

'Help' from Washington may end small town polling

It's fashionable for politicians to say they care about rural America. It's fashionable for politicians to say they are going to do something for rural America.

But in truth, hardly anyone in Washington or Topeka knows what goes on out here. There are not very many of *us* any more, and *they* have never been here.

Washington gives a nod to rural America now and then, mostly when the Farm Bill is up. But the Department of Agriculture is more about welfare and cities these days than it is about farming.

In Washington, they pass laws all the time, one-size-fits-all laws that might work in cities (though it's doubtful) and just mess things up in rural areas. Now we have the Helping America Vote Act, passed after the ballot-counting fiasco in Florida four years ago.

The voting act strikes out at some real problems, but it grew to include comprehensive federal standards which just won't fit rural America. It will centralize voting and may well mean the end of democracy in small towns all over the country.

Naw, *they* wouldn't do that.

Sure.

Helping America Vote may have started out as a good idea, but that was before all the special interests and pressure groups got a hold of it. As passed, it requires all voting places to be in buildings which meet standards of the Americans With Disabilities Act. All polling places must have fancy new touch-screen voting devices to help handicapped people vote.

Neither requirement has much to do with the problem the law started out to solve, but now that there are federal standards, they have to be politically correct.

But there are no ADA-compliant buildings in most small towns. The economy is so bad,

no one has built any new buildings. And rural counties can't afford more than one of those touch-screen computers, which may cost \$10,000 each and haven't really been invented yet anyway.

The government *may* put up some money to buy them and the state *may* put up some money, though it has none. And the counties may just get stuck with the bill. No one has *any* money to make 80-year-old buildings accessible.

The result: There will never be another local election in most smaller towns across rural Kansas. All polls will be in the county seat. If you can't drive in, you'll have to vote an advance ballot by mail.

So a citizen of Jennings or Almena or Norcatar, to vote in a city election, will have to drive 20 miles or more to another city. It's already happened in Sherman County, where citizens of Kanorado have to drive to Goodland to vote in their own elections.

How long will city government survive in small towns after this?

The scary thing is, state and county officials have rolled over and just accepted this dictate from Washington. Not one county so far has said, "Take your fancy machines and your federal money and just stick 'em."

No state has stood up and said, "Our small towns are important, too, and we don't want to see them die."

No one planned to put an end to small-town elections. But in Topeka and Washington, no one knows where these towns are, though some of them may have been raised in one. Worse yet, no one cares much what happens to them.

It's just collateral damage from another good idea gone wrong.

— Steve Haynes

Winds remind us of 'Dirty 30s'

We had one of THOSE weekends.

I needed to be at a 4:30 p.m. meeting in Overland Park, near Kansas City, on Saturday. We left our house at 6:30 a.m., drove to an old friend's house just south of the city and had a nice visit with her. In fact, we got ready at her house and made it to the meeting right on time.

Afterwards, we headed back west and stopped for the night at my brother, Jim's place just west of Lawrence and, of course, stayed up way too late talking. Up and out the door early, we made it to Salina just in time for church with an old preacher friend of Jim's.

Noon saw us back on the road and pushing to get home before the little singing group we're part of had rehearsal at 4 p.m. We kinda slid in on two wheels, changed clothes, gave the cat his shot and were only 15 minutes late to practice.

We wouldn't want to miss a thing, and usually, we don't.

—ob—

Progress Report on Mother Robin: I have come to the conclusion that she must be a first-time mother. Originally, she tried to build her nest on a two-inch-wide platform and only succeeded when Jim gave her something more substantial to build on. Then, one day we came home to discover a little blue



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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egg had evidently been laid over the edge of the nest, only to fall "ker-splaat" on the concrete step below.

There are two surviving eggs, though. I just took a mirror and held it over the nest to check. Whether she knows enough to set on them remains to be seen. So far, she hasn't earned a lot of points in the "maternal instinct" department.

—ob—

This has been a tough week on Jim. Last Monday, he had his remaining eight teeth pulled. Having learned from past experience, he knew he wouldn't be worth much for a day or two, so he kind of camped out in his recliner the rest of Monday and all day Tuesday. Wednesday, he felt like going to work and made it through the rest of the week. But, as sometimes happens, bone chips appear to be working their way upwards and he is in a lot of pain. He's at the dentist's office right now to see if they really are

bone chips that will come out on their own, or remnants of a tooth that will need attention.

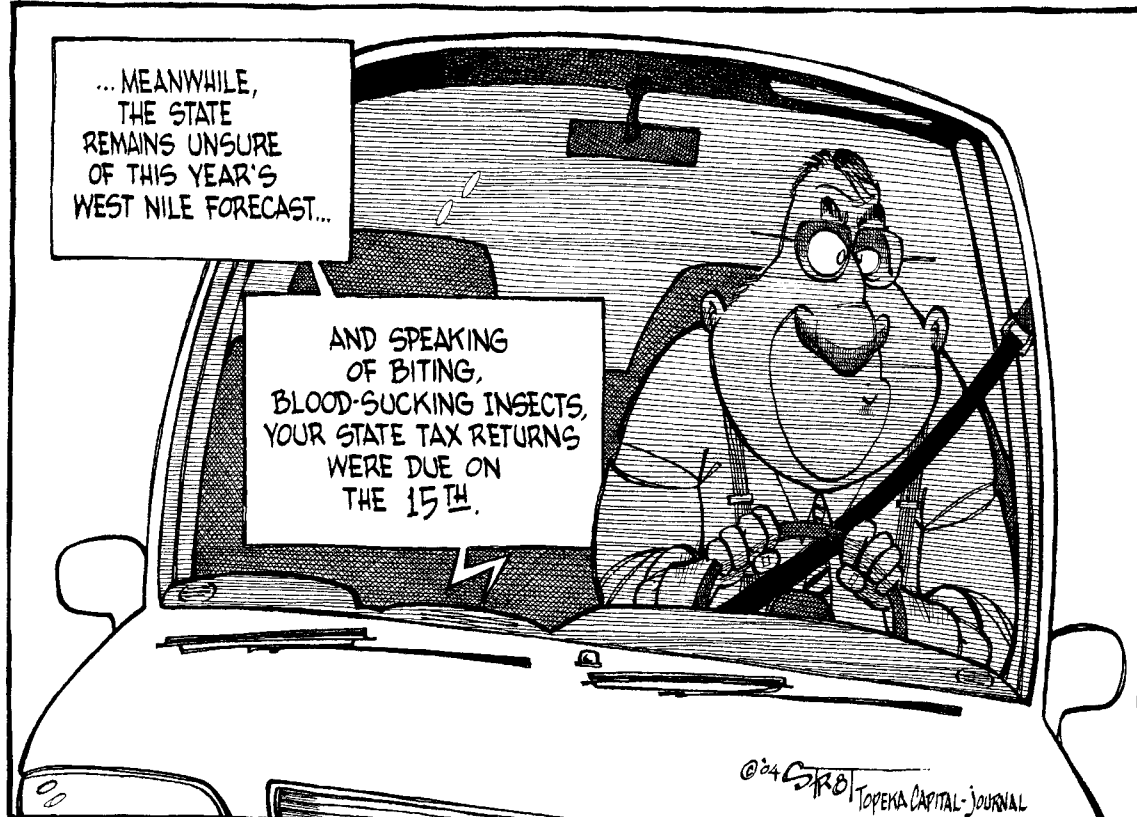
—ob—

We drove home Sunday in those terrible high winds. And I can swear that they swept the entire length of the state. Saturday night, they started in Overland Park, and all day Sunday it was a struggle to keep the vehicle on the road. The farther west we came, the hazier the air was. The dust was thick, completely blotting out the landscape.

Shades of the Dirty Thirties!

From the Bible

Thou art the God that doest wonders: thou hast declared thy strength among the people. Psalm 77: 14



Snow shower was still welcomed

They really should call spring the silly season

I know that term is usually reserved for the legislative session, but Mother Nature gets downright giddy during the spring.

Easter was sunny and cool, but flowers were popping out all over the place.

In front of my house, the daffodils I planted along a wall were all in bloom and the tulips were budded. The forsythia was fitfully blooming and the crocuses were past their prime.

It was really a beautiful day. Steve mowed the yard and we enjoyed the cool sunshine.

Then we had to go to work. We always work on Sundays. Usually, we go in late and work until midnight or so.

At 12:10 a.m. Monday morning, I stepped out into the darkness and spotted the first few tentative snowflakes.

With the drought we have been having, all moisture is welcome and I remembered the snowstorm we had six or eight years ago when they almost had to cancel prom because there was such a bad storm a day or two before the big event.



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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However, I was praying for a snowstorm that would melt quickly — like right away, so I wouldn't have to deal with bad roads on the way to work the next day.

The next morning, I awoke to about six inches of snow on the back deck.

The ornamental pear tree, which had been in full bloom, hung heavy with snow on its branches and flowers. The tulips, which had been ready to open, were clamped tightly shut.

I was more than an hour late getting to work. The roads were icy, and I decided to give the plows a little time to do their work.

The day warmed up, like it was supposed to do, and Tuesday was beautiful. By Wednesday, temperatures were back up in the 70s and 80s

and the snow was almost gone. Even the tulips had consented to open up and show off their beauty.

Wednesday night, we got home from work early and cooked outside on the grill. Then we washed off the picnic table and ate outside under our gloriously blossom-filled pear tree.

I had really worried that the cold snap would cause all those beautiful blossoms to fall off.

Sitting there as the perfume of the tree drifted by and the cats took turns slipping in and out of the house, I know I loved spring and I loved Kansas.

However, I was wondering if someone didn't need to give Mother Nature a Prozac. She seems a little confused. Oh well, maybe she's blonde, too.

Domestic abuse gets attention

The complaint was no doubt sincere.

The victim of a domestic violence case did not like the fact that it had been written up in a story.

"Family things don't belong in the paper," she said, or words to that effect.

The man in this case was booked on a felony, however, and that pretty much always gets into the paper.

Time was when a "domestic" case might not have gotten much attention. Police were reluctant to haul a man in when they knew the victim might forgive him the next day and decide not to press charges. In those days, the system might have let this case slide.

No more.

Today, society realizes the problem of domestic violence just won't go away. Groups demand tougher penalties and tougher law enforcement. Most police agencies will make an arrest when called to a domestic dispute, even if the victim asks them not to.

Some, in fact, routinely arrest both warring parties.

But isn't it just family stuff?

Well, yes. Assault, battery,



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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abuse, even murder, but all in the family.

And the victim often regrets calling police, wants to smooth things over and forget about it.

Until the next time.

But like drunken driving, domestic abuse now has society's attention.

We know it won't go away. The system is focused to do something about it.

So are newspapers. Whatever happened in the past, we know now that it's wrong to ignore domestic violence.

If a call is made, the paper will record it in the police files. If an arrest is made, someone jailed for a felony, there will be a story.

Like society as a whole, we know that something has to be done. We

know we have a part.

We also know that we will get complaints. That's too bad. We don't like upsetting anyone.

But we'll tell people what we always tell those who complain about showing up in a police item: The way to keep your name out of that part of the paper is to stay out of trouble.

And that really shouldn't be too hard for any one of us.

Those who can't will wind up in print. To be fair to everyone, we will have to run all cases and treat them the same, and we promise to do that.

When "family business" turns to family abuse and the cops are called, then it becomes society's business.

If we can save just one victim from being hit, or worse, then it will be worth whatever price we pay.

Do we stand in the way of progress?

To the Editor:

I hear a lot of whining about empty buildings on our Main Street by Oberlin people and by council members.

But when there is a chance to help small businesses, most are content to ride the fence or sit on their hands, looking down their noses at those who do the work, and would like to stay in business here.

Vacating the alley on Penn Avenue should be a "slam dunk". The

alley is now and has always been a hazard to pedestrians. It serves no useful purpose other than being a shortcut.

If the council wants more empty buildings, they should continue talking, doing nothing, whining and wringing their hands at the problem.

We don't need excuses or road-blocks.

When it comes to progress, to making a difference, "Those who say it can't be done should not stand in the way of those who are doing it."

Eldon Helberg
Traer Traders Inc., Oberlin

Letter to the Editor

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Keepers groups working together to spearhead this distribution, with the support of several area churches. We want everyone in our county to have the privilege of learning more about Jesus and hopefully becoming a Christian disciple.

Earlier this month, the movie, "The Passion of the Christ," was showing for a week ending with Good Friday and Easter Sunday, and we want to extend the Gospel message via your own personal

copy of this movie.

The plan is to package and deliver all copies, beginning on Thursday, April 22, one per household.

If you do not receive your copy by about May 1, you may pick one up at Warren Bainter's accounting office, 122 E. Commercial, in Oberlin.

It is our goal to honor God and the Lord Jesus Christ for now and for eternity.

Merlin Anderson
Dresden

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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, Norcatar, Dresden and Decatur County. Member of the Kansas Press Association, National Newspaper Association, Colorado Press Association, Nebraska Press Association and Inland Press Association.

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.

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

