

Legislature may hear call for fewer counties

With the opening of the Legislature on us, the drumbeat is starting to consolidate Kansas counties.

One writer urges retaining the 35 counties with populations over 14,000 and combining the rest into just 13 rural counties. In the northwest, he postulates nine counties combining around Colby and maybe another six or seven around, say, Phillipsburg.

No local choice or "piecemeal" approach would be allowed; just get it done and quit whining.

That's democracy for you.

The writer claims the usual benefits: fewer county jobs, lower taxes, better services, less burden on business.

Sure. We can't recall a consolidation that ever saved taxpayers money.

They're often sold that way, but the truth is, government is loath to give up revenue. Save money here, and someone will spend it there. Taxes never go down — unless taxpayers demand it.

There's always someone with a "need" to spend money on.

There's no thought here to what happens to people in the nearly 60 former county seats, towns like Goodland and Oberlin, St. Francis and Atwood, Norton and Hill City, Sharon Springs and Gove, where the jobs will be eliminated "by attrition only."

If you want a forecast, though, drive through Russell Springs, where the dusty old Logan County courthouse stands in mute testimony to the loss of a county seat.

There are more issues here than meet the eye. Efficiency is just one of them.

Sure, a nine-county sheriff's department

would be bigger than the two- and three-man departments most counties field. But is that better?

Dispatchers in a central office could handle the load, but would they know the roads, or where the Jones farm is?

Would there even be a deputy on duty in the former Rawlins County on the day something happened? Or would he be having coffee in the office at Colby?

It might make more sense to combine city and county services, or even cities and counties, and eliminate some duplication right at home.

It's only realistic to assume that no actual money would be saved in any consolidation. Jobs would be lost, offices closed, towns destroyed, but the money likely would just flow to the new county seat.

What happens then is an acceleration of the past century's trend: More people in the bigger towns, fewer in the smaller.

That's not, or shouldn't be, the goal of state policy. Kansas ought to be defending and building its small towns, not destroying them.

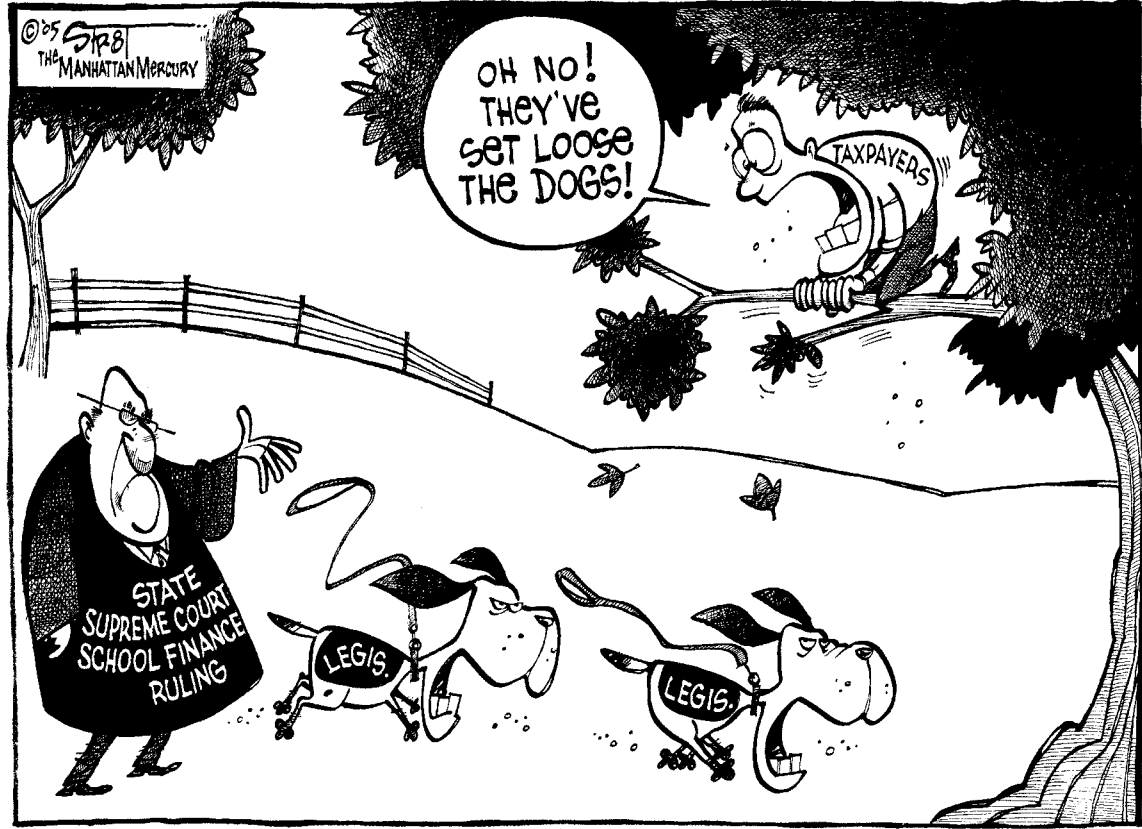
To this point, there is no groundswell for consolidation, just a few know-it-alls who think they know what is good for us.

Voters will have to sort out what of this makes sense and give public officials some direction. Until that is clear, nothing will happen.

Our guess is there will be some local consolidations. A few counties, a few schools, some cities will give up the ghost — when it makes sense to them.

But spare us from big-time consolidators in Topeka who think they know the way.

— Steve Haynes



If a thing could go wrong, it did

It was the kind of week where nothing ever quite went right, where if something can go wrong, it will, and Murphy definitely was in charge.

That's Mr. Murphy to you.

Sir!

We were due out of Denver at 6 p.m. Tuesday, headed for Park City, Utah, where there was a meeting, and maybe a little skiing.

The forecast was for snow in Utah, but that's why you go to a ski area.

Monday, though, Kim was in Denver. She called to say they were coming on home to get in ahead of the second ice storm due Tuesday. From St. Francis, she said the roads were good, and why didn't we get out of town before the storm hit?

Sounded like good advice. We went home when the paper was done, finished packing all the ski gear, and took off for Denver. We got there about 3 a.m., got a room and crashed.

Tuesday afternoon, it was snowing in Denver. We had a late lunch in town and signed up for a 3:30 hotel shuttle to the airport.

Maybe I should have started worrying when a guy who looked like a hotel shuttle driver walked through the lobby, around our luggage, and out the door, never to return. Half hour later, the desk called him back to pick us up. We were a little late, but not to worry.

Little did I know. We checked in for our 6:05 flight to Denver, though my computer showed that plane still in Kansas City when it should have been on the way. Strange, I thought.

When we got to the gate, the screen continued to show the flight on time, right up until the time it should have landed. Then the computer said, "delayed."



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
schaynes@nwkansas.com

You can quibble about the meaning of delayed if you like. The bottom line is, that plane never did leave Kansas City that night. Nor did any other. After a while, the flight just sort of disappeared from the monitor. There may have been an announcement; the speakers at the airport mutter constantly, but few can understand any of the gibberish.

A nice lady at the Frontier counter helped me get seats on the 9:10 flight to Salt Lake. I didn't feel too bad. The people ahead of me were going to Fort Meyers, Fla., and their flight was canceled. Wednesday's was full. They had to settle for Thursday.

All over the concourse, people were waiting for planes that were late, planes that never showed up, planes that changed gates. The computer could not keep track, and agents were scrawling destinations on paper place mats, then pasting them over the display screens.

Eventually, a plane appeared at our gate, and eventually we boarded, only a half hour or so late. The good news was it was cold enough, we didn't have to get deiced. Everyone who was waiting got seats on the later flight, and Frontier promised us our luggage would follow.

We walked down the jetway without a glance back to the lost souls still stranded in the airport.

The flight was short and uneventful, but when we got to Utah, something was missing. Our luggage.

Everyone's luggage from the 6 o'clock flight, judging from the line at the Frontier counter.

The agent gave us overnight kits and claim forms, where we listed the address of our hotel or home. He assured us the bags probably were in Denver and they'd catch up the next day. We caught the last shuttle for Park City, and made plans to find essentials — like underwear — the next day.

That shopping expedition turned into a marathon, as we sought this and that to fill in the blanks. I got new long johns for skiing, she got makeup. We used the coin laundry in the hotel basement.

It's amazing how light you can pack when you have to. One little carryon, that's all we had.

The meeting went OK. Our best friends were there. We relaxed and had some fun with them. It snowed. Wind closed the ski lifts. Our luggage finally did catch up to us — Friday, just in time to turn in and be ready to head home. We wore only a couple of things out of the bags.

The plane back east was late — radio problems, and the pilot went back to Denver to have it fixed, but you expected that by now, right?

When we did get home, it was colder in Kansas than in Park City, though less snow. The furnace didn't want to kick on, and I thought, it just figures....

Invitation count trips up mom

You've never been humbled until you've been humbled by a child. My youngest daughter Kara is an accountant for a property management company in Dallas.

She handles large transactions every day, she keeps the books on dozens of business properties, she knows and understands complicated bookkeeping principles.

That must be why sending invitations for her daughter's birthday party was confusing. It was too simple.

Kara said she had addressed 19 invitations to her daughter Taylor's sixteenth birthday party, but she was stumped.

"Taylor," she said, "Think, think. There are 20 kids in your class and I can only come up with 19. Who are we forgetting?"

"Uh, Mom," Taylor began. "You don't have to send one to me. I make 20."

"Right," was Kara's only answer. She did tell me of the plans for Taylor's party.

If I understand this right, policy does not allow parties at school, but it forbids that any child in the class be excluded from private parties.

Every child has to be invited, so a simple party at Chuck E. Cheese turns into a major production, requiring a second mortgage to finance.

Not only is the host expected to pick up the tab for the kids, but most



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
cplotts@nwkansas.com

likely, you have to feed their parents, too.

Whatever happened to having four of a little girl's best friends over for cake, ice cream and balloons? Maybe even a slumber party if you were up to it?

They would bring their Barbie dolls and play into the wee hours. Life was simpler then.

There must be something about giving your child what, you hope, will be the perfect birthday party.

I know I sponsored my share of roller-skating and pizza parties.

It has only been in the last few years that I learned a dark secret my girls had kept from me.

I was confident both of them had said they didn't really like cake.

So, thinking I was being the good mother, I came up with an alternate.

Every year, when they were little, I made them a Rice Krispie cake, decorated with candles, frosting and their name spelled out in chocolate chips.

Can you imagine how devastat-

ing it was to learn they had just been humoring me?

They didn't like the Rice Krispie cake, either. I was crushed.

Thank you (sniff, sniff), I'm (sniff) over it, now.

On Friday, Alexandria, my granddaughter who lives nearby, will be 11, and I'm sure her mother has a special fete planned for her. Too bad Taylor and Alex live so far apart.

Their moms could combine forces and get two for the price of one.

From the Bible

He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion. Jeremiah 10:12

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E-mail: obherald@nwkansas.com

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Old grad urges students to apply

To the Editor:
As members of the Class of 2005, you have embarked upon your senior year at Decatur Community High School.

No doubt each of you is contemplating your future following the day you receive that cherished and hard-earned high school diploma. Your decisions at this critical time will no doubt form the foundation for the remainder of your life.

I firmly believe that a good education is just the first step on the road to a successful and rewarding career. As you mull over your options, may I suggest that you consider applying for one or more of the scholarships available to Decatur Community High School graduates.

One of those is the Col. Delbert L. Townsend Scholarship to attend Kansas State University. Two recipients are selected each year for this four-year program, with the field of study up to the recipient.

Each student receives about \$3,000 a year towards tuition, books and fees, and a one-time allocation of \$1,250 for a computer. Selection is made by a local committee based upon merit and need.

I was born the second of four children and spent my early childhood on a farm near Danbury, Neb. I attended school in Danbury for the first 10 years, then graduated from Decatur Community High School in Oberlin. I remained out of school for a year, and then enrolled at Kansas State College (now Kansas State University).

I graduated from K-State in December 1942 and entered the U.S. Army in January 1943. I retired from the U.S. Army on 1 July 1973 following a nearly 31-year career. The Townsend Scholarship Program was initiated in late 1996 with the first two Decatur Community High School recipients being selected in May 2000. The program

where these "known ranch escape points" are. Are they marked? Can anyone show us? If so, it would make our job so much easier.

If you would take the time to know these kids as I have, you would change your mind. They are young people looking for a chance to change. Some will, some won't. Not every one is a success story, but not every one is a criminal. Get your facts.

John Stanley
Oberlin

Mr. Stanley is a youth care specialist at the Sappa Valley Youth Ranch east of Oberlin.

was completely funded in December 2002. To date, one recipient has graduated, one is completing her second year at the College of Veterinary Medicine, one left the program and seven are in classes.

The recipients so far are Roxann Corcoran, Danielle Bailey, Grant Reynolds, Byron McFee, Bridget Corcoran, Sarah Olson, Grant Reichert, Allie Moore and Kelsey Dorshorst. Krickit Steinmetz will be added for the spring semester 2005.

Your high school counselor, Nita Lavielle, is available to answer questions concerning application deadlines and details on all scholarships. We urge all Decatur Community High School seniors to take advantage of this "Golden Opportunity" and apply for one or more of the scholarships.

Col. Delbert L. Townsend (Ret.)
9602 Wedgewood Place
Ft. Washington, Md. 20744-5718
ColDelTownsend@AOL.COM