

from our viewpoint...

## Alarming story could affect all

The story is alarming, but entirely predictable. And, although today it's happening in Oberlin, tomorrow it may be Goodland's turn.

No one was signing up for the Oberlin Jaycees' Angel Tree, which puts people in touch with kids who might otherwise not get much for Christmas. These "angels" buy them gifts and the Jaycees make sure they get delivered.

In the past, the Jaycees said, they'd leave word at the county office of the state welfare agency, the Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services. The workers there would get word out to people whose kids might qualify for the tree.

Last year, the Jaycees reported 53 kids on the tree. This year, it's barely a dozen so far. This year, there is no welfare office in Oberlin. It closed a couple of months ago.

The state centralized the work at a regional office in Colby. Apparently, no one there knows or cares about local charity efforts in Oberlin. At least, though the Jaycees contacted state workers, they apparently didn't tell many families about the Angel Tree.

One reason may be lack of contact day in and day out with the agency's clients, who are now forced to call "800" telephone numbers answered God-knows-where for help. State workers have been clustered in regional offices where supervisors can keep an eye on them.

When Gov. Kathleen Sebelius was here last summer, she seemed surprised people were not happy with the change. She pointed out that the state will have more "points of contact," or places where workers can meet clients at scheduled times.

What the state won't have is anyone who lives or works in or cares about Oberlin, Atwood, St. Francis, or soon, Goodland and Norton.

Welfare workers will be moving into expensive new buildings leased in Colby and Phillipsburg, where they will have less contact with clients and communities. The latest reports are that 35 new jobs will wind up in Colby alone, jobs that used to be spread out around northwest Kansas and elsewhere.

Is this plan working?

The Angel Tree says no.

What we're seeing is the opening round of a battle to centralize not just state, but county and federal services in rural areas. Lucky towns like Colby will become "super county seats," with regional state and federal offices, and eventually, Topeka will try to get counties to follow suit and merge in clusters around these towns.

It's not anyone's wild imagination. It's already happening. Extension districts are merging. Other offices will follow soon, unless rural people take a stand.

Do we want to drive 50-60 miles just to get license tags? Or call some "800" number that may be answered in Indiana, or India, to get answers about state government?

There's one consolation, though.

The architect of the welfare consolidation, former Social Services Secretary Janet Schallansky, disappeared from state government last month. After telling people for months she'd stick out the governor's first term, she took a quick and hastily announced retirement. A hold-over from the administration of Republican Bill Graves, Schallansky may have fallen from favor at the Statehouse.

The consolidation scheme arose before Gov. Sebelius, but she has done nothing to stop it.

Instead of taking jobs out of rural counties, the state ought to be putting some in, and not just in Colby. Instead of building new central offices, it could have spread them around the area and gotten the same, or more, impact.

And its employees would know about the Angel Tree and a dozen other projects around rural Kansas that won't ever be noticed in Colby or Phillipsburg. — *Steve Haynes*

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## Shopping can be a mixed blessing

I don't know about you, but I find shopping to be a mixed blessing.

I really don't do much of it — with the exception of when I'm on vacation.

Somehow, vacations seem to be a time to throw caution to the wind, and I succumb to all sorts of unplanned purchases. But then, I have no one to blame for the credit-card bill except myself.

Christmas shopping is a thing of the past for me. And even if I'm tempted, I find it too discouraging, not to mention tiring.

The other day I wanted to buy a friend a sweater as a birthday present.

That was my full intent as I purposely went to a department store that had advertised tremendous savings — even before Thanksgiving. About 10 steps inside the door cured me — once again.

The choice of merchandise was overwhelming. I guess I'm becoming a little claustrophobic; it seemed like I was going to be swallowed up by all the available stuff.

I looked around for about five minutes and resorted to a gift certificate from a fairly non-



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burdened sales clerk.

The few short minutes I was in the store I heard a rather interesting exchange by a 30-something couple. I surmised they were beginning their Christmas shopping. You know how you are privy to many snippets of conversation from people you don't know and will never see again. Sometimes it is at the top of their lungs as they snip at each other or order their children around.

This verbal exchange was not heated, nor loud. It was rather matter-of-fact, carried on as she continued to look at choices and he trailed behind her.

As I thought about it later, I was rather amused. It went something like this:

She: "Do you like this purse?"

He: "I don't care."

She: "Do you think your mother would like it?"

He: "I don't know. I'm not into this."

She: "Well, thanks for all your help."

He: "What do you want from me?"

She: "I wish you'd be more into helping."

He: "What would you say if I asked you if you liked a fishing pole? Would you be interested at all?"

She: "Well, I'd tell you if I liked it at all."

He: "Right! I'll bet!"

(Both exited stage right.)

Somehow I thought they both had good points. As an almost-forever single person, I've never understood "group" shopping. Maybe they communicate better in the store away from the TV, but it seems like a general plan could have been formed before they hit the crowded store.

Oh well. Like I said before: "I find shopping to be a mixed blessing."

I think the man did too. He wasn't interested in the process (especially in the ladies' department), but probably would have been the first to complain if his mother didn't receive a gift. Next year, maybe she'll get a fishing pole.

## What's not W's mandate

**By Dick Morris**

The Christian right has sought to portray the president's re-election as a victory for their moral agenda, claiming that it was a mandate to curb abortion and to approve draconian Supreme Court nominees.

In fact, the president's victory was about terrorism, terrorism and terrorism. It was his steady hand in Iraq and his commitment to battle the "axis of evil" that won him a second term.

The only basis for the assertions tying President Bush's win to his embrace of their social agenda is exit-polling data indicating that 22 percent of the voters cited "moral" issues as the basis for their vote. But to tie their comments to abortion, which was not an issue, rather than to gay marriage, which was a huge issue, is a misinterpretation of the information.

The election had nothing to do with abortion. To the extent that moral issues played a part, it was the left's overreaching on the gay-marriage issue that kindled a massive rebuttal from the right and the center.

The true moral message of this election was not to use the judicial or the legislative process to enact a moral agenda — left or right — which is out of step with the national consensus. Those voters who opposed a Massachusetts judge and a San Francisco mayor ratifying gay marriage are also likely to oppose a president and a Senate trying to jam doctrinaire pro-life justices down our national throat.

Second-term presidents frequently fail by misinterpreting their victories as a mandate for extreme policies. Most famously, FDR used his heavy 1936 majority to try to pack the Supreme Court, a move that cost him such national credibility that he was unable to pass important priorities in his second term despite huge majorities in Congress.

Bush can and should use his "political capital" to press his domestic agenda of tax reform and Social Security changes. He is courageous



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to tackle these issues and, if his proposals are wisely designed, will succeed.

But he will not prevail if he plunges himself into a battle for the pro-life agenda. Fewer than a quarter of all Americans want abortion to be illegal. If Bush squanders his capital on this battle, he will not be able again to capture a national mandate. Second-term presidents who lose their popularity also lose their power. Very quickly.

On another front, Bush has moved wisely to replace his Cabinet with veteran White House staffers. Most presidents restock their Cabinet with deputy or assistant or under secretaries from these same agencies, or just reshuffle the deck of Cabinet members, giving them new portfolios.

Both strategies are a recipe for losing con-

trol. But by replacing the Cabinet with his staff, Bush has moved to hold in check these centrifugal tendencies and keep all of the executive branch in his domain, not just the White House itself.

Bush is also wisely interpreting his re-election as a mandate to win in Iraq and to increase pressure on North Korea and Iran. He is doing well in using his mandate to reshuffle the intelligence community — and should not take a military or a congressional "no" for an answer.

But the abortion debate is a swamp in which a Republican president can lose his way and eviscerate his power while failing to accomplish his agenda. Beware.

*Dick Morris was an adviser to Bill Clinton for 20 years. Look for Dick's new book "Because He Could" about Bill Clinton. Copyright 2004 Dick Morris, All Rights Reserved. Distributed by Cagle Cartoons, Inc. www.caglecartoons.com Call Cari Dawson Bartley at (800) 696 7561 or e-mail: [cari@cagle.com](mailto:cari@cagle.com). e-mail for Dick Morris is [dmredding@aol.com](mailto:dmredding@aol.com)*



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