

from our viewpoint...

Progress unlikely on consolidation

A major issue again this year in Topeka is local government consolidation, but progress seems unlikely. The consolidation idea has been gaining ground in recent years because it seems like a “good idea.” The way it works in Kansas today, though, it’s almost impossible. One county, Riley, has a consolidated city-county police department under an appointed chief. That required an act of the Legislature. A handful have consolidated law enforcement under the elected sheriff, which can be done with a city-county contract. Only one county has consolidated city and county government, Wyandotte, though a couple of small towns continue to function within the overall combined county. That, too, required an act of the Legislature. And that’s the biggest obstacle to consolidation. If we’re going to have any meaningful joining, the state needs to set clear, simple rules for local governments to follow, then let the cities and counties have at it.

Kansas Farm Bureau stands in the way right now, having vowed any consolidation bill must include separate votes in cities and rural areas. A plan with that provision was shot down by rural voters in Shawnee County last fall. Part of the problem is that cities and counties are different creatures. Cities run utilities like sewer, water and electric systems. They patch potholes in paved streets and chase dogs. Counties grade roads and spray noxious weeds. They kill prairie dogs, run elections and help the state sell license tags and drivers’ licenses. Some functions, like law enforcement and administration, do overlap, but rural people fear a consolidated government would be a “super city” that ignores the minority out in the hinterlands. Most of all, they think they would be forgotten in a majority rule system. Hence the Farm Bureau stance. And they may be right.

Oddly enough, that hasn’t happened with the traditional county system, where city voters usually outnumber the rural block, but perception is everything. Political jealousies enter this debate, since consolidation schemes might do away with county elected officers in favor of a manager system or appointed department heads. Our view is that the majority ought to rule, but gently. It’s unlikely we’ll have any consolidation with a split vote, so the Legislature ought to craft a compromise that protects rural people from taking on city debt or paying for city services they don’t get.

The decision ought to be made on a one-man, one-vote basis. And the law ought to allow flexibility in crafting a new kind of local government without interference from Topeka. One last word of warning: Don’t expect consolidation to save money. It won’t. Things might run better, but they seldom get less expensive. That said, let the consolidation begin. — *Steve Haynes*

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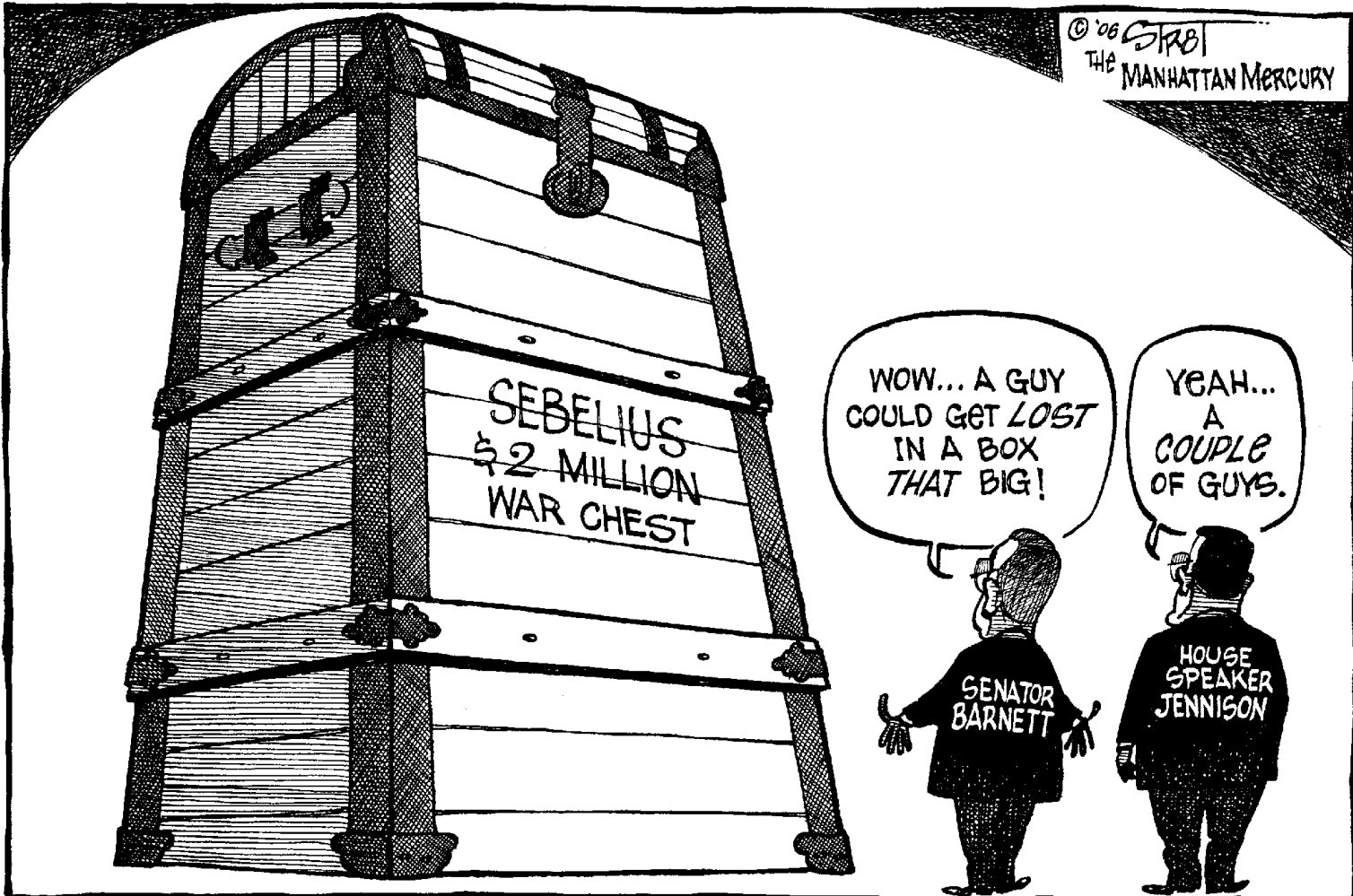
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And on the farm they have some dogs, cats

Stephen’s sister has a farm, E-I-E-I-O. And on that farm she has some dogs, E-I-E-I-O. And so on and so forth, with horses and cats and what have you..

We visited the Blaylock household in rural Emporia over the weekend.

The trip was billed as a hunting expedition to give our dog, Annie, the opportunity to try her nose on quail, since she seems to do better with them than the pheasants we have out here.

The boys — Steve, brother-in-law Daryl and nephew Andy — took off for a day in the field while Barb, Steve’s baby sister, and I did farm chores.

The Blaylocks live on a “gentleman’s farm” of a few acres with creek, trees and a renovated farmhouse only a few miles outside of Emporia.

They raise quality quarter horses and have eight in the pastures.

They also have a pair of Vizslas, red Hungarian hunting dogs. Their dogs prefer sleeping on the couch and scaring off burglars to hunting, however.

Then there are the cats, or as Steve put it. “Barb has two dogs, eight horses, eight cats and an envious sister-in-law,” Steve said.



cynthia
haynes

• open season

He’s right, of course. They have more cats than I do. I’m jealous, and neither Barb nor Steve would let me sneak one of the half-grown kittens home. You’d think someone with that many cats wouldn’t notice one missing.

That’s not true, however. Daryl and Barb know each of their animals by name and pedigree, even when that pedigree is Snowball and some visiting tom.

On the farm, the felines are divided into house cats and barn cats. Two cats live in the house. Both would prefer to be outside all day and have to be caught each night and dragged into the house.

The barn cats spend the day scampering all over the farm — except for a couple of half-grown kittens, which spend their days in the

house pretending to be housecats from a litter Barb hand-raised after their mother disappeared. (It’s one of those that I tried to kittennap.)

As evening approaches, Daryl or Barb will go into the barn yelling, “kitty, kitty, kitty.”

Soon six to eight cats are scampering after them with the sure knowledge that the next step is the haphazard scattering of dry cat food on the floor. Barb says if you scatter the food, you have fewer fights over the bowl.

If the inside cats respond to the call, they are hauled to the house. Otherwise, they are hunted down and the barn door is closed for the night.

Since the cats have been shut up in the barn each night, sis reports, a lot fewer have gone missing at the Blaylocks. When they first moved to the farm, they lost a lot of cats to coyotes, bobcats, foxes and other things that go burp in the night.

I was a little jealous of the cats, but I sure don’t want eight horses and two more dogs so I’ll let Barb and Daryl have their farm and their pets and I’ll keep mine. Especially since I didn’t do so well trying to have garage cats when my son visited — we lost one, which was a 50 percent decrease in his cat population.

Bills being introduced on hot issues

It is important to me to hear from people in the district regarding issues we are debating. My vote is directly related to what I believe the constituents of my 121st district want me to do.

I make many votes that I personally do not agree with on behalf of you who elected me to represent your voice here in Topeka. I am a representative and your voice in Topeka, not someone who has an “agenda” or will vote what I want regardless of the district’s wishes. Thus your communications are vital to me. I have daily radio and considerable voice contact via phone with people in the four counties I represent, but I can always use more.

This session will likely see considerable and heated debate on education, eminent domain, health care, tax policy and agriculture.

Two opposing eminent domain bills have been requested. One clearly allows eminent domain for economic development, while the other allows use of eminent domain only for roads, parks and the like.

Expansion of scope for health providers is a big and heated issue.

Legislation increasing taxes and the other end the “Taxpayer’s Bill of Rights,” holding government spending increases to no more than cost of living, are being prepared for discussion.

School choice (vouchers), consolidation, elimination of low-enrollment weighting and other discussions that place our schools in an unfavorable situation are queued up.

Increasing severance taxes and taxes on inventory are being discussed, along with increasing taxes on agriculture, which historically has been protected. I need your thoughts, please.

I expect more partisan activity this election year regarding all issues. I’m already seeing it following the governor’s State of the State address. I will not criticize her message, but will work with her to obtain assistance on issues so very important to us in the 121st Dis-



jim
morrison

• capitol review

trict.

“Politicking” should not be a part of this session, and to the best of my ability, I will not be persuaded by those pressures.

This year, my Health Committee will be making history in the way we conduct our meetings completely in full view and interactivity with the public via the Internet. This is the anticipated normal operation in all the committees when the remodeling of our

state Capitol is able to allow the technology. I expect all committees to be fully electronic in three years. You will be able to testify from your home to my committee this year and interact with members. This really is a big deal, being watched by the major news networks, C-Span, and most other state legislatures. Kansas is far ahead in this open government and elected legislators’ accountability trial.

I have room for four pages March 7 and two for April 27. If interested, please call or e-mail or write me.

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to serve as your representative in Topeka. I will continue to work hard to help you to the best of my ability. Thanks also for your prayers, kind cards and great support.



garfield

