

State needs to spread jobs around rural areas

While the state centralizes offices and pulls state jobs out of rural Kansas, thousands of people are leaving for cities or other states to find jobs.

Our population decline is not the state's fault, at least not most of it.

Rural populations have been on a slide since the turn of the century. Since Cyrus McCormick invented the reaper, better equipment, seed and farming practices have boosted productivity every year.

That has meant fewer farmers and fewer farm jobs nearly every year. And while the government has spent billions to "keep farmers on the land," it's spent millions for research and land-grant universities to accelerate the trend.

If you count jobs saved or farmers kept on the land, the money has been mostly wasted. Our population continues to decline, and the government at best has bought people a few more years.

You can't blame the state for that.

You can blame the state, though, for a lack of commitment to rural towns. At best the state has a split personality: taking jobs away on one hand, promising to help out of the other side of its mouth.

So just what can the state do? Sen. Stan Clark, before his death in May, was pushing to move state jobs out into rural areas.

Economic development experts keep saying that with modern communications, including the Internet, there is no reason why work has to be done in any one central location.

People work from home, in airports, on trains, wherever they can plug in their computers.

So instead of using telecommunications to

centralize state work in big towns, why not farm it out to rural areas that really need the jobs?

This is no wild-eyed dream. Rural Kansas is full of old schools and other buildings that could house a state agency or two. Except for top executives, most state work could be done by "branch offices." They'd be as centralized and efficient as the agency cared to make them. They just wouldn't be in Topeka.

Sen. Clark thought that instead of building a new state office building in Topeka, the state should spread the jobs around.

This would take some commitment from the state. For one thing, many current state workers would not want to move to rural areas. The state would have to hire many new people to fill jobs it "outsourced" to rural areas.

However, there is no need to pay Kansas City wages in northwest Kansas. People here would work for a reasonable amount.

Supervisors might have to come from Topeka at first. Someone would be willing to step up and move here for a promotion.

There isn't much that happens in a state office that couldn't be done out here. There is plenty of space. When the Herndon school is closed, for instance, the state could put an office complex there, drawing workers from surrounding towns.

The state, which always promises rural economic development, would be putting its jobs where its mouth is. It might cost a little, but it would be far better than having Medicaid calls answered in India or driver's licenses made in Washington.

And it just might start a trend that would make rural Kansas much more valuable to the state. It just might work. — Steve Haynes

Pie samples voted as winners

If Chantelle is mother to these baby chicks, then I guess that makes me their great-grandmother.

We noticed cracks in the eggs last Wednesday morning. By that evening, four fuzzy little chicks were wobbling around the incubator and there were cracks in three more eggs.

That left five eggs. And, even though we gave them the same treatment as the others, nothing happened. We let them set a couple of extra days, but still nothing. But we thought seven out of a dozen isn't too bad of a return on our first attempt at hatching chicks.

It wasn't long before Chantelle had each one named. I guess the names she had assigned to the eggs didn't match the chicks after she got to "know" them. We have Scarlett and Alexis, plus others I can't recall, but Chantelle knows and can identify them on sight.

Chantelle and Angelia's mom came to pick up the girls over the weekend. I think it was as hard for them to leave the chicks as it was for them to leave us.

—ob—
Last Monday morning, my kitchen looked like a pie factory. I baked three apple pies so I could have three chances of a good one to enter at the Norton County Fair. There seemed to be something wrong with each one, but I took the



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
cplotts@nwkansan.com

best of the lot and headed out.

I was stunned when I learned that entry day was the following day, so my co-workers benefited from that attempt. They voted their samples blue ribbon good. After all, I wanted to enter a really fresh, just-out-of-the-oven pie. I resigned myself to the fact that I would have to bake again the next morning.

Problems beset me from the beginning, though. First, I overslept. There wouldn't be enough time to make more than one pie. That, in a way, was a good thing, because I discovered I had enough apples and crust for only one pie. Now, all my hopes were pinned on this particular pie.

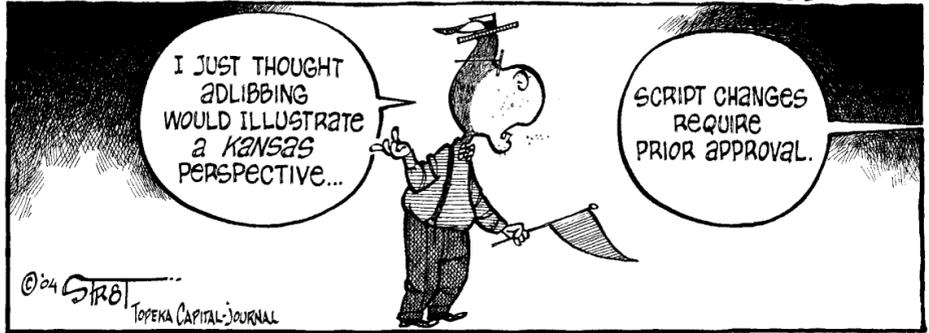
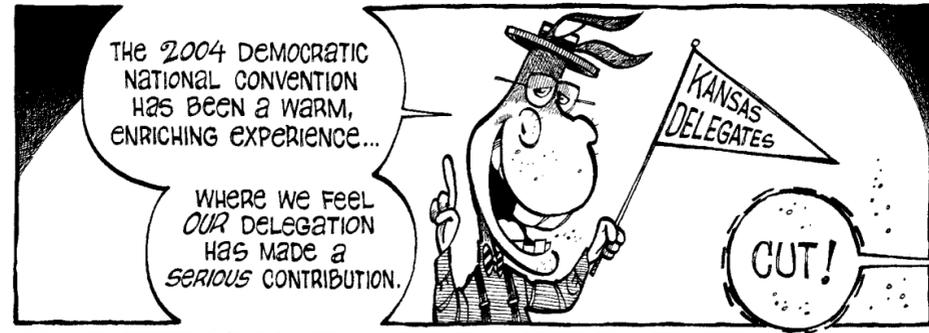
Maybe I tried too hard, I don't know. But, truthfully, that pie did not turn out as good as the ones the day before. The juices split the crust at the edge and bubbled over, the crust browned a little too much, and, for some reason, the filling just wasn't quite as good as the previous

day. The judge gave it a red, and quite frankly, that's what it deserved. Sure, good enough for family, but it wasn't the quality product I had wanted.

But as Scarlett (O'Hara, not the aforementioned chick) would say, "Fiddle dee dee. Tomorrow is another day."

From the Bible

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Romans 8:35



Things went from bad to worse

It's been a down week. Some weeks everything goes right and the world is wonderful.

Then there was last week. Monday wasn't too bad. We had no disasters and the papers got out on time.

Then on Tuesday came the call from my sister. "Cyn, Mom's fallen and broken her hip."

Mom's balance has been bad for years, and she falls about twice a week. Every time it happens, my sister tells her she's going to break a hip one of these days.

"Don't you just hate it when you're right?" I said.

Mother was transferred from her home at an assisted living facility in Concordia to the Salina Regional Medical Center, where she had surgery on Wednesday.

I called our oldest daughter to tell her how her grandmother was.

She told me her dog had cancer and she and her husband have decided on chemotherapy. The success rate is 75 percent, she said, but the cost will be between \$30-\$40 a week for a year.

But they love their dog and have no children upon which to spend their hard-earned money

Which, speaking of money, my son-in-law's wallet was stolen on Thursday and someone is using his credit cards.

I went to Salina to spend Wednesday night with mother so my sister and her husband could get some rest.



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
chaynes@nwkansan.com

Between the two of them, they've spent almost every waking hour at Mom's side and a whole bunch of the sleeping ones.

Youngest daughter, who is moving to South Carolina this week, joined me. She was planning to visit her grandmother before leaving the state anyway.

After her visit, she headed back to Lawrence, where she was busy packing.

On Thursday, she tried to call the movers, who were scheduled to pick up her stuff on Friday. She got a recording.

Next she went to the Internet to check out their web site. She couldn't find it. However, she did find one dedicated to people who were unhappy with the moving company.

Boy, was she thrilled.

Friday morning, the movers called and said they would be there sometime that day. Later, they called to say they'd be there between 4 and 6 p.m. She was relieved.

The movers finally showed up at 8:30 p.m.

She was steamed, but still relieved.

While the movers were taking her stuff to the truck, her brother was moving his into a friend's garage. He had been sick all week and had forgotten to get a U-Haul trailer until the last minute — and of course, they had none.

So "the go 'n' throw" bug combined with trying to move and clean his old apartment kept him busy over the weekend.

As of Monday, his stuff was still in the friend's garage. His ex-roommate, who had offered a truck to help move the furniture, had lost the keys. And, he had no hot water because he forgot to call the gas company and get it turned on.

Mom is getting better. Steve is helping youngest daughter move this week. Son finally got moved, but not until he'd had a couple of nights sleeping on some very pretty, but very solid, hardwood floors.

Oldest daughter and son-in-law will get things figured out.

Me, I'm hiding under the bed for the rest of the week.

Greyhound close to end of era

The decision by Greyhound Lines to abandon most of its stops in the Tri-State area smacks of desperation.

The company is closing most of its stops along the Interstates. In western Kansas, there will be only two stops, Hays and Colby. People will no longer be able to catch a bus in Ellsworth, Russell, WaKeeney or Goodland.

In Nebraska, there'll be no stops west of Lincoln as the firm aims, apparently, for the long-haul market.

One big loss: prisons in Ellsworth, Burlington, Colo., and elsewhere in the area won't have an easy way to ship parolees back home after their release.

Greyhound claims it'll save millions because buses will stay on the freeway and arrive sooner at their destination. Our guess is the savings are mostly illusory.

Maybe they figure people will get a ride to the next stop. Maybe they think they'll hitchhike. But it sounds like the dog may be close to its last lap.

There aren't that many people who want to ride a bus cross country, after all. Most of us, given the choice, would fly or take a train or drive — anything but the bus.

With air fares nearly as low as the bus on a good day, the Hound makes the most sense in country towns where people don't have a choice. And those are the markets the firm is giving up.



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
schaynes@nwkansan.com

So there's no money in serving rural America? In the city, they can choose. Let's see, Kansas City-Denver, 13 hours by bus, less than two by air. Price, \$74 and \$155

Greyhound often is left with the passengers who can't or won't fly or drive: a few elderly with a fear of flying, the poor and the disenfranchised, students without cars (not many of those these days) and others who don't quite fit the mainstream of America.

The firm admits it has problems. They've cut jobs and canceled an order for 200 new buses. And yet, Greyhound, after absorbing Continental Trailways, is by far the country's biggest over-the-road passenger carrier.

At this point, you really have to ask if the bus business will be around that much longer. It still does well in a few concentrated markets, but out here, people drive.

If Greyhound were to go under, then the automobile will have polished off its last and final alternative. That may or may not be a bad thing — few people get nostalgic about a

ride on an old Silversides or a Super Scenic Cruiser, like they do for a train — but we've pretty much lost our public transportation outside the urban corridors.

In a way, it's the end of an era for rural America. Oh, it's been coming on for years. How long, for instance, since Trailways ran out U.S. 36? Or since a passenger train stopped in Oakley or Hays?

This is a matter of choice and policy. Choice, because Americans choose their cars, and policy, because the government pours billions into highways while spending next to nothing on trains and busses and other public transportation.

Sure, there are a few subsidized options, but we no longer have a ground transportation system for public use, at least not in most of rural America.

You can still drive to McCook and catch a train, or to Colby for a bus, but more and more, people — once they get in the car — just keep on driving.

Someday, we may regret what we lost.

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Phone: (785) 475-2206 Fax (785) 475-2800

E-mail: obherald@nwkansan.com

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STAFF

- Steve Haynes editor
- Kimberly Davis managing editor
- Mary Lou Olson society editor
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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, Norcatuar, 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.)

