

from our viewpoint...

Legislature opens; drumbeat starts up

With the opening of the Legislature on us, the drumbeat is starting to consolidate Kansas counties.

One writer urges retaining the 35 counties with populations over 14,000 and combining the rest into just 13 rural counties. In the northwest, he postulates nine counties combining around Colby and maybe another six or seven around, say, Phillipsburg.

No local choice or “piecemeal” approach would be allowed; just get it done and quit whining.

That’s democracy for you.

The writer claims the usual benefits: fewer county jobs, lower taxes, better services, less burden on business.

Sure.

We can’t recall a consolidation that *ever* saved taxpayers money.

They’re often sold that way, but the truth is, government is loath to give up revenue. Save money here, and someone will spend it there. Taxes never go down — unless taxpayers demand it.

There’s always someone with a “need” to spend money on.

There’s no thought here to what happens to people in the nearly 60 former county seats, towns like Goodland and Oberlin, St. Francis and Atwood, Norton and Hill City, Sharon Springs and Gove, where the jobs will be eliminated “by attrition only.”

If you want a forecast, though, drive through Russell Springs, where the dusty old Logan County courthouse stands in mute testimony to the loss of a county seat.

There are more issues here than meet the eye. Efficiency is just one of them.

Sure, a nine-county sheriff’s department would be bigger than the two- and three-man departments most counties field. But is that better?

Dispatchers in a central office could handle the load, but would they know the roads, or where the Jones farm is? Would there even be a deputy on duty in the former Rawlins County on the day something happened? Or would he be having coffee in the office at Colby?

It might make more sense to combine city and county services, or even cities and counties, and eliminate some duplication right at home.

It’s only realistic to assume that no actual money would be saved in any consolidation. Jobs would be lost, offices closed, towns destroyed, but the money likely would just flow to the new county seat.

What happens then is an acceleration of the past century’s trend: More people in the bigger towns, fewer in the smaller.

That’s not, or shouldn’t be, the goal of state policy. Kansas ought to be defending and building its small towns, not destroying them.

To this point, there is no groundswell for consolidation, just a few know-it-alls who think they know what is good for us.

Voters will have to sort out what of this makes sense and give public officials some direction. Until that is clear, nothing will happen.

Our guess is there will be some local consolidations. A few counties, a few schools, some cities will give up the ghost — when it makes sense to them.

But spare us from big-time consolidators in Topeka who think they know the way. — *Steve Haynes*

The Goodland Star-News

(USPS No. 222-460. ISSN 0893-0562)
Member: Kansas Press Association
Inland Press Association Colorado Press Association
National Newspaper Association
e-mail: star-news@nwkanssas.com

Steve Haynes, President
Tom Betz, Editor
Pat Schiefen, Copy Editor
Sharon Corcoran, Society Editor
Greg E. Stover, Sports Editor/Reporter
Kathryn Burke, Reporter
Doug Jackson, Advertising Coordinator
Robin Flax, **Mona Carver**, Adv. Sales
Sheila Smith, Office Manager

Nor’west Press
Jim Bowker, General Manager
Richard Westfahl **Ron VanLoenen** **Judy McKnight** **Betty Morris**
Aaron Hickert **Travis Jones** **Kris McCool** **Lana Westfahl**

 **nwkansas.com**
N.T. Betz, Director of Internet Services
(ntbetz@nwkanssas.com)
Evan Barnum, Systems Admin.(support@nwkanssas.com)

Published every Tuesday and Friday except the days observed for New Year’s Day and Christmas Day, at 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735. Periodicals postage paid at Goodland, Kan. 67735; entered at the Goodland, Kan., Post Office under the Act of Congress of March 8, 1878.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Goodland Star-News, 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

TELEPHONE: (785) 899-2338. Editorial e-mail: star-news@nwkanssas.com. Advertising questions can be sent to: goodlandads@nwkanssas.com

The Goodland Star-News assumes no liability for mistakes or omissions in advertising or failure to publish beyond the actual cost of the ad.

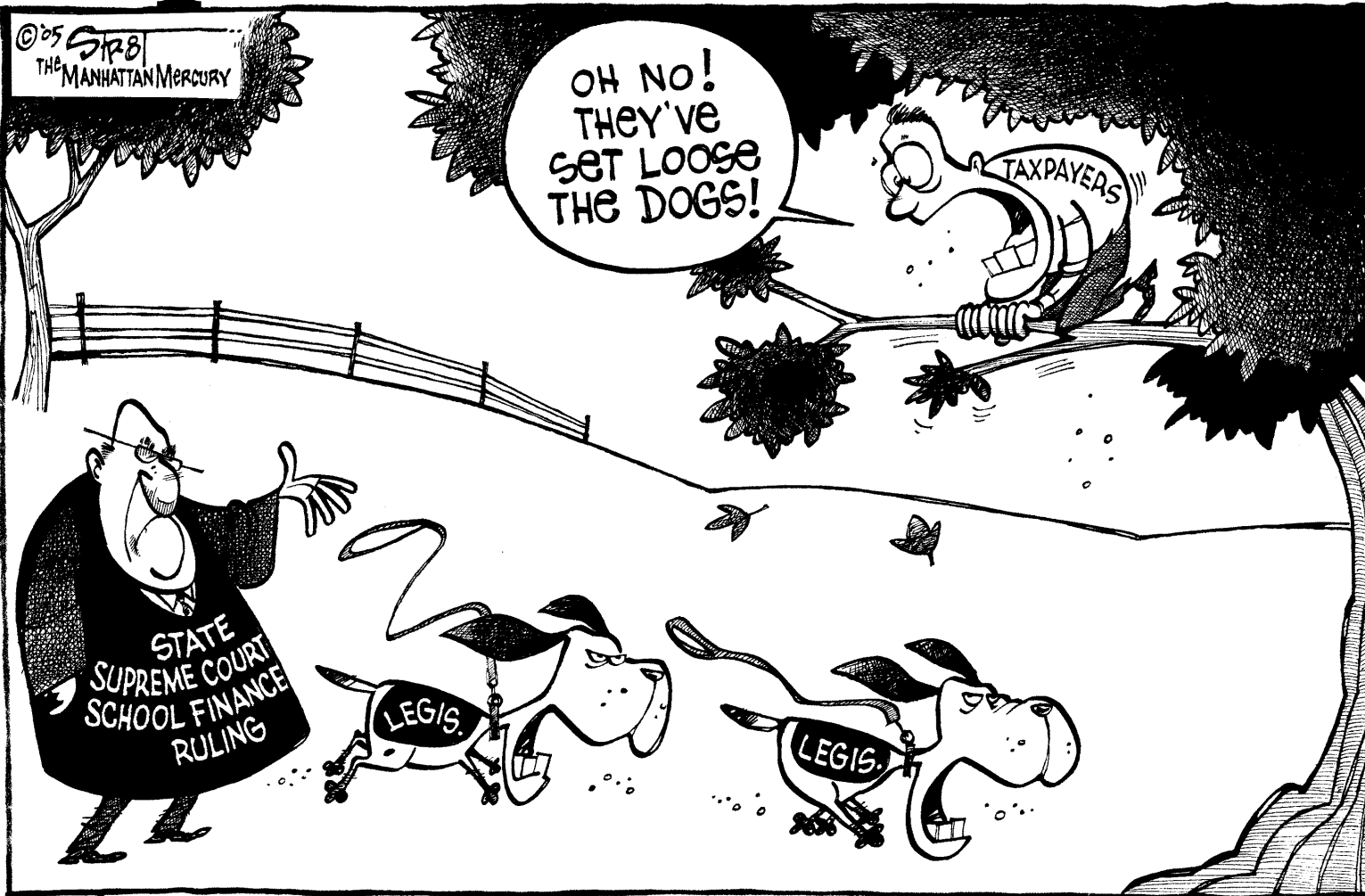
SUBSCRIPTIONS: In Sherman County and adjacent counties: three months, \$24; six months, \$42; 12 months, \$76. Out of area, weekly mailing of two issues: three months, \$34; six months, \$49; 12 months, \$84. Mailed individually each day: 12 months, \$119. (All tax included.)

Incorporating:
The Goodland Daily News
1932-2003

The Sherman County Herald
Founded by Thomas McCants
1935-1989

THE SHERMAN COUNTY STAR
Founded by Eric and Roxie Yonkey
1994-2001

Nor’West Newspapers
Haynes Publishing Company



Snow makes it white, silent world

I don’t know about you, but I’m sitting in a warm house looking out on a white, silent world.

Kansas is experiencing the worst ice storm for decades; half the state has been declared a disaster area.

Our town has electricity now, but many people still do not — and this is going into the fourth day. Electric crews from surrounding states have been called in to help with the widespread problem. They are working in sub-freezing temperatures. We are all very grateful for their dedication.

Our power went off just as I was preparing to go to bed last Tuesday night. (written last Friday.) My first thought was: Well, that’s good timing. I’m going to bed anyway. Lying in bed, I could hear the gun shot sounds of trees unable to bend any more with their coating of heavy ice, And the town still looks like a war zone.

It will take a long time to get everything caught up, trees and bushes trimmed, and things back to normal. Almost everyone has some damage, some having entire trees up-



**lorna
g t**

● commentary

rooted. The limbs pulled down a lot of high wires, but I’ve seen very little damage to homes and buildings.

We are grateful for that. And grateful that no one in our immediate area has been killed or seriously injured, although two froze to death in Wichita. Some of our elderly were taken to the local nursing home for the night where they were safe and warm, thanks to an emergency generator.

The town was out of electricity for about 15 hours, but some rural areas still are out.

I spent the whole time in bed with blankets, thanking God I was not exposed to the elements in the way the poor people of Sumatra, Indonesia and Thailand are. I could have left my home and driven to a safe area, but they have nowhere to go. The 11 countries directly

affected by the tsunami were unwarned and totally at the mercy of the sea.

Even with our “war zone” conditions, we can’t begin to imagine their devastation and hopelessness.

My heart goes out to them. We will be taking up Love Offerings for them in church the next two Sundays.

Our country is so blessed. I cannot despair. Storms like this are humbling though.

I realize how completely dependent on electricity we have become as a nation. How would we exist if our modern conveniences were to suddenly disappear? It’s something to think about, isn’t it?

I like antiques and one night this week, I was very grateful for my kerosene lamp, the oil in it and childhood lessons of how to light it — and how to be extremely careful with it.

So today I’m thanking God and being grateful.

The trees are truly beautiful with their transparent new clothes, the birds are finally out of their hiding places, and God is still in charge of this awesome, wonderful world.

Newspaper provides information, opinions

To the editor:
Is the local newspaper doing it’s job?
Providing information of what is occurring in the community, accurately, timely and provoking thought.

The Tuesday, Jan. 11, issue of *The Goodland Star-News* did provide information of the community and to my knowledge, accurately and timely. It also provoked thought from the opinion page.

In regard to Freedom Fest and fireworks, it does seem curious that \$7,500 is spent on fireworks, all of which is blown up in one hour. But how much money is spent yearly on cigarettes, beer, gambling, overeating and other wasteful pursuits?

If each resident of Goodland gave \$1 to the Chamber for Freedom Fest, we would have \$5,000, two thirds of what is needed. How much do we spend on the items listed above?

We celebrate our country’s beginning, a country that is one of the best! Cost: Priceless!

In regard to the commentary by Steve Haynes about the trash that is thrown carelessly by a few, this is a problem in all communities.

A couple of remarks in this commentary where of concern to me. Why the statement — “Teen-agers like Budlight, apparently.” And “As long as we criminalize teen-agers who drink, they’re going to throw the bottles out. Duh.”

Well, Duh! One, it’s against the law to sell beer to minors. Two, it’s against the law for some one to buy beer for a minor. Three, it’s against the law to have an open alcohol beverage in a car. And four, it’s against the law to throw trash out of a vehicle.

You state that most of the thrown stuff is from those under 30. Remember the saying, “Don’t trust anyone over 30!”

Your column’s intent was, I think, to complain about thrown trash, but leaves an impression of blaming teen-agers, people who



**from our
readers**

● to the editor

sell beer to minors or provide beer to minors, and in a sense blaming law enforcement for not enforcing the laws.

On another thought: Another column on the Opinion page was another episode of cat craziness. We demand equal time for dogs! I could tell you many stories about my terrific little dog friend that would bore you to tears!!

Arlo Hansen
Goodland

Editor’s note: This letter was sent to Sherman County to complement the staff of the county health department:

Dear Sherman County Commissioners:
My name is Debbie Whitmer and I am one of the three public health nurse specialist who cover Kansas. I work for the Kansas Department of Health and Environment out of the Office of Local and Rural Health. I work with 56 of the central and western counties in Kansas. I visit with your county health department through phone, mail, e-mail, regional meetings, conferences and personal visits throughout the year. I wish I could come meet with each of you in person, but with 56 counties to cover, it makes it very difficult and I apologize for that.

I would like to take this opportunity to inform you of how impressed I am with your local county health department administrator, Dorendo Harrel. Under Dorendo’s professional guidance, she and her staff have been very busy this past year, as you know, with crisis readiness, WIC automation, immunization updates and epidemiology reporting of chicken pox, whooping cough and other dis-

eases, besides the many other routine public health services that they offer on your behalf to keep your county protected and healthy.

The staff has worked very hard under the direction of Dorendo. This has not been an easy task with decreasing resources and increased time, effort and collaboration on everyone’s part. In a time, with our societal and economic condition of our state and nation, they have done an excellent job fulfilling the needs of their county in a timely manner. Dorendo and her staff need to be commended for the hard work, accomplishments and contributions they have made for public health in 2004.

I would also like to thank you for all the support you have given them in their effort to keep Sherman County safe and healthy. I look forward to working with Dorendo and her staff in 2005. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to call me. Again thank you for hiring such a qualified administrator and staff for the Sherman County health department.

Debbie Whitmer ARNP, public health nurse specialist
Salina

Letter Policy

The Goodland Star-News encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, and must include a telephone number and a signature. Unsigned letters will not be published. Form letters will be rejected, as will letters deemed to be of no public interest or considered offensive. We reserve the right to edit letters for length and good taste. We encourage letters, with address and phone numbers, by e-mail to: <star-news@nw-kansas.com>.

garfield

