counties may just get stuck with the bill. No one has *any* money to make 80-year-old buildings accessible.

The result: There may never be another local election in most smaller towns across rural Kansas. All polls will be in the county seat. If you can't drive in, you'll have to vote an advance ballot by mail.

So a citizen of Jennings or Almena or Norcatur, to vote in a city election, will have to drive 20 miles or more to another city. It's already happened in Sherman County, where citizens of Kanorado have to drive 17 miles to Goodland to vote in their city election.

How long will city government survive in small towns after this? The scary thing is, state and county officials have rolled over and just accepted this dictate from Washington. Not one county so far has said, "Take your fancy machines and your federal money and just stick 'em."

No state has stood up and said, "Our small towns are important, too, and we don't want to see them die."

No one planned to put an end to small-town elections. But in Topeka and Washington, no one knows where these towns are, though some of them may have been raised in one. Worse yet, no one cares much what happens to them.

It's collateral damage from another good idea gone wrong. — *Steve Haynes*

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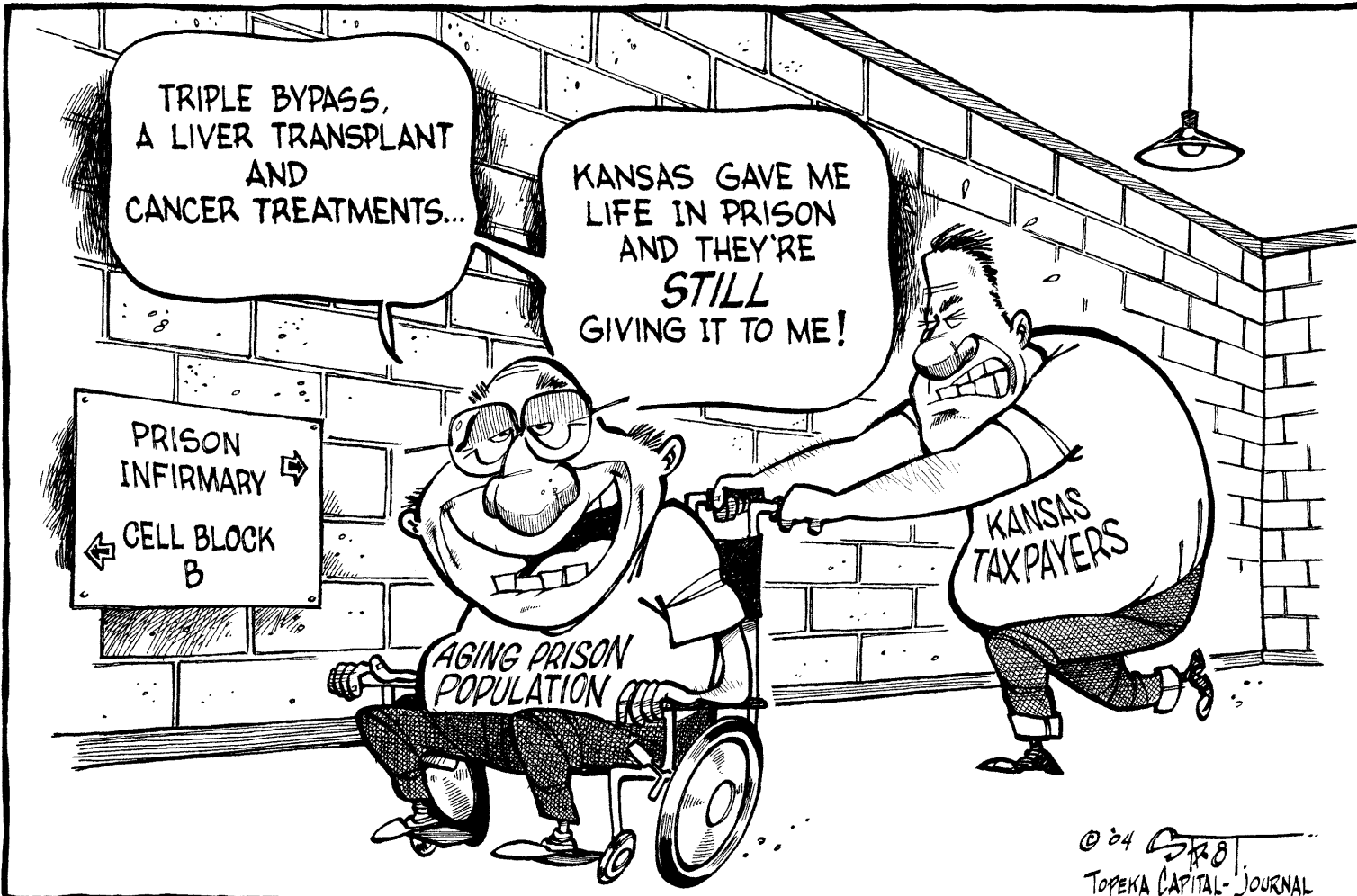
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Forgiveness isn't easy; I need practice

I don't know about you, but I've been thinking about forgiveness.

Forgiveness hasn't always been easy for me, but I think I'm getting better at it. Or maybe it's just that holding grudges just doesn't seem as important as it used to be. Life is too short.

Yesterday I went out for a late lunch or an early dinner. There weren't many cars in the popular restaurant, but upon entering, I noticed strange activity inside. There was even a policeman talking to some of the workers.

Not many customers, and a strange atmosphere prevailed.

My curiosity got the best of me and I asked the waitress what was going on.

She kind of laughed and said, "Silly kids. They skipped out on their tab, but left their cell phone on the table. And then they were even stupid enough to call back to the phone. We answered and they said, 'That's my cell phone! Where is it?' We said, 'It's in the restaurant where you skipped out on your dinner tab.' The caller quickly hung up. But the name is entered in the cell phone, so we know who it belongs to."

She chuckled and I shook my head.

I watched the activity for a while, wondering what the young people would do. The dinner tab probably wasn't that big. The kids may have just decided to have a lark, or maybe they'd done this before. I couldn't quite believe they were hungry and had no money — not if they owned a cell phone. And I wondered how



**lorna
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• commentary

it would all be resolved.

I wanted to believe they could just come back to the restaurant, pay their bill and be forgiven. That in itself would have been humiliating enough for me.

I wanted to believe the humiliation would teach them a life-changing lesson, but who knows.

But I doubted, since the police were involved, if that could happen.

I wondered if they would just abandon the cell phone and tell their parents it was lost. I wondered if the police would run it down and visit the home.

I don't know. I've always tried to live so I wouldn't have to know the inner workings of the crime-and-punishment system.

Something in me began to feel a little sorry for the kids. I hoped it was the most severe crime they'd ever commit. But the incident did make me do some thinking about forgiveness.

Here are some quotes I like from Above three quotes from a workshop Two Steps Toward a Victorious Ministry by Dr. Gene Williams:

1) There was a woman in Florida who was

on a new magazine show.

The woman had been raped, shot in the head, left for dead. She lived, but was blinded. When asked if she hated the man, she said, "No. He took one night of my life, and I refuse to give him one more minute." [Acceptance goes a long way toward forgiveness. — LGT]

2) Someone else urges: "Take the initiative: forgive before being asked." [That seems healthy to me too. — LGT]

3) "The price of getting even is more than anyone can afford to pay."

Dr. Paul Faulkner in Making Things Right Things Go Wrong: "Love lets the past die. It moves people to a new beginning without settling the past. Love does not have to clear up all past misunderstandings. The details of the past become irrelevant. Only its new beginnings matter. Accounts may go unsettled — differences remain unsolved — ledgers remain unbalanced. Conflicts between people's memories of how things happened are not cleared up. The past stays muddled. Only the future matters.

"Love's power does not make fussy historians. Love prefers to tuck the loose ends of past wrongs into the bosom of forgiveness and pushes us into a new start."

Forgiveness can heal.

I hope the young people will have a change to be on the receiving end of forgiveness. It would probably touch them deeper than punishment will.

Meth Prevention program needs our support

To the Editor:

About five months ago, the Kansas Methamphetamine Prevention Project was notified by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, one of the prevention program's two money sources, that it would not continue funding the project. Project staff began to alert Kansas communities, media, federal legislators and regional prevention center staff of the loss.

The Kansas delegation in Washington has been in contact with the methamphetamine prevention program, expressing their concerns for the future of this project. Rep. Dennis Moore wrote a personal letter to Tommy Thompson, secretary of Health and Human Services, in support of the project. The staffs of Reps. Jerry Moran and Jim Ryun have scrambled to provide the project with ideas to find other money sources.

In December, Ward Loyd, state representative from Garden City and chairman of the Joint Committee on Correction and Juvenile Justice, recommended the state fund the project. However, a committee recommendation does not guarantee money. The Kansas Meth Prevention Project needs the public to contact their tsate legislators as soon as possible to voice support for the committee's recommendation.

The project has achieved a great deal in its mission to raise awareness and counteract illegal drug use in our state and Goodland as well. I personally handed out several educational



from our
readers

• to the editor

video kits at the Sherman County Ag show, provided by the prevention project. Furthermore, 35 communities received 1,000 anhydrous ammonia tank tamper tags, including those in Thomas, Cheyenne and Wallace counties.

The meth prevention project has awarded mini-grants to 42 Kansas cities, and half of these have implemented meth prevention programs or Drug-Endangered Children Programs. A survey showed that 60 percent of Kansas counties were present at meth prevention workshops.

Cris Lovington, our Sherman County representative, has attended four of these workshops within the last 18 months. She has implemented the knowledge gained from these workshops, not only at Goodland High School and drug prevention programs, but in other areas of northwest Kansas.

The Kansas prevention project is important because meth costs our state \$23 million per year in law enforcement, incarceration and treatment expenses. John Trembley, state director of community corrections, shared a few statistics to help me understand the impact meth is having on our communities.

Around 90 people from northwest Kansas

have gone through a meth treatment program since it began 18 months ago. From July to March, 58 people received treatment. The itemized break down of their expenses includes: \$45,000 meth treatment; \$20,000 drug testing supplies; \$15,600 surveillance; and \$110,000 contractual (includes two counselors \$48,000 and evaluations)

The total amounts to \$190,000 within a short eight months. Given these enormous costs, money for prevention programs like the Kansas meth project is more important than ever.

The project has served communities that have had lots of success in fighting the production and use of meth. The benefits include an increase in public awareness, more arrests, better community safety and improved collaboration between law enforcement, businesses, citizens and neighborhood watch groups.

As a result of the prevention project, our Wal-Mart has enrolled in the Retail Watch Program to join the effort in fighting the meth problem.

I hope I have sparked an interest and given a brief explanation of the Kansas Methamphetamine Prevention Project.

Parents, teachers, organizations and citizens of Goodland and surrounding communities, please write a letter or send an e-mail to our state Legislators in support of the money for the project

Judy McKee, coordinator
Neighborhood Watch of Sherman County Goodland

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