

Federal election may end voting in several cities

Decatur County finally has faced up to the so-called Helping America Vote Act, which requires expensive handicapped-accessible voting machines at all polling places.

Using federal money, the state is willing to give the machines to the county. The catch is, the county will have to pay the \$5,000-per-year maintenance fees.

With five polling places — two in Oberlin and one each in the three smaller cities — that would be \$25,000 a year.

The first question is, are voters willing to pay a tax increase to keep all five polling places open.

The second is, would it be worth \$5,000 a year to allow a few dozen people a year to vote in Dresden, Jennings or Norcatur?

And the third is, why does Congress keep passing stupid laws like this?

Helping people with handicaps vote is a great idea. No one would be against that.

But it's likely that no one in Washington ever considered the consequences for rural towns. Most Congressional staffers probably can't conceive of a polling place run to serve 20 or 30 voters.

So after the voting fiasco in Florida in 2000, the big train got rolling. Congress passed this puppy with little dissent and few questions, because it was "a good idea."

And now rural America is stuck with the collateral damage.

What to do?

We could have gone to Rep. Jerry Moran and our senators last year, and maybe got an exemption or at least a delay in the law. With the deadline looming Jan. 1, though, it's probably too late to do that now.

Across Kansas, across America, county commissioners faced with this choice have turned their backs on rural voters. Many counties have gone to a single polling place to save money.

There aren't many people left in places like Dresden, after all. Who cares about them?

While we agree that the handicapped shouldn't be prevented from voting, is it right to close polls in towns 20 or more miles from the courthouse and make those voters drive for an hour to cast a ballot? To have cities where taxpayers have to go to another town to vote in a city election?

Which group is more important? Congress seems to have answered that question.

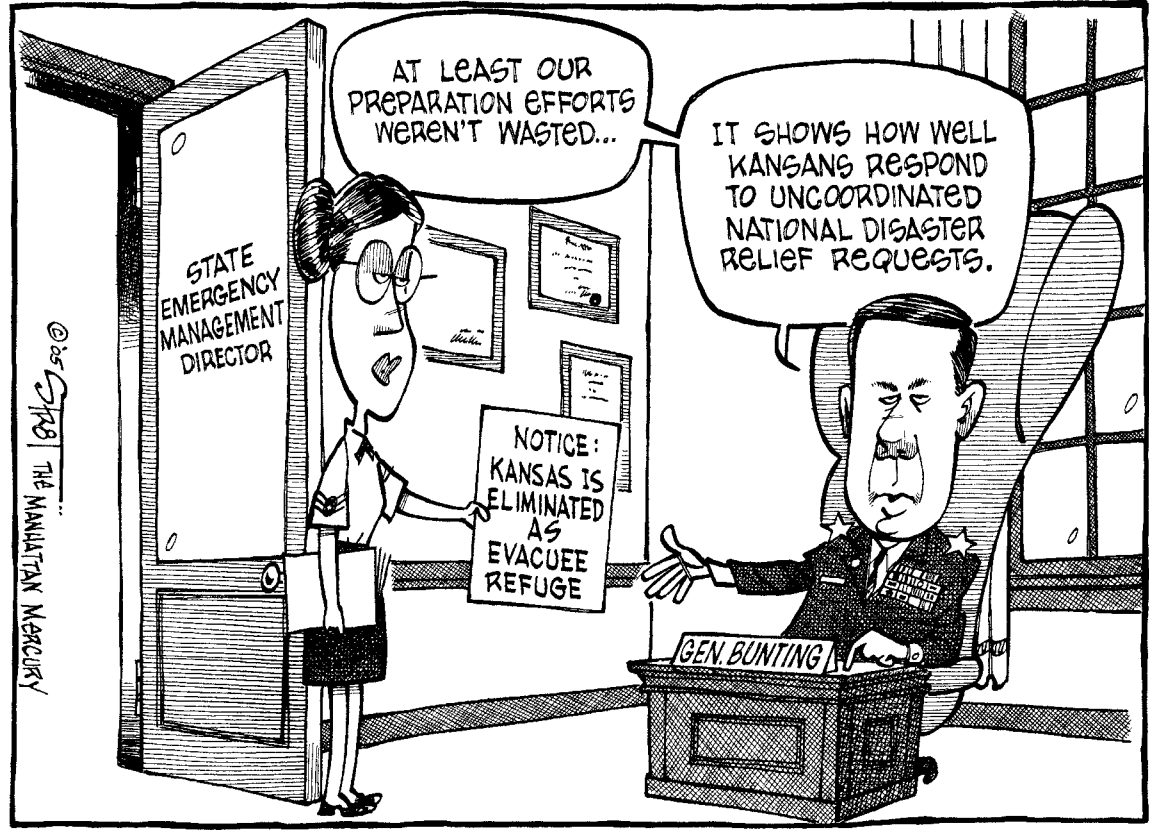
The only choices left to the county commissioners are to cave in, or defy the law and face the consequences.

That might get this stupid rule changed. Or it might just cost money.

Think the commissioners have the gumption to call Washington's bluff?

Somebody should.

— Steve Haynes



Game, friends make weekend

We've been back in Kansas for a dozen years and we decided it was time for a small celebration.

Actually, the anniversary was just an excuse to see another baseball game before the end of the season, even though our Rockies aren't anywhere near being in the playoffs.

Since I had to work Saturday, we decided to go to a Sunday game, leaving Saturday when I got off work and spending the night in Denver.

I tried to get a room at my favorite downtown hotel but all the reasonably priced ones were gone, and I wasn't about to pay more for a room than I make in a week, so I started checking around. The Adam's Mark, a nice hotel on 16th Street at the end of the mall, had a good deal, so we decided to stay there.

As soon as we arrived, Steve laid down. I had taken a nap on the four-hour trip to Denver while he drove. While I had worked in a nice, cool store, he had mowed the lawn in 90-degree-plus weather.

Well, I wanted to go to the bookstore and he wanted a nap. No problem. I headed downstairs.

As I started out the front door, I came face to face with our best friends, Merle and Mary Barnczyk from Salida, Colo. Since I didn't know they were coming to Denver, let alone staying at the Adam's Mark, I was stunned, if not very surprised.

(I have always said, never have an affair. No matter where you go, you'll run into someone you know.) Merle and Mary were in Denver



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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with their grandchildren because they had won a one-night stay at the hotel and dinner for two. They all planned to go to the amusement park on Sunday.

Merle and Mary are also in the newspaper business, and the two men always get lost in computers, presses and problems with the papers. Mary and I talk about our children, her grandchildren, what's happening and where we are going next.

We've been friends for more than 20 years, and even though we sometimes don't see each other for months at a time, we always seem to stay close.

Later, as Merle and Mary and their crew headed for the hotel dining room, Steve and I started walking down 16th Street to find a quiet little restaurant for a romantic dinner.

Halfway down the mall, we ran into some more friends from Colorado. Boy, am I glad I was with my husband.

Shane and Susan Birdsey have a sporting goods store in Creede, the little town in the mountains where we settled 25 years ago to run our own newspaper and raise a family. Back then, Shane was in high

school and a source of gray hair for both his parents and the sheriff. Today he's a prosperous businessman with a wife and two children and works as a deputy for the same sheriff to whom he gave all those gray hairs.

The Birdseys were in town for a fly fishing equipment retailers conference, and the kids were home with grandma. They promised to say hi to all our friends back in the high country.

We found a good restaurant, but it wasn't too quiet. While the food was wonderful and the atmosphere inside great, there was the annual Octoberfest going on in Larimer Square right outside.

I know, it's not October. Larimer Square holds Octoberfest in September because you never know what the October weather will be like in the Mile-High City.

We had breakfast with Merle and Mary and their kids, went to church and watched the Rockies beat the Arizona Diamondbacks 7-2 without running into anyone else we knew, even though we stopped at the filling station at Byers, Colo., where you can meet someone from northwest Kansas almost any day.

Challenging as it is, life goes on

I don't go out of town without my husband very often, but once a year, I love to go to a women's retreat sponsored by churches in the central to northwest part of the state.

I made him a chocolate cake and a big beef stew, so I knew he would survive my two nights away.

The setting is a lovely, wooded camp a few miles east and north of Salina. Dormitories with bunk beds house the 80-100 women who show up. We ate in a dining hall, where all our meals were prepared for us. A bathroom had plenty of shower stalls, plenty of mirrors with shelves for cosmetics and plug-ins for hair dryers and curling irons.

I don't care how old a woman gets, she is still going to primp and fuss over her appearance. When it comes to my make-up, I say it's like a paint-by-number set. Doesn't matter if it is only women, we want to look our best.

Some women have been coming to camp for 25 or more years. I've missed a few, but want it to become a tradition.

The speaker this year was a very funny lady — and a very spiritual woman. Suzy had us laughing from the moment she began, and we scarcely stopped all weekend. When people are laughing, they are teachable, and she taught us a lot in two days.

Perhaps the most important thing I learned was, "Life does go on." The first night she spoke, we learned she and her husband had been missionaries in Chile for 13 years. They had three sons and after several years, finally, had the little girl they had prayed for. When she was about 3 months old, they began to suspect something was wrong. She was not



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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developing like other children and they were told their little girl was mentally handicapped. But, life goes on.

Suzy showed us pictures and told how her beautiful, blonde little girl, who is now 17 but forever 7, mentally, has been such a joy in their lives — the funny things she says and her innocent approach to life.

Then Suzy dropped the bomb. She told us that a few months ago her daughter made a remark about an incident that caused Suzy to ask questions. And then more questions. The answers they got were a parent's worst fear. Suzy and her husband learned their daughter had been raped. Tests proved it and DNA tested positively identified the rapist. But, life goes on.

Here was this Godly woman spilling her guts out to a room full of women she had just met and yet, in that moment we were all sisters, mothers and friends. What her revelation did, too, was open the floodgates. It was astounding the number of women who came forward with stories of their own abuse or an instance within their own families. This is a pervasive problem.

Do I have any answers? No. Except, to try to encourage families to get help for their loved ones, those who have been victims and for those

who have been the victimizers.

Suzy and her family are now facing the legal process. Charges have been filed but the perpetrator still denies his guilt. She saw him in a courtroom for the first time last week and said, "As Christians we are supposed to forgive, but...I'm not there, yet. Please pray for me."

We will, Suzy. And, as she knows, life does go on.

From the Bible

Thou hast thrust sore at me that I might fall: but the Lord helped me. The Lord is my strength and song, and is become my salvation.
Psalms 118: 13, 14

Write

The Oberlin Herald encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of public interest.

Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

Mail letters to 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan., 67749, or by E-mail to obherald@nwkansas.com.

THE OBERLIN HERALD

Serving Oberlin and Decatur County since 1879

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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, \$30 (tax included) in Decatur, Norton, Rawlins, Sheridan, Thomas and Red Willow counties; \$34 (tax included) elsewhere in Kansas; \$37 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.)



Walk in Sappa Park inspiring

It was one of those nights when we got to Sappa Park on Sunday.

The sun had just set, after popping out briefly at the end of what had been a gray and cloudy day.

The fog was so wet, you had to use windshield wipers earlier in the day. By the time the grass dried out, the mower wouldn't start, and there was no way I could cut the grass.

That wouldn't be so bad, but I've got no other day off to cut the grass, and it could be a bear by the time I get back to it.

Cynthia was out front pulling bermuda grass out of the flowers. Or trying to, anyway.

It didn't take much to talk her into an early walk.

So there we were, alone in the park with about 7 million mosquitoes and just one bottle of Off.

I looked up; there was a swarm over our heads. I soon realized, though, that they weren't following us. The whole sky above the park was full of mosquitoes.

As we walked, though, we seemed to get out from under the cloud. The western sky was beautiful, in shades of blue, purple, red, orange and yellow. As we walked on down, we could see mist rising off the old lake bottom.

Then a great horned owl hooted and I looked up. He was high in a old, dead cottonwood west of the youth



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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ranch, regal and big, surveying the entire park. Rabbits and mice, I'd assume, were one their guard.

Later, still awed by the afterglow and the mist, we heard turkeys calling to each other and, off in the distance, coyotes howling. A late-season cicada chirped in a tree.

It was one of those evenings when Mother Nature makes a lot of noise, quite beautiful and oh so entertaining.

Our DEET held out, and we made it back to the car with at least some blood left.

☆☆☆☆

The following violates rules formulated by one of our readers in that it mentions cats. Be warned, and if you don't like cat columns, don't read on.

☆☆☆☆

Evan and I were stringing television cable for the kitchen through the basement overhead on Saturday. It was an easy job, using holes drilled by electricians for earlier

wiring. We had to make sure the line to the basement television, which we had tapped into, still worked.

When I looked behind the telly to check the wiring, I spotted a pelt resting on a mass of game-box and connecting wires.

After checking the picture, I called Cynthia over.

"Maybe it's one of those skins you pet?" she guessed.

After retrieving it, however, she reported that it must have been a whole rabbit, judging from the fur and bones she pulled out of there.

That's a first for the cats since they got their own door. Usually, they just stash birds under the couch.

You'd think you'd notice a whole rabbit behind the television, huh?

☆☆☆☆

For kid, cat and vacation haters, Cynthia says she wants a picture for her column of one of her kids petting a cat while on vacation in a foreign country. She's still working on it.

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