

State often of two minds when it's trying to help us

When Gov. Kathleen Sebelius visited last week, it was pretty clear she did not have much of a handle on how the state affects rural Kansas.

She tried to say the right things, as state officials usually do when they come out here, but when people had tough questions, she didn't have much in the way of answers.

She's not the only one. Most people coming from the relatively prosperous belt along the state's freeways in eastern Kansas forget that 80 percent of the state does not share in their growth and wealth.

Our counties are dying. Our people are leaving. Our Main Streets are folding up. Our schools are shrinking. Jobs flee, and no one wants to move here.

It's not just northwest Kansas. It's the northeast, the southeast, the north central, much of the southwest, pretty much all over. Any county without an Interstate highway or a major state institution has a sick economy and a shrinking population base.

Towns are dying out here. Whole counties may be next.

Just what is the problem?

It's complicated. It's not even the state's fault, but the state is not doing much to help, and what little it does often is negated by — the state. The population decline has been going on for a century, fueled in part by federal farm policy and the economic trends for automation, consolidation and efficiency.

Those are immutable laws. We have to have something besides farming to survive.

Economic development officials come to rural Kansas often, and they always say they are here to help us. Gov. Sebelius and her team have been on the bandwagon, but so have their predecessors. Not much has happened.

The state comes in, tries to help attract business here. The effort is sincere. But while the economic development agencies attract a few jobs, other state agencies take jobs away.

The Highway Patrol closed all its small-town dispatch offices. No jobs were cut. No

money saved to speak of. Some troopers would argue that service got worse, not better.

Jobs were shifted to Salina, a growing and prosperous town, from places like Norton which needed them far more.

Same with the Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services. Managers thought it is inefficient to have offices scattered all over the state, so they closed most of them. No jobs were eliminated. Little money was saved.

Jobs were shifted to larger towns, and in the next round, will be shifted to still larger towns. The governor answered rather lamely that it was not meant to cut jobs, just offices.

But three people who used to work and live in Oberlin do not have jobs here. Offices were closed in St. Francis and Atwood and, eventually, Norton. No one who fills them in the future will live out here.

That's the problem, governor. When it comes to helping rural Kansas, the state often is its own worst enemy. And ours.

A new entrepreneurial center is nice, but does anyone think a program in Wichita is going to help rural Kansas. Why not put it in Pratt?

Create a few jobs. Give us a loan program. Help business expand. Then the Revenue Department decides we need a fancy new sales tax scheme, and the cost drives jobs away.

To save money, state departments contract whole bureaus out of state, though the work could be done in Kansas. It's all in how you write the specs, isn't it? That's why our drivers' licenses are being made in Washington and our phone calls almost went to India.

Those are jobs that could be done in rural Kansas, and if the state is going to spend the money, why not spend it here?

Isn't it about time the state of Kansas got its act together and examined each move it makes in the light of how it affects our economy, as a state and especially, the starving rural areas?

We think so. We'll have more to say next week.

— Steve Haynes



Newest addition almost gets lost

I blame Steve's sister Barbara for the new kitten.

Barb lives on a farm near Emporia. She likes cats and tries to keep a couple in the house and four to six in the horse barn to keep the rodent population in check.

She was having trouble keeping cats because the local coyote population found the felines a tasty treat. She even lost one to a bobcat.

Barb started putting the cats in the barn each night and solved the coyote problem, but between horses, husband, son and spring garden, she forgot something. She forgot that she had three female cats.

Now she has five cats and 15 kittens. The cats all have dates to see the vet but, in the meantime, she has lots of kittens to give away.

She asked me about taking a kitten. I heartlessly suggested a classified in the Emporia newspaper.

She invited youngest daughter Lindsay to come for a going-away visit. She is moving from Lawrence to South Carolina next week and won't be around any more.

Lindsay returned from the farm with a bundle of fur that her other cats hated on sight.

We assured her that adult cats always hate kittens. In fact, most cats are pretty territorial. They hate any new cat you bring into the house. We've had April Alice for almost



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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three years, and she and Molly Monster still maintain an armed truce.

The first problem was to name the newcomer. Barbara called her Fluffy because she is.

Lindsay felt that was a little simple and was searching for a better name when we came to visit. I suggested Aphrodite, Diane or Athena. She liked the goddess names, but went with her brother's suggestion of Penelope.

Penelope is a cute little monster who attacks the older cats every time their backs are turned. However, the new kitten almost got lost last week.

Lindsay had her outside to show her off to a neighbor when a loud car drove by and the kitten took off. First she went under a car, then another cat chased her under a fence and through a hedge.

Since it was about 11 p.m., Lindsay gave up after about half an hour of searching with a flashlight and calling.

In the morning, she went out again and looked where she thought the cat had been. She could hear her but not see her. Finally, she looked up, and there was Penelope about 15 feet up a tree.

Lindsay said she considered trying to climb the tree but decided that even if she could get all the way up to the cat, it might be tough to hang onto the kitten and the tree on the way back down.

She called a friend with a tall ladder and Penelope was soon back on the ground.

I don't think that little cat will be back outside anytime soon, at least not without a cat carrier.

I'm just glad she got her cat back. With the addition of Penelope, the family cat complement is back up to 10. Steve and I have two, both daughters have three each and son has a pair.

It sure does take the pressure off me to get that third cat.

Rasure, Sebelius the ticket

To the Editor:

On Saturday afternoon, July 10, at the Decatur Community High School auditorium, the Decatur County Farm Bureau hosted a "meet the candidates" forum. Candidates for the Kansas House and Senate and county commission were in attendance.

In the Senate race, Dan Rasure of Goodland had filed for the August Republican primary long before the untimely death of Sen. Stan Clark. Rep. Ralph Ostmeyer of Grinnell has now filed on the Republican ticket also. Tim Peterson is the Democrat in the race, and in a

Letters to the Editor

heavily Republican district it would look like youth has the upper hand, which would please me.

As far as the candidates for the Kansas House are concerned, if all three candidates were of the same political persuasion and they as a group appeared in every county in the district two or three times, and if there were any accurate polls in existence in northwest Kansas, I believe Doug Sebelius would come

in with numbers in the 60th percentile. He speaks very well and has an extremely good grasp of the hot issues.

Years ago, it was written that in all things necessary, there must be unity. In all things less than necessary, there must be liberty, and in all things there must be charity. With Rasure and Sebelius, we could become closer to that old truth.

R. Jack Metcalf
Oberlin

Reader says Legislature failed schools

To the Editor:

I think it is clear to most Decatur Countians that the Kansas Legislature has failed our local schools, not only through inaction this past session, but in previous sessions when they didn't make increases necessary in the funding formula for schools to address spiraling costs for health insurance, fuel for buses, rising utility costs, etc. They thought it more prudent to dump the problems back on the local taxpayer and allow funds to be derived from property taxes by a Local Option Budget.

I believe the Kansas Constitution requires that the state provide to all its youth an equal education opportunity, whether the student lives in Johnson County or Decatur County. If the candidate who suggests that the state only fund core curriculum subjects thinks that effort would remotely result in an equal education for all students in Kansas, he is out of touch with reality.

A new voice needs to be sent to Topeka, and it needs to be someone with an open mind who will consider a variety of options that would

help resolve our funding crisis in education. The responsibility for schools lies with the Legislature, not with Judge Terry Bullock. Our elected officials need to act to save our secondary and elementary schools from further decline.

It is fairly apparent that the current approach to ignore these problems in hopes that they will go away has resulted in double-digit college tuition increases at our Regents institutions. Costs of higher education may keep many from earning degrees even if they do pass the "core" curriculum requirements.

It's time for a change in the thought processes that go on in the statehouse in order to bring about compromise. Reps. John Faber and Ralph Ostmeyer have not offered a favorable response to our school-funding crisis. They need to work closely with their colleagues to solve problems, not continue to bicker over less critical issues.

The Local Option Budget is a wonderful way to raise money in Overland Park but it is not responsible to say that is how Oberlin and

Jennings school districts should fund school programs when our elected officials lack the fortitude to raise the money. Our schools receive more mandates each year from both state and federal lawmakers. At the same time our teachers must find ways to do more for each student while accepting less.

Our representatives in the House and Senate need to be willing to work toward getting state revenues rerouted to the west and save our small schools, all of which are so vital to each town's existence. To have an equal chance of success as our friends to the east, our students need to have a well-rounded curriculum, and the extracurricular activities that go along with earning a first-class education in Kansas, that's all of Kansas.

Doug Sebelius and Dan Rasure will give us a fighting chance when taking on the populated districts that already have the money and don't want to share it. Vote for Rasure and Sebelius for the Legislature to secure the best chance we have of getting an equal educational opportunity for our young minds.

Connie Grafel, Oberlin
former school board member

Hubby thinks losers are great

I examined each one for imperfections, looking for wrinkles or dimples, checking to make sure they were plump and full.

Pies, silly. I'm talking about pies. It's county fair time, and I'm trying my luck in one of the neighboring counties to see if the open class judges there are any tougher than they are in my home county.

I've been up since 4 this morning, paring, slicing, rolling and crimping. There are three pies in the oven right now, one perched precariously on top of a small stainless steel bowl.

Warm pies, in my opinion, make a better impression. And, if I've timed it right, these will come out of the oven at 7 a.m., which will make them just right for the judge to sample around 10.

But, just like a mother inspecting her newborn babe, I see a flaw. One got a little too close to the side of the oven and the crust is too brown. Oh, let's be honest, it's burned. Not the entire crust, just one little spot, but enough to disqualify it. One of its sisters got too "bubbly" and syrup oozed out from between the crusts.



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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That leaves my hopes pinned on the last sister to come out of the oven. I'm setting the timer in three-minute increments. This is it. My last chance to achieve perfection.

Whenever I make pies, I remember my Grandma Davison. She had the knack of holding a pie on the fingers of her left hand while she deftly trimmed the excess crust with a knife in her right hand. She could rotate the pie without ever setting it down. I remember being fascinated as she pinched the crust between her index finger and her thumb, making a perfect edge.

Her trademark, though, was the design on her crust. Two curved stalks of wheat were carved in the

center of the top crust while it was still on the floured counter. A table knife, drawn across the crust in two arched lines made the stalks. A flip of the knife and five impressions of the tip down each side of the stalks made the wheat heads. It's a design I copy for my pies.

They are all three out of the oven now, and I have one keeper. The little cinnamon pinwheels I always make with the crust trimmings are baking as a little treat for the granddaughters who are still here. They probably won't last long.

Even though these may not be the prettiest pies I ever made, Jim doesn't seem to care. He just ate half of one of the losers for breakfast.

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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.

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.)

