

State says it wants to help but, takes away our jobs

One by one, the welfare offices in western Kansas are closing. With them go precious state jobs that likely won't be replaced.

Instead of being able to go to an office and talk to a case worker or other professional, Social Services clients now will go to a "kiosk" where forms and pamphlets will be stocked. They'll call a toll-free number and talk with someone they'll never see.

Gov. Kathleen Sebelius and her staff have done nothing to stop this travesty.

On one hand, the state Department of Commerce says it's trying to help us find more plants and more jobs. On the other, the Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services takes jobs away.

This is nothing new. The Department of Transportation closed many rural shops a few years ago, taking scarce state jobs out of places like Jennings and Selden. The Highway Patrol consolidated all dispatchers in Salina, creating a staff that most likely will never see the roads they send troopers out to patrol.

It's true that state jobs are not economic development, and it's also true that the state is nearly broke. It needs to cut back and save money wherever it can.

But these consolidations save little, if any, cash. They are designed to create larger offices where workers are all in the same room. That makes them easier to control.

In fact, it's the workers who bear the brunt of these moves. They either have to uproot their families and move across the state, commute long distances to keep their jobs or find other work.

Some veteran highway patrol dispatchers, looking at a move to Salina, simply pulled the

pin. Others couldn't afford to retire yet.

Social Services workers are in the same boat. Many will be driving an hour to and from work as they shift to offices in Colby or Hays that will be open.

The department admits it isn't going to save much, if any, money by closing its rural offices. It's just shifting things around.

The fact that small-town Kansas and small-town employees suffer doesn't faze the welfare bureaucrats. Despite pleas from legislators and others, they've crammed their reorganization through.

The end result of all this is more state jobs in Topeka and in places like Hays and Salina.

Topeka has more than enough state jobs already. And while Hays and Salina, Garden City and Wichita might like to have a few more jobs, they don't need them as badly as Norton, Selden, Oberlin, St. Francis or Hoxie.

If the governor does care about the economy in rural Kansas, she should do something.

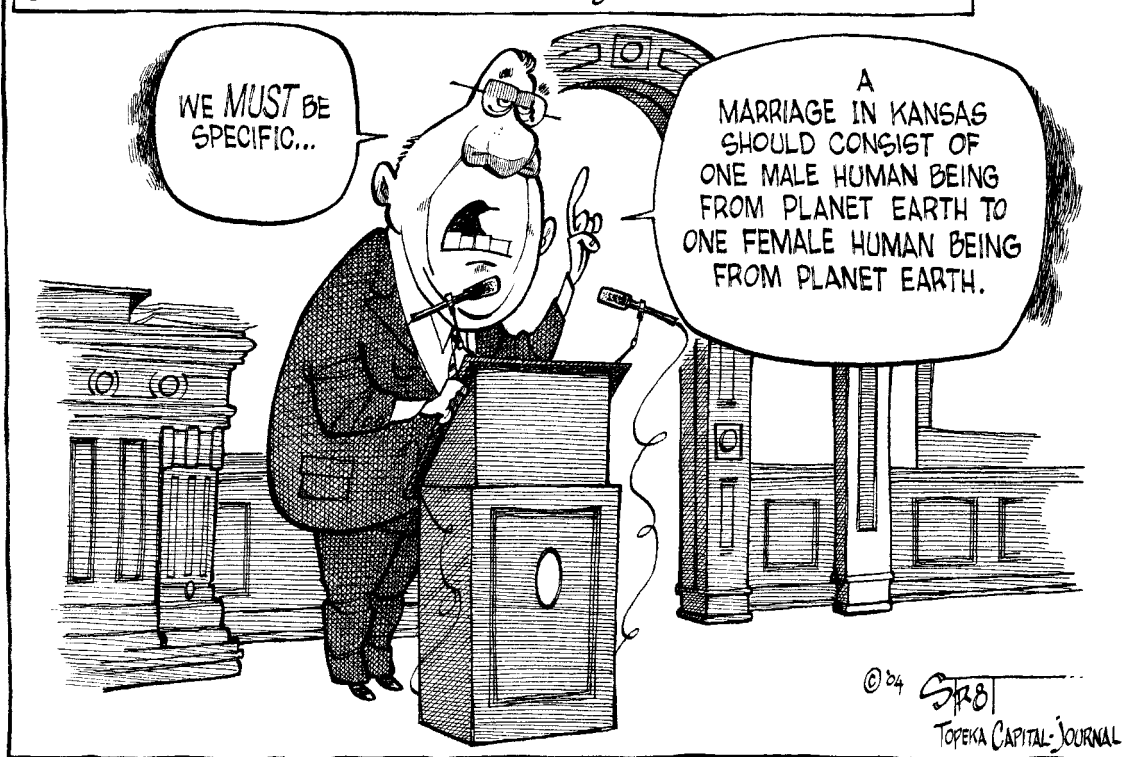
What's the point of one agency trying to find new jobs while others take state jobs and move them to the cities?

Instead, the state ought to be shifting jobs out of Topeka and into rural Kansas, not just the west, but all over, and not to the places that have jobs, like Garden City or Hays, but to places like Selden and Smith Center, Humbolt, Iola and Ashland. With modern communications, there is no reason why this can't be done.

Rural Kansas has been bleeding population and jobs for years. The state's not to blame for that, but it doesn't have to be part of the problem.

Governor, do you care? — Steve Haynes

Debate over Kansas' proposed marriage amendment continues...



Snake season comes all too soon

Did you know that Kansas has a rattlesnake season?

I always figured that it was open season on the little buzzers anytime you saw one.

Now, I really like snakes. I had a bull snake as a pet when I was younger. But, I've never been fond of critters that are meaner than me, with perhaps the exception of the cats. Cats, no matter how obnoxious, are not poisonous.

So standing at the counter in the county clerk's office, I was surprised to see a brochure entitled "2004 Western Prairie Rattlesnake Crotalus viridis application and Season Information"

It wasn't a very fancy brochure. It was an 8 1/2-inch-by-11-inch piece of goldenrod-colored note paper that had been tri-folded to give you six sides to look at. It wasn't really printed, just badly copied.

The cover had the name of the brochure and a picture of a coiled snake I assume was a western prairie rattler.

Under the caption in small letters was the information that commercial prairie rattlesnake harvest permits and commercial dealer permits expire on December 31, 2004. Below that was the usual equal opportunity notice.

On the same side of the sheet, the next two folds had information for commercial harvest and commercial dealer.

In a commercial harvest, prairie rattlesnakes less than 18 inches long can be possessed only during special events and then have to be let go



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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unharmful and unrestrained.

"Prairie rattlesnakes or their parts may only be sold during a commercial prairie rattlesnake special event to a person legally authorized to purchase prairie rattlesnakes," the brochure says. "A bill of sale shall accompany each sale of prairie rattlesnakes or their parts."

Now, if you want to purchase rattlesnakes or their parts for resale or export out of the state, you have to have a dealer permit.

Dealers may not have snakes under 18 inches. It's nice to know they protect the children.

The other side of the brochure sheet has the commercial harvest permit application. It costs \$6 if you have a Kansas hunting license and \$21 if you don't.

No matter whether you have a hunting license or not, you need a lot of nerve, a cool head and a little bit of stupidity to apply.

The next fold has information on the annual Sharon Springs Rattlesnake Roundup and the last fold an application form for commercial dealers.

A commercial dealer's permit costs \$51 and if you're smart, you'll

only buy dead snakes.

I was most interested in the Rattlesnake Roundup, which I have heard of but never attended. Apparently, Sharon Springs is the only town in the state that had the bright idea to capitalize on something you normally couldn't give away.

I wonder why no one else has thought of this? Oh yeah, see above.

Morbid curiosity kept me going. The bag limit on western prairie rattle snakes is 10 per day with a possession limit of 20. That's a lot of rattles.

Snakes may only be taken by hand, by noose, by snake hook, tong or fork or other methods approved by the Department of Wildlife and Parks.

I guess a shotgun isn't on the "other approved methods" list. Nor is garden hoe, my grandmother's favorite weapon against snakes. When she was done, they were all "parts."

While I'm making fun of this, my friends who have been to the roundup say it's really lots of fun.

Festival dates are Friday and Saturday, May 7-8 this year. Slither on down.

Taxpayer doesn't want to pay more

To the Editor: Why does the school district need a tax increase?

I believe it is because there have not been necessary cuts for the past 10 years. The population of the county and school enrollment have steadily declined. Changes were not made along the way and now there is a time of crisis when something has to be done.

There are fewer taxpayers, and enough is enough. At an in-service meeting early in the school year, it was said that compared to 32 other schools with the same enrollment as Oberlin, we have 19 more employees than the other 32. Of that number, 11 are certified and eight support staff. Perhaps that is good for bragging rights, but it does not seem fiscally responsible. I read with interest the positions that had been cut this year and was not surprised to see they were not high-wage jobs.

Losing jobs and downsizing are a sign of the times we live in. Not many have been unaffected.

It is possible to maintain a quality education in the Oberlin School District without an over-quantity of staff? Is there some major industry coming into our community that we are not aware of? One that would add to our enrollment, sell real estate, create jobs and ease our tax burden? I have not heard of any. Have you?

Please look at the whole picture of our little community. The nursing

Letter to the Editor

homes are both at low census, our cherished senior citizens are moving out of the community to go live close to their children. Many of our seniors still here are trying to exist on limited Social Security. Our farmers and ranchers have been dealing with a long-term drought, which not only affects them, but all of us. There is a need to redesign our city sewer plant and our water system. The additional tax money is not there; the pockets of our remaining citizens are shallow and empty.

I do not want to come off as a cold and callous person. This is home, I

love this town and my roots run deep. We are all emotionally connected. The bottom line is, make the cuts necessary to live within the budget. The district will still have schools with quality education.

There is a wealth of resources that compare schools, teacher-to-student ratios, expenses per student and salaries. These can be obtained from the Internet and Sen. Stan Clark. Get the real facts and figures, then exercise your right to vote, hopefully with common sense and not emotions.

Shayla Williby, Oberlin

Write

The Oberlin Herald encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of public interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

Mail letters to 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan., 67749, or by E-mail to obherald@nwkansas.com.

We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise.

We do not publish form letters or letters about topics which do not

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Pastor against a school tax increase

To the Editor:

The Bible tells us to provide for honest things. When it comes to the proposed increase in the school tax, there is much provision for dishonest things.

It is dishonest to tell the public that more money is needed for school programs when much money is being wasted on the programs already offered. It is dishonest to tell the public that teachers and other staff have to be cut because of the lack of funds when the superintendent, the high school principal and the elementary school principal are drawing big fat paychecks and living high on the hog. It is dishonest to ask the taxpayers of this school district for more money when there has been a decline in school enrollment.

Let's face it. Unless the voters realize that the school board is giving

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us the shaft, then they will keep on increasing our taxes. The local option budget is based on a percentage of the overall school budget. School budgets (like any other budget) can be manipulated. If the school board is into pork-barrel spending, then school taxes will go sky high. I believe it is time to eliminate the local option budget and put the school board on a spending freeze. Our school board doesn't need more money. They only need to control their spending.

In retail sales, there is one sure way to get the retailer to sit up and listen to what you have to say. That way is called a boycott. I call for a

boycott of our public school district.

How can this be accomplished? If every parent withdraws their children from the public school and establishes a non-accredited private school in their home, then we would have no more need of a public school in this community. Is it legal? Yes, it is perfectly legal, and the school board cannot protest or regulate the actions of the parents. Millions of dollars would be saved and our children would receive the best education money can buy. Besides, parents are the best educators in the world.

Pastor Steve Smith
High Plains Baptist Church, Oberlin

She's real busy doing nothing



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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only course.

Let's not even talk about cleaning house. I'm a good house "cleaner" but a lousy house "keeper." My goal is simple. Keep a path cleared between the front door and the kitchen. Anything more aggressive than that, and I get in trouble.

It's not that I don't want a tidy house. I do. It just seems that I'm incapable of actually maintaining that level of order.

Some women can't stand clutter, but clutter is my friend. We get along well. I embrace clutter. I like to think of it as organized clutter. This pile is stuff I want to read; that pile is stuff I have read. Another pile is stuff I don't want to read, but haven't managed to throw away yet.

Thank goodness I'm married to a man who has the same affliction.

Jim is like Pigpen in the "Peanuts" comic strip. A cloud of dust follows him wherever he goes.

It's true, Jim has more than his share of clutter around here. The difference is, he has the benefit of the whole outdoors and every storage building on the place to keep his clutter in.

From the Bible

... at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth: And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the Glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:10,11