

from our viewpoint...

Like it or not ‘C’ word is coming

A statewide conference last week on local government consolidation drew a lot of interest, and out here in rural Kansas, we should be listening to what was said.

The first thing to mark down is that consolidation is coming, like it or not.

Kansas has more local government employees per taxpayer than most states, and sooner or later, people will get tired of paying them. There’s only so much money to go around.

With pressure for consolidation building, though, we have time now to decide what kind of local government we want.

One model would merge Kansas’ 105 counties to form “supercounties” with larger populations and a single, presumably less expensive, government.

That could mean joining two or three adjacent counties, but in northwest Kansas, you could easily see a nine-county cluster with a single courthouse and branches in the eight former county seats.

Another model joins city and county governments to provide the same services we have today with a single bureaucracy and governing board.

That’s the model used by populous Wyandotte County (157,461 people) and tiny Greeley County (1,503, the state’s smallest).

Other counties have consolidated a service or two, including law enforcement under a professional chief in Riley County or under the elected sheriff in Cheyenne County.

Any way you look at it, consolidation is a fight because somebody will lose power, position and influence when counties, cities or agencies merge. Farmers suspect city folk won’t pay to grade their roads anymore if cities and counties merge, and employees fear for their jobs.

Many questions need to be answered, many fears are valid, but consolidation is an idea whose time has come.

Today, though, consolidation is next to impossible. Wyandotte and Riley counties had to get special bills passed by the Legislature. Greeley has to follow the same path.

A bill last year to allow government to consolidate without a special law failed. Farm Bureau opposition to a single vote of all county citizens was critical, because most people assume a consolidation measure would never pass that way.

If the summit last week is any indication, the subject will come up again and again until it does pass. Farm Bureau is fighting a rear-guard action here.

We think citizens should have the right to decide how they’ll be governed. If that results in a patchwork of different solutions, all the better. If people are happy with a plan, and willing to pay for it, let them.

The question we should ask ourselves is this: how do we want to be governed in this century?

By separate county and city governments with overlapping functions? By megacounties, where it might be an hour’s drive to the courthouse to get tags for the car or pay taxes?

Do we want separate three-person sheriff’s departments and city police in a lot of little counties, regional law enforcement or joint city-county departments?

We have our ideas. You may have yours. One thing is for certain. If we don’t decide how to do things, someone will decide for us. And that’s wrong.

Our centuries-old system of city and county government is changing, and we, the people, ought to decide how we want the new system to work. — *Steve Haynes*

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Tripping over our dog was a beautiful fall

It was a beautiful fall.

And I’m not talking about autumn here. I’m talking about trying to take a bite out of the road — a big bite.

We were walking along the road Friday. It was a nice evening for a walk, but it was getting late and we needed to stretch our legs and get the kinks out. Annie, our dog, had been on her chain all day, and she needed to get out and check out the world.

Suddenly, the black dog from down the street came out of his yard straight for us, barking up a storm.

This happened about a year ago and Annie had him on his way home in about 10 seconds, but Steve’s been working with her and she’s better behaved now. When he says, “Heel,” she comes to his left side — a bit excited but obedient.

Steve wanted to avoid a fight, so he called Annie.



cynthia haynes

● open season

She came, but she was excited, not knowing whether she should make friends or send this interloper on his way. She danced around, back and forth, but always at Steve’s left.

The only problem was that’s where I was walking, then dancing, then falling as I tripped over the dog.

I came down hard, my left knee hitting before the rest of my body.

“Are you all right?” Steve asked anxiously. I didn’t answer right away. I wasn’t sure.

But, I soon rolled over, spit out some gravel and examined myself. Except for a bruised lip and a sore knee, I seemed to be OK.

The Veteran’s Soul



from other pens

● commentary

— because of what he experienced in World War II.

He was Sgt. L.G. Pool, a Texas-born bull rider who he rode the Sherman tank he commanded with the same enthusiasm. He was always the first out front and the last to wrap up for the day. But one night, he ran out of fuel. He and his men, trapped five miles behind enemy lines, were “sitting ducks.”

Two other men volunteered to travel five miles on foot carrying a five-gallon can of fuel. They were guided to Sgt. Pool’s tank by the sight and sound of gunfire. Sgt. Pool and his men were saved because of the bravery of the volunteers. One was Native American, the other African-American.

Other stories celebrate the best of the human spirit. There’s a story about four chaplains on a sinking ship. There weren’t enough lifebelts to go around and each of the four took theirs off and strapped them onto others. The chaplains died when the ship went down.

After an American battalion pushed back the

I figured I’d have a limp and a fat lip in the morning, but nothing was broken or even very bent.

In the morning, I discovered that my lips and teeth were fine, I had no bruises and the only abrasion was a tiny cut on my left hand. I wasn’t sore and I wasn’t even mad at the dog — or my husband.

I think those calcium supplements are working. Now maybe I should try taking dancing lessons or dog avoidance lessons or something.

I’m in a quandary. Obviously, no one wants to be in pain or suffer injury. On the other hand, I should have something to show for the shock and trauma of suddenly finding myself face down on the road.

I guess I should be glad the road wasn’t paved. Concrete or asphalt might not have been as forgiving as gravel. Then again, grass would have been nice. Maybe a walk in the park next time.

Germans near a small Belgian town, one GI heard church bells ringing. The town now in American hands, the GI went into town to celebrate Mass. He saw a priest begin the service, but there was no altar boy. The GI, a former altar boy, walked to the altar and performed the job.

After Mass he followed the priest into the sacristy. He kept his hands in the prayer position, while the priest removed his garments. Beneath his garments, the priest wore a German officer’s uniform — he was a chaplain in the German army. The men shook hands and parted, both exhilarated by the truth that “even in war our common humanity, under the same God, can triumph over hatred and division.”

It’s an oddity of human existence that in the midst of the hell of war, as human nature is at its most violent, human goodness and beauty are at their highest. Such goodness and beauty are occurring now in our current disputes. Hopefully, someone will write a book about that soon.

But it’s something else to remember as we honor our veterans, and pray for the men and women in harm’s way now.

Tom Purcell’s weekly political humor column runs in newspapers and Web sites across America. Contact him at TomPurcell@aol.com

