

from our viewpoint...

We need a chamber, but at what cost

Goodland needs a Chamber of Commerce, but with the financial problems of the present organization, there are a lot of questions.

We need an organization that can respond to people who are looking for information about Goodland and Sherman County, and to help the businesses that form the base of our commercial economy.

All the Chamber board members and Executive Director Courtney Warden worked hard to keep the Goodland Area Chamber of Commerce afloat, and they deserve credit for those efforts.

Without getting into detail about what happened, there are questions that need to be answered before we allow the resurrection of the Chamber like a Phoenix rising from the ashes of the past.

Questions of accountability have been directed at the Chamber board. There are questions about what happened to money for the Freedom Fest that was funneled to the Chamber from businesses, individuals and the city and county.

When the Chamber went to the county commissioners in November to ask for money for the 2005 Freedom Fest, representatives said the money would go into a separate fund to make the event self-perpetuating. They told the city the same thing several times before the commission approved giving the Chamber money for the fireworks.

Tuesday when the Chamber board asked the county Economic Development Council for money to help pay some of its \$19,926 outstanding bills, among the list was \$6,000 for fireworks, \$981 for food and \$216 for Coke for the Freedom Fest. The \$7,500 raised for this event should have been enough to cover these expenses, as the Chamber board told the city and county.

However, since the Chamber was deep in debt, the money for the Freedom Fest apparently was not put in a separate account, but was swallowed up in the Chamber's effort to pay its bills.

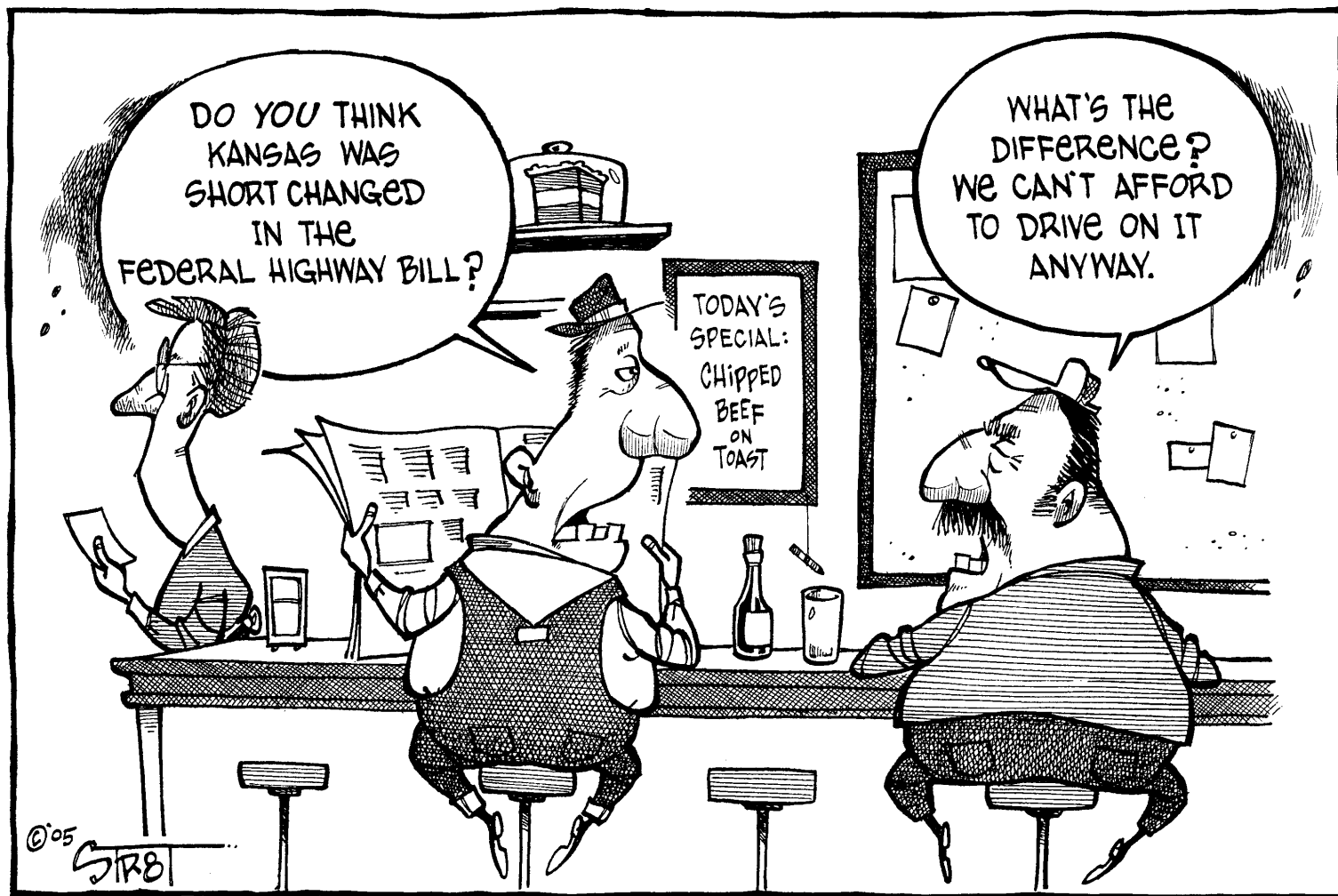
There have been questions in previous years, under different leadership, about the Chamber's accountability, and they are at the root of why we have a separate economic development office and a separate visitors bureau office today.

These groups need to work together, because they dovetail into a single effort to promote the community. Today, there is good accountability with the economic development office, which is funded by public money, and good accountability with the visitors bureau, which is funded by the county hotel tax. Without a similar level of accountability from the Chamber, which depends on memberships and fund raising, there will always be doubts about what public money is being spent for.

The Chamber can be resurrected, but accountability is the major obstacle facing those who believe it deserves a second — or is it a third — chance. We believe in the mission of a Chamber, and want to see a good Chamber organization. We appreciate the work Chamber members do.

The economic development council agreed to loan \$8,000 in public tax money to help save the Chamber, and will move the Chamber into its office to save money.

It remains to be seen what the Chamber can do in the next few months to reorganize and move away from the mistakes of the past. Being open and honest with the public and public officials about its financial health will be a top priority if the board hopes to succeed. — Tom Betz



Visiting schools, children in Costa Rica

The sign said "Escuela el dos San Ramon Tilaran."

As our bus drew up in front, curious children stopped their games and came to see why the tourists were stopping in their little part of the world.

The cinder-box schoolhouse had two classrooms with desks, a kindergarten room out back and a kitchen housing a wood stove.

Recess was just getting over when we got off the bus. As the tour guide asked those of us who hadn't been able to hop off almost before it stopped to wait for him to speak to the teachers, the first of our editors on the ground were handing out pens and trinkets.

The children were enchanted by the strangers with gifts and the publishers on the bus, all members of the National Newspaper Association, were taken by the youngsters, with their shy smiles and open welcome.

There were 33 of us, but we crowded around the edges of the classroom while our guide relayed our questions to the teacher, Edel Cascante Navarro, a middle-aged woman who said she was both the principal and teacher for grades 3, 4 and 6. She had a master's degree and had taken English in school but did not speak it.

There were 34 students in six grades, she told us, broken up into two classrooms. The teacher



cynthia haynes
• open season

for grades 1, 2 and 5 was sick, so those students were not in class. Apparently, there is no substitute teacher in San Ramon.

We were on a study mission in Costa Rica learning about volcanoes, rain forests and the culture of this tiny Central American nation.

We had already visited the country's largest newspaper, La Nacion, where we learned that Costa Rica has a free press which fights government corruption and prints books.

The books, all by well-known authors with expired copyrights, cost about 40 cents each. They are about the size of comic books with lurid colors on the cover and cheap newsprint inside. Titles include works by Henry James, Edgar Allan Poe and Jack London, among others — all in Spanish.

At the school, we noticed that the children, while cleanly dressed in mismatched uniforms, had little play equipment and few books.

The newspaper people passed out the trinkets we had brought for the kids — ink pens, pins, and hats.

They wanted to know our names and some of the more enterprising got our autographs.

Mostly, they are the children of small dairy farmers, our guide said. Their parents probably make about \$350 to \$450 a month, the average for Costa Rica. They aren't poor for this region but their school lunch of rice, beans and cabbage would be cooked over a wood stove and they would walk the few blocks or several kilometers home at the end of the day.

Our tour guide was nervous. This stop was not on his regular schedule. He didn't quite know what to do about Americans who wanted to stop and visit a country school.

But it turned out to be a good stop for all of us. We enjoyed the children. The kids enjoyed the attention, and the photographs we took. And the teachers will soon be enjoying a whole stack of books we persuaded La Nacion to give them.

Meanwhile, back in the states a high school in New Jersey is about to find out that it's becoming a sponsor for a little two-room school in the middle of Central America.

One of the publisher's had a daughter on the tour who was just looking for a project, and she found it in Escuela el dos San Ramon Tilaran.

Moran smart to stay in Congress

Rep. Jerry Moran has decided to stay in Washington, passing on a firefight with Gov. Kathleen Sebelius.

Smart move. While Mr. Moran is widely regarded as the only Republican with a chance of uniting the party and whipping the popular governor, there's no saying that he would have won.

Maybe. A year and a half, a lot of work, a ton of money and a few truckloads of dirt later, he might have won.

Probably would have won. Though he wouldn't have seen his family much in the meantime.

Most Kansas Republicans fall more or less into one of two warring camps, conservative or "moderate." While individual members of each group are diverse and hard to pigeon hole, the bottom line is they don't much get along.

Jerry Moran rises above all that, going back even to his days in the state Senate. The Hays Republican has the respect, and the ear, of nearly every Republican in the state.

His position as a five-term incumbent in the Big 1st District, now 69 counties strong, gives him great name recognition.

But he's still "just" a congressman. There's the temptation to move up, to the Senate or the governor's chair.

A race for governor, though, is no picnic. You'd have to hit all 105 Kansas counties. You'd have to be on the road all year. You'd have to step in some stuff that most of us would rather avoid.

And did I mention the money? You'd have to raise a boatload of it.

Gov. Sebelius has proven herself a tough and able campaigner. Running against her would be no walk in the park.

Bob Dole says Jerry Moran should be a senator, and he should know.



steve haynes
• along the sappa

My guess is that will happen some day. Either Sam Brownback will run for president or Pat Roberts will retire.

Mr. Moran has passed his chance to be governor, and it may not come back his way. Who knows; Ms. Sebelius might run against him.

It's probably just as well. Two terms as governor, and you can retire into genteel obscurity. Jerry Moran is not cut out for that.

He's going to be with us for quite a while. When his girls are out of school and he's nothing better to do, we expect he'll make it to the Senate some day.

Until then, he's doing a pretty good job for us where he is.

In terms of politics, it's too darned bad he's not running.

We'd have had a dandy fight for governor, and maybe a real battle for the 1st District seat.

As it is, Mr. Moran will walk, not run, to reelection. The governor may strain a muscle or two, but nothing like the contest we could have seen.

It was a sensible move on Mr. Moran's part, but oh, what might have been.

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