

Consolidation will be part of government changes

The "C" word. Consolidation. It's going to be the Big Thing over the next few years in Kansas, but don't hold your breath.

There's another "C" word — Change — and people don't much like it.

Nonetheless, we'll be forced to change as the world around us pushes on into the 21st Century. Consolidation of government units will be part of that, just as consolidation has changed farming, business and our economy while we weren't watching.

Right now, consolidation is next to impossible for local governments. The state has nearly a thousand local units, but state law does not allow them to consolidate easily.

Wyandotte County had to go to the Legislature to accomplish a city-county consolidation, one of only 33 in the nation. That's wrong.

If the Legislature does anything, it ought to write clear laws allowing local people to make decisions on consolidating whatever they want. Counties should be allowed to consolidate. Cities and counties should be able to merge. Local government should be able to cooperate easily on any function they choose, all without "permission" from the Legislature.

The boys and girls in Topeka, after all, have more important things to worry about than whether Oberlin and Decatur County want to consolidate dispatching or law enforcement or road crews.

Today, only schools have a clear path to consolidation, and it's neither easy nor popular. Only a couple of districts, including neighboring Rawlins County, have consolidated since the mass school mergers of the 1960s.

That era gave consolidation a bad name in Kansas because many small towns felt it was crammed down their throats by the state. Thousands of small school districts disappeared in just a few years, and many towns died with them.

Let's hope that's not a model for future con-

solidation. Let's hope whatever comes is positive and voluntary. Let's hope we see consolidation because people want better government, not because somebody in Topeka says so.

We think that's the future. A few Kansas counties may give up the ghost, but not many. A few school districts will throw in the towel, but only because their population has left them.

Most of us want our county seat nearby and our school across the town, not across the state. For the most part, we can afford to pay the price.

But there is no magic in having a two-man sheriff's department and a three-man police department. Only turf battles separate those departments in most rural counties.

There's lots of room for consolidation. We suspect there's more likelihood of local consolidations — sheriff and police, city and county, combined offices or crews — than county consolidation, which puts services far away from many residents.

Having one county seat in northwest Kansas, for instance, is not an appealing idea. Sharing costs and functions among agencies while keeping local control is.

In an era when taxes are rising and people want service, what's to say most Kansans need or want separate city and county offices that often duplicate their efforts? Why have a city council and a county commission when it's hard enough to find good people to fill one board some years?

Those are issue Kansans ought to get to decide. The Legislature and the governor need to step aside and let us have our way. Yet, when two bills passed last year to allow law enforcement consolidation, the governor, responding to purely political pressure, vetoed them.

That's not good. But why should the Legislature decide? Why not let the people decide? And let the "C" debate begin.

— Steve Haynes



Extra chores leave her behind

I make this mistake all the time. My ambition is writing checks my time and talents can't cover.

We try real hard not to get caught up in the commercial side of Christmas. Our own children know that when they had kids, they got cut off. We do cash or a little something for our kids and a little more for the grandkids. But it's that "little more" that gets me in trouble.

Our two older granddaughters love to shop, so gift cards suit them just fine. But the two younger girls want stuff. Taylor called me last week and said, "G'ma, will you make me some grape jelly?"

"Sure," I said, mentally thinking jars of jelly would look good in her Christmas box. Alexandria likes jelly too, so I'll make enough for her. Well, the other kids need some, and then I mustn't forget about Jim, and, and, and....

So, you can see why, in the middle of winter, I'm making several batches of grape jelly.

Then there are my little "projects". A friend showed me a neck scarf she had made with flannel using the chenille technique. I had good luck making a chenille pillow out of an old pair of flannel pajamas. So naturally, I thought I could do the same thing for a scarf for Taylor. I wanted it "fluffy" on both sides, and that, automatically, doubles the time involved. Tick, tick, tick, the Christmas clock is running. Last night I clipped strips until I couldn't see any longer, and I'm not half done.

If I tell you about my other project, you have to promise not to tell, because it's for Alexandria. When she rides in the car, she likes to wrap up in a blanket and take a nap. I thought a cuddly, fleece blanket would be nice for her. The fabric store had a display in their win-



Out Back

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dow of a double-sided blanket with tied edges. No sewing involved. Great. This would be a project I could whip out in an evening.

Do you know how long it takes to cut and tie a 65-inch-by-72-inch blanket? Me, either, because I'm not done yet. Tick, tock, tick, tock.

Forget about Christmas candies. Being laid up for two weeks when I hurt my back really put a damper on my holiday cooking. I've resorted to making those quick-and-easy cracker candies, with sugar and butter syrup and almonds baked on top. Tick, tock, tick, tock.

Jim takes care of the outside lighting. On that score, we look pretty festive. Since we are leaving for Mexico on Sunday, we opted not to do anything on the inside. So, except for fabric everywhere, you can't tell any difference on the inside. We're in our usual helter-skelter mode.

Thoughts of wrapping and mailing are scary. Everything has to be in the mail now. Those poor mail carriers. Procrastinators like me make their jobs hard. But, I know every effort will be made to deliver everything they can before Saturday.

I shouldn't complain. We all have the same 24 hours in our day. Some people just seem to get more done in theirs than I do. But, ready or not, Christmas will come. And I hope we can all relax long enough to truly enjoy the day with our family and

friends. From the Plotts family to yours, have a blessed week and Christmas Day.

From the Bible

And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

Luke 2: 6-11

Letter generates complaints

Boy, am I getting tired of all this whining about Christmas letters.

I'm not talking about those nay sayers who don't like Christmas letters because they can't stand to see that their old high school rival is doing better than they are.

I'm talking about my relatives who complained about the contents of the letter Steve and I wrote this year, and some friends who complained about not getting a letter.

The relative — youngest daughter to be exact — was a fount of complaints about our Christmas letter. She got one paragraph and it was all wrong, she says.

"Lindsay quit her teaching job in McLouth, Kan., after three years in which she got sort of fond of junior high kids, and enrolled to take a master's in library science at the University of South Carolina. She's about an hour from Augusta, (Ga.), dates a guy there and sees her sister a lot."

The complaints are:

1. We said she quit her job. Well, she did. She got offered a contract to return for a fourth year and get tenure, but she turned it



Open Season

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down. That's quitting in my book.

Maybe she would prefer we said they fired her?

2. Her father didn't capitalize library science.

Her father is an editor, and even our Christmas letters get edited according to the Associated Press style book.

Live with it, kid.

3. We didn't name her boy friend. This is the biggest burr.

It seems that when she decided to go back to school, one of the reasons she picked Columbia was because she wanted to get better acquainted with a young man named Brad, who works for her sister at Morris Digital Works.

What I know about Brad is mini-

mal. I met him, along with about 20 other young Internet geeks, when we visited Augusta last spring.

On the plus side, her sister likes him and feels he does good work and he's a graduate of the University of Missouri. Any Big 12 graduate is OK with me.

On the minus side: I don't know what his last name is, although I'm sure someone has told me sometime. Plus, he's allergic to cats.

Youngest daughter has three cats. She's shipping two of them home to us.

This could be a serious relationship. I'd better learn this boy's last name.

No mother, I don't know if he's Catholic.

The Prosecutor frowned, going over the report.

This would not do. This would just not do.

He sighed, and shook his head.

A host of violations in this "Jingle, Bells" caper.

Line by line, he checked them off. "Dashing thro' the snow."

Sounds like speeding, might be careless driving.

"O'er the fields we go."

Trespassing.

"Laughing all the way; bells on Bobtail ring."

Noise violation. Have to check the dB readings.

"Making spirits bright."

Spirits! Possible SWI (sleighting while intoxicated), maybe open container.

"Miss Fannie Bright was seated by my side."

Let's see, Bright, Fannie, age 15. Third-degree sexual assault on a minor if he touched her, contributing to the delinquency, minor in possession if she shared the spirits.

"The horse was lean and lank; misfortune seemed his lot."

Call animal welfare; possible abuse, malnutrition.

"He got into a drifted bank, and



Along the Sappa

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we, we got upset."

Reckless and heedless driving, leaving the scene, duty to render aid.

Was the horse hurt?

"Go it while you're you, take the girls tonight."

More underage girls. Call child welfare.

"Just get a bobtailed nag; two-forty for his speed."

Horse droppings. That's an environmental citation.

"Then hitch him to an open sleigh; and crack! You'll take the lead."

Wait until PETA hears about this! Animal cruelty for sure.

Let's see, that's what, 14 violations, maybe 15, all misdemeanors unless there's prior conviction on the SWI. The girl's parents aren't going to be very happy. We'll have to impound the sleigh as evidence,

and take the girls in for questioning.

Need permission to search the sleigh, unless maybe we can do that under the Patriot Act.

Hate to wake the judge up to get a warrant.

We can keep this guy for 48 hours, maybe longer if we get an immigration hold.

"Breaking rocks in the hot sun."

When the judge gets through with him, this guy'll be a guest at the county hotel for a couple of years.

It's sort of old fashioned, and probably not politically correct, but Merry Christmas from all of us at *The Herald*.

Stay out of trouble, don't drink and drive, remember to love your neighbor, and always keep in mind, the Reason for the Season

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Reader praises The Oberlin Herald

To the Editor:

Time to renew again. We enjoy the whole paper — well, maybe we don't really read the classified section every time. We turn to the "Events of Yesteryear" section first. We moved from Decatur County in the late 1960s.

It is fun to read about the 75-to-100-year-old historical events, the things that happened as we were growing up and starting our family, plus get a review of significant news items since our move.

Sometimes I wonder about the big photos, but I confess that there can-

not be any community in the nation who has more beautiful or handsome children.

Please continue that format. Your feature articles are outstanding.

You do a really good job of keeping people aware of local govern-

ment, community and school issues. Most of the information is unbiased and balances your great editorial page.

Keep up the good work.

Elizabeth Dean
Knoxville, Iowa

