from our viewpoint...

Reflecting on results, **40th Senate primary**

You'd think that a candidate who carried his own county nearly 3-1 and also took his opponent's home county would have had an easy victory on election night.

But that was not the case for Dan Rasure of Goodland in his quest to win the Republican primary for state senator in District 40.

Rasure lost to Ralph Ostmeyer, 8,553-7385, a shortage of 1,168 votes.

In his loss, Rasure carried Sherman County, his home county, 1,010 to 415. In Gove County, Ostmeyer's home, he won by 11 votes, 368-357, which, we are sure, was a concern to Ostmeyer.

Although losing at home had no bearing on the outcome, it had to be somewhat of a surprise, maybe even an embarrassment. Maybe, like most of us, it was just a matter of taking the home folks for granted.

Overall, Ostmeyer carried 12 counties to Rasure's six. Dollars figured in this race. Rasure raised considerably more money than his opponent and spent considerably more. He needed to. Many people had never heard of him and it was imperative that he get his name around the district.

Ostmeyer, as an incumbent state representative, didn't face that problem, at least not in his district. And Rasure had to deal with something else: age and experience. At 22, he was seeking his first political office with with his main experience internships in the offices of Sen. Sam Brownback and Rep. Jerry Moran.

Ostmeyer, on the other hand, is completing his second, two-year term as a member of the Kansas House of Representatives from the 118th District, covering seven and one-half counties.

Waiting in the wings to challenge Ostmeyer is Democrat Tim Peterson, a Monument farmer. Peterson has a long history of political involvement and is party chair for the 1st Congressional District. He's rested up and ready to go, not having had any opposition in the primary.

It will be interesting to see how united the Republicans in the 40th District are come Nov. 2. The conservatives and moderates of that party have had their share of fist fights over the years, and that showed in the Rasure-Ostmeyer primary. Will it spill over into the general election? That's a question that can't be answered this soon after the primary wounds were inflicted. Time may heal. May.

As a Democrat in a Republican stronghold as is the 40th District, Peterson can only hope dissension in the ranks of the opposing party prevails throughout the fall and into the voting booth on Nov. 2. It worked for Gov. Kathleen Sebelius.

As for Dan Rasure: we haven't heard the last from this young, energetic, now politically tested young man. You can bet on that. — Tom A. Dreiling

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The uncommon buffalo and the commons

Most Americans know the American bison, commonly called the buffalo, was almost extinct by 1900, the victim of slaughter and expanding white settlement.

In the past 20 years or so, the term "Buffalo Commons" has become a popular catch phrase that usually refers to another disaster: the death of the small towns of the High Plains a result of an exodus of young people, a lack of economic growth and an aging population.

Frank and Deborah Popper, two East Coast professors, proposed the term when their study of High Plains, geographical statistics spotlighted sparse and declining population. Why not, they suggested, turn the most distressed areas of the region into a vast common pasture for its natives, the American bison?

At first, the term Buffalo Commons was a lightning rod, attracting doomsday prophets and defenders of civilized life in small towns and rural areas across the Great Plains. But in the past few years, the term has garnered a more optimistic connotation.

I've followed this debate with interest as I travel to lead book discussions for the Kansas Humanities Council. Often our reading leads us into conversations about the future of the Great Plains, particularly about the future of the place we happen to be sitting.

young people who intended to leave, tired of livof challenge and adversity. These occasions lead me to believe the original Buffalo Commons model, which suggests ing where people and opportunities are so an either/or face-off between civilization and sparse. But I also met people who moved back, Nature of the Place: A Study of Great Plains Ficemptiness, is really a false dilemma. Rather, the unable to live for long anyplace else. The lack tion" and "A Great Plains Reader." She teaches term can suggest a way of living already com- of physical barriers and the immense sky that *English at Wichita State University and is a mem*mon on the Plains. When I ask people why they intimidate some people invigorate those who ber of the Prairie Writers Circle, Salina.



live in a place so unforgiving, I get straight, immediate answers: wide-open spaces, inconstant weather, even isolation, traits that would discourage many.

Bison know how to survive these harsh conditions, and the people who live in these places have proved equally adaptable. The decision to live among a scattered population requires careful attention to the way life is lived, for both animals and people.

When I spent some months in Chadron, Neb., I was reminded of distances daily. Even in January, a grocery clerk asked if I needed dry ice to preserve my frozen items on the way home. I was invited to join years-old Chadron dinner clubs. These examples reflect a commons concept: looking out for shoppers who might have long drives home and creating occasions to soothe isolation by coming together for good food and conversation.

For many people of the region, Buffalo Commons reflects affection for the place itself. I met

choose to live here. Like the buffalo, Plains people know how to survive on their own in blizzards and drought-and economic downturns.

Recently I was back in Chadron at the annual meeting of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society discussing Sandoz's book, "The Buffalo Hunters." Historians, bison ranchers and the instructor of "buffalo management" on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation told of their experiences with animals they have come to admire for their endurance and intelligence.

Today, almost 300,000 bison roam America's grasslands, most owned by private ranchers and Indian tribes who raise them for profit. Ranchers and researchers have observed their bison herds for decades and know their animals intimately. These people tell of family groups, the communal care of the calves and the animals, ability to survive any kind of weather without human intervention. No wonder the American bison is the iconic animal of the Great Plains. Their intelligence and adaptation embody the "commons" ideal.

The Buffalo Commons seems to be developing unguided by any grand scheme, and it may well be the future of the Great Plains. I imagine it not as the desolation of abandoned home places and empty pastures, but rather a region where people find rich reward in the face

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Greyhound decision smacks of desperation

The decision by Greyhound Lines to abandon most of its stops in the Tri-State area smacks of desperation.

The company is closing most of its stops along the Interstates. In western Kansas, there will be only two stops, Hays and Colby. People will no longer be able to catch a bus in Ellsworth, Russell, WaKeeney or Goodland.

In Nebraska, there'll be no stops west of Lincoln as the firm aims, apparently, for the longhaul market.

One big loss: prisons in Ellsworth, Burlington, Colo., and elsewhere in the area won't have an easy way to ship parolees back home after their release.

Greyhound claims it'll save millions because buses will stay on the freeway and arrive sooner at their destination. Our guess is the savings are mostly illusory.

Maybe they figure people will get a ride to the next stop. Maybe they think they'll hitchhike. But it sounds like the dog may be close to its last lap.

There aren't that many people who want to ride a bus cross country, after all. Most of us, given the choice, would fly or take a train or drive — anything but the bus.

With air fares nearly as low as the bus on a good day, the Hound makes the most sense in country towns where people don't have a choice. And those are the markets the firm is giving up.

So there's no money in serving rural

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America? In the city, they can choose. Let's see, Kansas City-Denver, 13 hours by bus, less than two by air. Price, \$74 and \$155

Greyhound often is left with the passengers who can't or won't fly or drive: a few elderly with a fear of flying, the poor and the disenfranchised, students without cars (not many of America. those these days) and others who don't quite fit the mainstream of America.

The firm admits it has problems. They've cut jobs and canceled an order for 200 new buses. And yet, Greyhound, after absorbing Continental Trailways, is by far the country's biggest over-the-road passenger carrier.

At this point, you really have to ask if the bus business will be around that much longer. It still does well in a few concentrated markets, but out here, people drive.

If Greyhound were to go under, then the automobile will have polished off its last and final alternative. That may or may not be a bad thing — few people get nostalgic about a ride on an old Silversides or a Super ScenicCruiser, like they do for a train—but we've pretty much lost our public transportation outside the urban corridors.

In a way, it's the end of an era for rural America. Oh, it's been coming on for years. How long, for instance, since Trailways ran out U.S. 36? Or since a passenger train stopped in Oakley or Hays?

This is a matter of choice and policy. Choice, because Americans choose their cars, and policy, because the government pours billions into highways while spending next to nothing on trains and busses and other public transportation.

Sure, there are a few subsidized options, but we no longer have a ground transportation system for public use, at least not in most of rural

You can still drive to McCook and catch a train, or to Colby for a bus, but more and more, people — once they get in the car — just keep on driving.

Someday, we may regret what we lost.

Letter Policy

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