

Eastern legislators would close schools in our area

It's out in the open now. Eastern Kansas legislators want to close our schools.

Not just the struggling "little" schools like Jennings, Brewster and Weskan. Under one plan on the table in Topeka, it's likely that every district in northwest Kansas, save one or two, would be forced to merge.

The legislators say, of course, that they don't want to close schools. It's all about cutting administrative expense, they say.

Bull. First, there's no way to save money by consolidating districts. Most have cut costs to the bone. Buildings still need principals. Someone still has to fill out the state and federal paperwork. Classes would still need teachers.

Jim Has, a research specialist with the Kansas Association of School Boards, put it well: "The only way to have substantial saving would be to close buildings."

One plan, by Rep. Candy Ruff, a Leavenworth Democrat, would cut to just one district in any county with fewer than 26,000 people, which is all of our counties. That would eliminate 122 of the state's 302 school districts.

Another, by Sen. Phil Journey, a Wichita-area Republican, would require merging all districts under 1,000 enrollment. In northwest Kansas, only a handful would survive.

And at first, perhaps, schools would remain open in county seat towns. Forget about the little ones — Brewster, Rexford, Weskan and

the like. They'd be closed. Many are on the edge anyway.

But two things happen in school consolidations: The town with the votes gets the schools, no matter what promises are made at the outset.

Ask people in McDonald. And since closing buildings is the only real way to save money, someday it'll happen. Students in St. Francis, Atwood, Oberlin, Sharon Springs, Hoxie and other smaller county seats will wind up being bused to "efficient" high schools in larger towns. Even those schools will have less money than they get today.

And people in the cities will neither notice nor care.

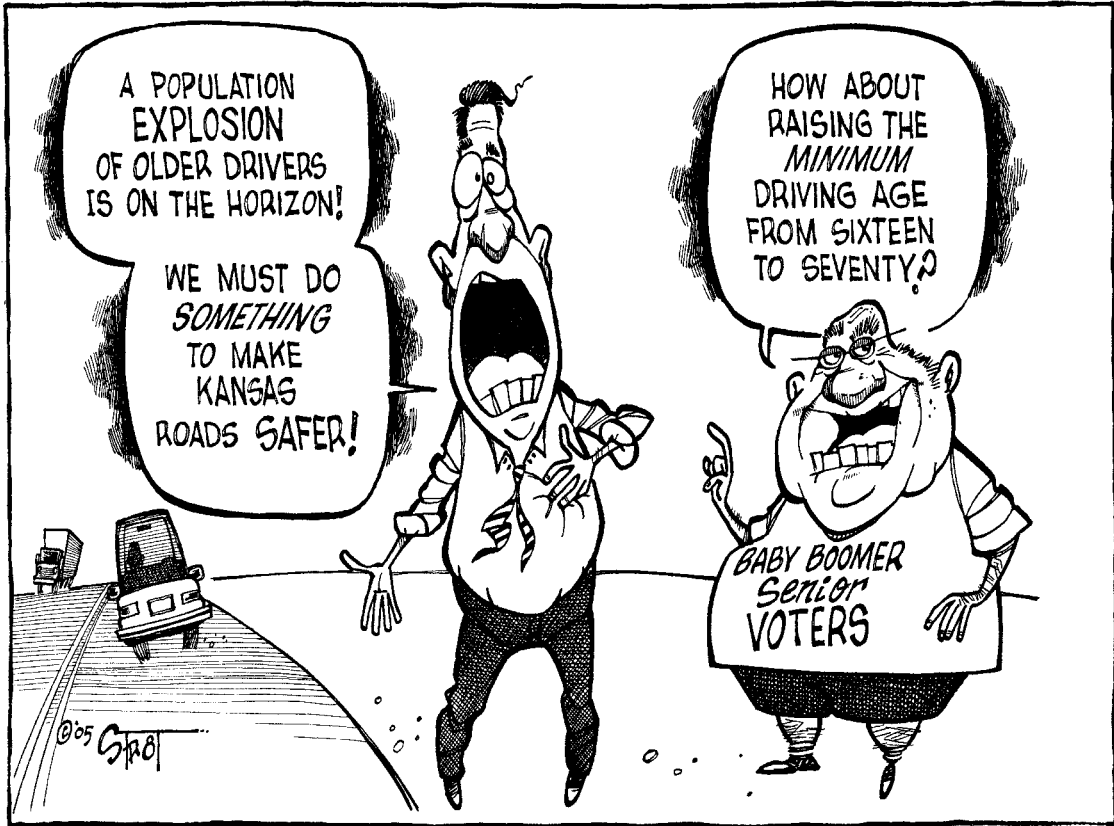
Their taxes won't go down, education won't be any better for anyone, but rural kids will spend hours on a bus every day of their school lives.

This is no joke, folks. The Legislature is under the gun to do something about school finance. Eastern Kansas has the votes. Unless we start screaming now, our schools are toast.

People in Topeka, Johnson County and Wichita are stoking the fires.

It will be up to our legislators, our school leaders and our people to make a case for small schools. Let's hope we are up to it, because nothing could be more important to our survival out here on the Plains.

— Steve Haynes



My advice is, save this advice

I'm an advice junkie. I clip newspaper and magazine articles about how to have a cleaner, neater home and leave them to clutter up the counters.

I hoard great recipes I will never cook and save reviews for restaurants I will never visit.

So it's not surprising that I've saved an article from *The Denver Post* of 52 tips for better eating. (I'm also trying to lose a pound or 10.)

Many of the tips were common sense, some were dumb and a couple offered good advice on something I hadn't considered before.

In the common sense category there were:

No. 6: Eat the rainbow. Add color to your palate and challenge kids to do the same: green, red, yellow, orange, white, and you've covered the range of needed vitamins.

No. 11: Eat in-season fruits and veggies whenever possible.

No. 26: Use or buy a slow cooker.

No. 27: Bone up on calcium-rich foods.

No. 36: Eat fresh fruit instead of sweets for dessert.

No. 42: Get a salad next time you go to a fast-food place.

No. 43: Leave at least one bite of each food on your plate.

Under the "huh?, you got to be kidding me?" (or boy, do they live in the city or what?) category were:

No. 3: Have a glass of red wine instead of a martini before dinner and another after the meal.

I don't even know anyone who drinks martinis.

No. 5: Pick the salmon over the



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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steak at a restaurant. Check to make sure it's wild, not farmed.

"Hey, Joe, is this salmon wild?" "I dunno, I didn't ask for his police record"

No. 12: Buy little ceramic ramekins at kitchen stores or thrift shops. They're perfect for all sorts of things, from melting two squares of chocolate to dissolving a teaspoon of sugar into hot water.

Why would I want to melt a teaspoon of sugar in hot water, anyway?

No. 13: Fill a ramekin with kosher or sea salt and place it next to your stove to feel like you're on the Food Network.

Is this another trick to absorb food odors, like baking soda? Personally, I like my home to smell like spaghetti, bean soup, fried chicken or whatever is in the pot.

No. 32: If you like butter, buy one of the gourmet varieties, like Plugra, Buerre d'Isigny or Vermont Butter and Cheese-brand cultured butter.

My theory is if you can't pronounce it, don't buy it 'cause you'll never know what to do with it. That sort of fancy food is like the crocheted doilies in my cedar chest — another thing to take up space be-

cause it's too good to use. Besides, where would you get that stuff out here?

In the "Hey, I like that one," category were:

No. 2: Sit down and take at least 90 minutes to have a meal with family and friends at least once a week.

No. 20: Invest in a good set of Sharpie pens. Use them to write details and the date of whatever is in the container you're about to freeze. (I do that already, so it makes sense to me.)

No. 34: Make homemade soup stock.

No. 45: Share the wealth. When you feel hungry, donate a staple or write a check to the food bank.

No. 46: Try fixing your favorite vegetable in a cool new way.

No. 50: Try an ethnic food that's new to you.

And my favorite and one that I'm definitely going to try is:

No. 21: Every time the clocks change, go through your freezer. Use or throw out what's been there since the last time change.

You wouldn't believe the junk in my freezer. Most of it is mystery meat or maybe it's soup or a chunk of... who knows.

This freebie was wonderful

Normally I don't get too excited about potato peelers, but that was before I tried a "freebie" I got the other day.

My local credit union has an annual dinner for its members and always gives a nice gift to each person attending. Last year it was a small tool kit, just right for the glovebox. This year it was a "gripper flipper" (you've seen them on television — you can pick up a dime or flip a hamburger with them), and this little, unassuming potato peeler.

After removing the plastic coverings from flipper and peeler, I stuck them into my utensil crock on the counter. My utensil crock on the stove holds items I use every day like spatulas, pancake turners, kitchen scissors and long-handled spoons. The crock on the counter is reserved for specialty tools like my mother's rolling pin, a potato masher, other sundry utensils, and the potato peeler.

Saturday we helped with a benefit soup supper for a couple here in town who recently had a house fire. I volunteered to make potato soup and beef stew. Normally, I don't bother to peel my potatoes for soups or stews, but Jim said, "I think, they'd look better if they were peeled."

Now, I feel that way about carrots. I wouldn't think of putting an unpeeled carrot in my stew, but I don't have that same passion about unpeeled potatoes. I know cooks in other countries think we Americans are foolish for not using the peels. And I'm sure most of the nutrients are in the peel or directly under it. I'm sorry, but unpeeled carrots just don't look right.



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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Starting on the carrots first, I decided to use my new peeler. Slip, strip, and it was peeled. One easy stroke and the peel came off clean the entire length of the carrot. About four turns in my hand had the entire vegetable cleaned and ready for the next. Hey... this was almost fun.

When Jim came into the kitchen to help peel 15 pounds of potatoes (yes, he did it voluntarily) he started with my old peeler. I suggested he might like to try the new one.

"Well, it's for sure I don't like this one," he said as he fought the peeler, trying to get the peeling out of the blade.

After picking up the new peeler and taking a few swipes on a potato he said, "Now, that's more like it."

So the "ayes" have it. We have a new potato peeler.

—ob—
The gospel group that Jim and I sing with entertained after the supper Saturday night and like Jim said, "We've had several requests, but we're gonna sing anyway."

He's always looking for new material and I try to help. This morning when I opened my e-mail, I thought I had found a real winner. A friend in Texas had sent me the lyrics for a song that I always thought had a certain "hidden" message.

But, when I started singing it to Jim he gave me that you've-got-to-be-kidding look and said, "I don't think so."

It must all be in the perspective. I still think the "Mississippi Squirrel Revival" song would be a dandy. Maybe he had a problem with the verse about:

"All the way down to the Amen pew Where sat Sister Bertha Better-Than-You Who'd been watching all the commotion with sadistic glee. Oh, you should have seen the look in her eyes, When that squirrel jumped her garters and crossed her thighs, She jumped to her feet and said, "Lord have mercy on me." Like I said, it's a hidden message.



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Words have different meanings

Ever notice how some words just tend to get in the collective mind and stick, whether they ought to be there or not?

Mandate comes to mind. It's a perfectly good English word, meaning an authoritative order, especially a written one.

It's not, however, a synonym for order or require. It has a more specific meaning.

If you listen to the bureaucrats, though, it's mandate this and mandate that. No one says require anymore. And "unfunded mandates" are everywhere.

People say mandate when they're not really sure what it means.

Personally, I'd like to mandate people to stop using the word.

Then there is fund.

Time was when the use of funds was, at best, a genteelism used in place of the more crass money. It might be used by a banker or a particularly erudite bum in a movie. The word means a supply that can be drawn upon, or a sum of money set aside for some particular purpose.

Except in technical financial circles, it wasn't thought of as a verb. Today, it's the hot synonym for money. Bureaucrats talk about "getting some funding." Officials say, "we'll fund that."

It's not that it's wrong; it's just that it's not the way "real people"



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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talk.

That's one of the things about a bureaucracy. Bureaucrats set themselves apart from the rest of us by talking lingo. And those who hang around with them, like newspaper reporters, tend to pick up the argot.

Every business has its lingo. Newspaper people talk about tabs and cutlines and inches like ordinary people knew what they meant. (That's tabloid, a paper size; a photo caption, and column inches, a unit of square measure, in case you wondered.)

But that kind of language doesn't belong in public.

Everyone — school officials, teachers, public officials, reporters, bureaucrats — has a duty to talk plain language when they're outside the shop.

It may be good to set yourself apart with "in" talk, but it's not good communication. Reporters spend hours trying to straighten this stuff out, and not always too successfully.

There's more — take community.

Community is everywhere, means everything. "The community this, the community that." People who say it just mean "people" or "the town."

But I know I'm fighting a losing battle here.

No one wants any of my unfunded mandates. Surely no one will fund my crusade, if I'm allowed to use that term.

And I don't think the community cares.

From the Bible

I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

Titus 1:7, 8

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