

City can offer bond help but shouldn't lower taxes

Should the city help an outside firm revive a failed grain elevator operation here?

There are, after all, two existing grain operations in town, one private, one a farmer-owned cooperative.

That's part of the question Oberlin city councilmen faced when asked if they would help Hansen-Mueller Grain rehabilitate the former Oberlin Milling/Cedar Bluffs Grain operation.

Connie Grafel, economic development marketing director, said the firm has asked about industrial revenue bonds, which get a tax break and thus a lower interest rate than regular borrowings.

She also asked if the city would be willing to give the firm an abatement on its property taxes, cutting or eliminating them for some years. That's allowed under the same law.

At its next meeting, the council got a petition sponsored by the Decatur Cooperative Association against both the bonds and the tax incentive, which the Nebraska firm hadn't yet even asked for.

Well, fair is fair. The Co-op has never asked for a tax abatement to expand its operations, though theoretically, it could have. Co-op has become the big dog in grain and petroleum marketing here by steadily building up its business and recruiting farmer-owners to do business with it.

Yet, in the best of all possible worlds, the city and county would be better off with three elevators rather than two. That would mean three operations hiring people here and paying taxes here.

That's what we had until Oberlin Milling closed last year after the owners filed for bankruptcy.

This is not the first time Co-op has moved to close off competition. The association

wanted to buy the old Fifth Wheel site by The Gateway for a parking lot to prevent it from being sold to a competitor a couple of years ago.

Today the city has Crossroads Express on that corner, paying taxes and hiring people, but not without a price. Co-op scaled back its convenience store and restaurant operation across the street, indicating that it did not make money with its expanded food service operation.

So it's no simple matter for the city to decide. Helping the new guy could hurt the existing business. Oberlin Milling was bankrupt, after all.

In our mind, there is no way the city can consider giving Hansen-Mueller a tax abatement. Other firms here pay their property taxes, and there's not much benefit to having another business if it won't contribute.

That wouldn't be fair to Co-op, other businesses or taxpayers in general.

The industrial revenue bonds are another case. They allow a firm to pay a little less interest by making the borrowing exempt from federal taxes. The city would not have to pay the bonds and there would be no impact on tax revenue.

The bonds could be issued for any new business, including an expansion at Co-op, and cooperatives have access to low-interest federal money at preferential rates. Surely, if the city made bonds available to one, it'd do the same for the other.

So the city could at least consider issuing bonds. It would cost the taxpayers nothing and might not do any harm to existing elevators. Hansen-Mueller is here and in business already.

But a tax abatement? No way. We'd sign that petition.

— Steve Haynes

Country walk provides peace

Driving across Kansas on a beautiful, if partly cloudy and mostly hazy day, the back, the behind and the legs get stiff and sore.

After a niece's graduation in Emporia, we had to beat a hasty retreat. There was a paper to do Monday, and three-quarters of a state to cross.

But we knew we'd never make it home in time to get any exercise. My doctor says I need more exercise, and the dietitian says I need it every day.

Before sunset, we pulled off at an exit where Ellsworth County meets Lincoln County, between Salina and Russell up in the heart of the Smoky Hills.

There's a good gravel road there that you can walk without much traffic. It's at least two miles to the nearest house.

On a nice evening, the hills were green, softened by the glow of the fading light. The air, though humid, was cool and pleasant. There was a hay mow to the right, wheat to the left, in rich dark topsoil that seemed to run from bluff to bluff.

We started hiking up the hill, wondering at the fact that most of the homesteads were long abandoned. That's no different than any other spot in rural Kansas, though.

Up on top of the hill, where the green graded gently north toward the



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes

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Saline River drainage, was a stone farm house that had been handed down from the first generation on the hills. New roof, good paint, the house was in sharp repair. It was matched by a stone garage, two stone equipment sheds and a small but neat stone barn. Combines and big tractors were in a pole shed; in the days when they cut and built with local stone, they did not build big enough for today's equipment.

We kept walking past the first place and around the corner, where there were two more houses. Barn cats scattered when they saw our dog, wild and crazy as she is.

A couple came down the road on horseback. We stopped to let them by, but the big bay the man was riding was spooky as heck. Finally, he got off and led her by.

We nodded and exchanged pleasantries.

"Nice night to be out," I said.

"Yes. A wonderful night," he re-

plied. They rode on. They were enjoying the evening in the valley, and so were we.

Halfway back to the truck, a woman in a pickup stopped.

"You're not having any trouble, are you?" she asked.

No, we replied, just walking the dog. And our own sorry bodies.

She said she lived a couple of miles up the road.

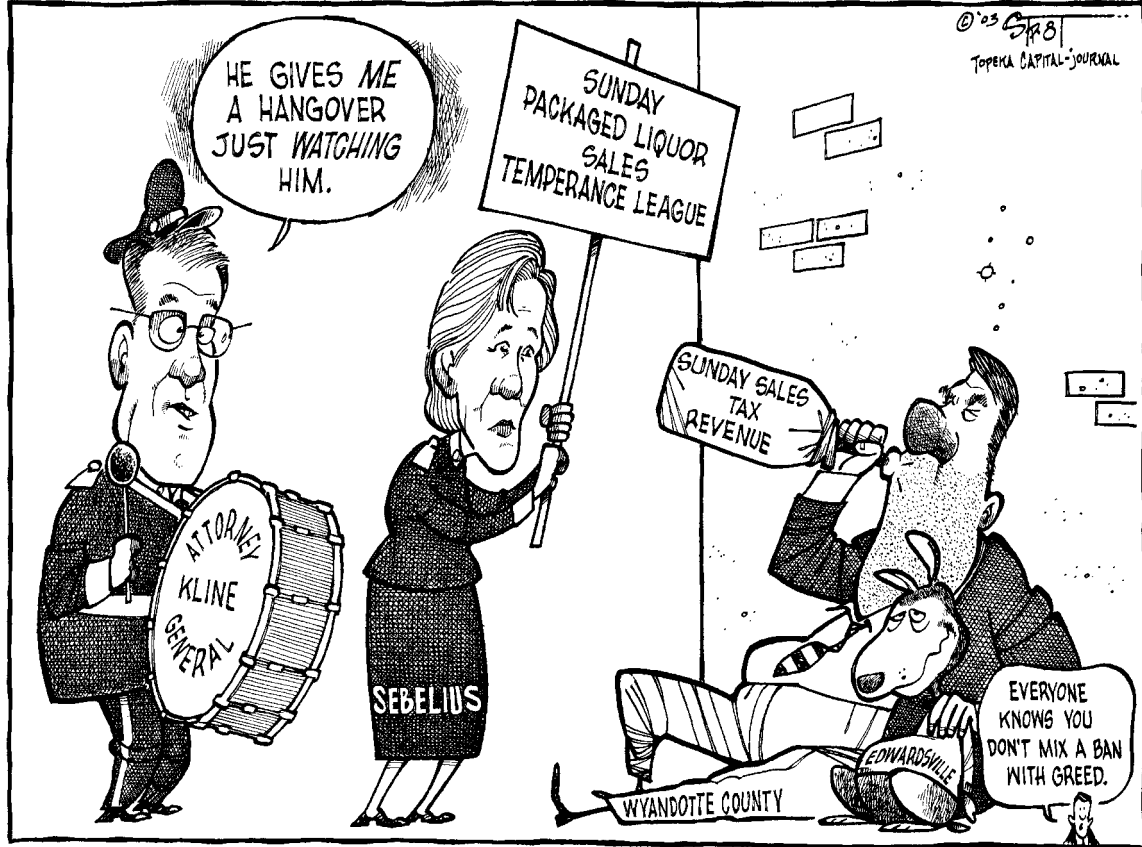
"Your little valley is beautiful," we said.

She smiled and went on.

Sometimes when city people ask why we live out here, it's hard to explain.

But show me a city where a lone woman will stop just to see if you're having trouble. Show me a city set in lush green hills. Show me a city where you can park your truck, walk for an hour, safely, come back and still have your hubcaps.

It shouldn't be that hard to explain, should it?



Car saves couple a long trip

If events had gone as planned, we would have been to Lubbock, Texas, and back over the weekend. Operative word there is "if."

A good friend was graduating from a Bible college Saturday morning and it was our intent to attend the ceremony. The plan was to leave Friday night after our last class at the correctional facility. By the time we finished, returned an extra vehicle to the house and packed the car, it was almost 10:30 p.m.

I was driving when, not even five miles from home, the car died. No warning. No spittin' or sputterin'. It just died. It had been running fine, no sign of trouble.

I said to Jim, "Do you think this is God's way of telling us we shouldn't go to Texas?"

He answered, "If you can get it started again, turn it around and let's go home."

After a couple of tries it started, I found a turnaround and we headed back. On the way home Jim confided, "You know, I was really dreading that drive."

Which prompted me to admit, "I wasn't looking forward to it, either."

What we had there (a la "Cool Hand Luke") is a failure to communicate.

If we had asked each other, we would have discovered that neither of us was that keen on making such a grueling trip. But, we each thought the other was set on going.

And the rest of the story is that the car ran perfectly after that.

—ob—

Our eight-year-old granddaughter Alexandria helped decorate family graves this year. She took her responsibilities very seriously, too, making sure that each quart jar was wrapped satisfactorily in foil and each contained an equal number of roses, peonies and iris. She pronounced it her official duty to place the containers by the tombstones.

City's purpose is agriculture

To the Editor:

I feel compelled to respond to Jay Anderson's letter in the May 14 *Oberlin Herald*. Jay asserts that Oberlin is a community without a purpose. I respectfully disagree. Oberlin, like other communities on the High Plains, was established to service and support agriculture. That remains our purpose today.

Think how many tens of thousands depend on us for their daily bread. What higher calling is needed than to be the breadbasket of the nation? Look at the tons of wheat,



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts

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We talked about ancestors that she never knew. We talked about how old they were when they died and, of course, we talked about when they died.

She had just placed flowers on the headstone of my great-uncle, Robert Burns Burger, someone I had never known, when I noted the date of death on his grave marker.

"He died on Dec. 24," I said.

"That was Christmas Eve."

"Man, what a bummer," Alex replied.

Her grandpa and I looked at each other, not knowing whether we should laugh or not. Ultimately, we agreed, "Yeah, that was a real bummer."

—ob—

Now, I can't prove this next story is true, but a friend relayed it to us. And a friend wouldn't lie, would he?

It seemed this preacher had a kitten that climbed up a tree in his backyard and then wouldn't come back down.

The tree was a young sapling and not strong enough to climb. The preacher decided that if he tied a rope to the tree and attached it to his car he could bend the tree over enough to rescue the kitten.

The plan was working fine until he pulled his car forward just a little too much and the rope broke. The tree went "boi-i-ing" and the kitten sailed right out of sight.

The preacher felt terrible as he searched the neighborhood. No one had seen the kitten. Finally he

prayed, "Lord, I just commit this kitten to your keeping," and went about his business.

A few days later, he was in the grocery store when he met a woman from his neighborhood. It was well known that this woman hated cats, but the preacher noticed she had cat food in her shopping cart.

He asked her why she was buying cat food when she hated cats so.

"You're not going to believe this!" she replied.

She told the preacher how her little girl had been begging her for a cat. Finally, the mother said, "Well, if God gives you a cat, I'll let you keep it."

She went on to say, "I watched as my little girl ran out in the back yard and got down on her knees and asked God for a cat. Suddenly, this kitten came flying through the air and landed right in front of her."

The moral of the story? Never underestimate the power of prayer.

From the Bible

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. . . Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which were seen were not made of things which do appear. Hebrews 11:1, 3

Letters to the Editor

beef, pork and other products which are annually shipped from this region.

The real source of our problems is the national policy to provide cheap food. As the relative value of our products has fallen, our economic strength has declined. A policy that encourages overproduction and allows cheap imports has

over the years been harmful to our interests.

Now, Jay is right that we need to develop other sources of income. We also need to diversify our agricultural production and add value to what we produce. Finally, we need to work for a national policy that restores value to what we produce.

Bob Streyve, Norcatur

Young voter's unhappy with city

To the Editor:

I am writing this letter as a very concerned voter. I have been debating for weeks about writing this letter because I am only 18 and don't think people will take me seriously. But here it goes anyway.

For the first time in my life, I was able to vote in an election, which was quite an experience. Months before the election, I started attending council meetings and learning about the issues of our local politics.

Now months after the election, I still follow local politics in the paper. And more and more, I get disgusted with it.

The city of Oberlin has the potential to grow but not the will. We are gearing up, and preparing to DIE! Pushing toward making this retirement community is not helping this town at all. I completely respect my elders, but when we center ourselves on making them happy, we leave a lot of younger families out in the

cold and then they move away.

Ken Shobe has done nothing beneficial for this community in the over two months that he has been mayor. Instead, he is preparing this city for his retirement so that he may live out his days in the lap of luxury at the expense of this community.

I would say that the biggest problem is that the mayor and the city council don't care enough about the little guy.

Benjamin Smith, Oberlin

Men help Girl Scouts do their best

To the Editor:

Girl Scouting isn't just for moms and daughters.

Currently, the Girl Scouts Sunflower Council has 31 men working as volunteers to Girl Scouting in northwest Kansas, including Dave Bose and Donald Ray of Oberlin.

These men are registered with Girl Scouts U.S.A. and hold many volunteer roles in the organization. They are behind-the-scenes supporters of wives and troop leaders, assistant leaders, council board

members, cookie chairmen, camp directors, canoe instructors, trip drivers, and more. Girl Scouting seems to enhance the relationships they build with daughters, wives, nieces, and granddaughters.

They come from all walks of life and are doctors, police officers, farmers, salesmen, truck drivers, auto mechanics, paramedics, architects, construction workers, oil field pumpers, and carpenters, just to name a few.

With Father's Day approaching,

I felt that your readers would be interested in the good that these men do in our communities.

Monica Legleiter, Hays communications director



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Office hours: 8:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. Mon.-Fri. (Also open most Saturdays when someone is in.)

Subscriptions: One year, \$28 (tax included) in Decatur, Norton, Rawlins, Sheridan, Thomas and Red Willow counties; \$32 (tax included) elsewhere in Kansas; \$35 elsewhere in the U.S. Foreign subscriptions, \$20 extra per year (except APO/FPO). POSTMASTER: Send change of address to 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749-2243.

Published each Wednesday by Haynes Publishing Co., 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749. Periodicals mail postage paid at Oberlin, Kan. 67749.

Steve and Cynthia Haynes, publishers Official newspaper of Oberlin, Jennings, Norcatur, Dresden and Decatur County. Member of the Kansas Press Association, National Newspaper Association, Colorado Press Association, Nebraska Press Association and Inland Press Association.