

Cities, county trade views on voting places

Number of voters could drop

Decatur County Commissioners: It has been brought to our attention that the county is going to change the polling place to The Gateway in Oberlin. We would like for you to revisit this issue. We have many concerns about changing the polling place. Our town largely consists of elderly residents. Many have a hard enough time making it to the city office to vote.

If you change the polling place to Oberlin, the (number of) voters from Norcatour will drop dramatically.

We have approximately 50 people who are over 65 in Norcatour. That is almost half of our town. A lot of those people do not drive out of town.

If you change to only have one polling place, you will lose the amount of voters. It is hard enough to get people out to vote, let alone changing the voting area to only one location. Why not purchase a machine for each town and let the people still vote in their local towns? Why change it to Oberlin?

We need to keep as much going in our smaller towns as possible. Before speaking for our community, please visit with us and let us speak for ourselves. Please take the time to rethink the voting place issue.

If you should have any questions or would like to speak to us, our meetings are on the third Monday of every month at 7 p.m. We would put you on our agenda and welcome you at any time.

We look forward to hearing from you on the voting place issue.

Norcatour City Mayor and Council
Doug Dempewolf, mayor
Mike Helm
Carl Lyon
Jim Plotts
Linda Hunt
Mark Bailey



COUNTY EMPLOYEES worked late to help count advance ballots during the 2004 general election. At the counter, Treasurer Jean Hale, Colleen Geishler from the clerk's office and sheriff's Deputy Michael French tallied the votes.

— Herald staff photo by Steve Haynes

For many, voting will be inconvenient

Decatur County Commissioners: The Jennings City Council met on July 13, 2006, for their regular monthly meeting. One item on the agenda was the elimination of the voting location in Jennings.

The council understands that this change is a result of federal legislation passed to aid the handicapped with voting, but as a result of the elimination of the Jennings voting site, many who are not handicapped have had their opportunity to vote made more inconvenient and costly due to the need to travel.

The Jennings City Council would like to encourage the commissioners to purchase additional machines or make arrangements to have a vot-

ing machine travel around the county to the cities of Jennings, Dresden and Norcatour on election dates. The right to vote should not be made more difficult for the residents of this county.

Hopefully, the commissioners will contact our state and federal legislators and express concern about the requirement to have a voting machine at each polling location and explain the impact this legislation will have on the majority of the rural residents in Decatur County. Possibly, the commissioners could locate federal funding to help pay for the cost of additional machines and the high maintenance costs.

The residents of Jennings and the

surrounding rural area must assume that the Decatur County commissioners and the election officer will feel it is important to take the steps necessary to help bring a voting site back to Jennings. The machines will not accommodate all voters and paper ballots will still be necessary for the majority of Decatur County citizens. Why can't the Jennings site continue with just the paper ballots?

Also, the council is curious about how local elections will be handled next April. Will Jennings residents be required to travel to the Gateway in Oberlin to vote for our local council members and mayor?

Robert W. Jones, mayor
Jennings

No one commented on rural polling places

Norcatour City Mayor and Council: I have read your letter of June 19th to the county commissioners of Decatur County. As the Decatur County election officer, I do set up polling places according to the Kansas Statutes and under the guidance of the Kansas secretary of state.

The main reason I have pulled all voters to The Gateway in Oberlin was because of costs to every resident in Decatur County.

It has been over two years since the Americans with Disabilities Act regulations and the discussion of voting machines began. It was out in the news even before the August primary of 2004 and the federal mandate had been discussed by Congress before that.

Then the purchase of voting machines and talk about polling places for Decatur County has been going on since the April city/school election in 2005.

I did attend meetings and had some say in allowing paper ballots to still be an option, and that is the type of voting machine I have ordered for Decatur County.

These machines cost \$4,500 each and there are now two purchased with federal funds by the Kansas secretary of state's office for Decatur County, one for the advance process done at the courthouse and the other for the polling place for the voters.

The maintenance of these machines will be approximately \$3,000 per year for each one and on top of that cost is the ballot set-up fees and audio fees for the AutoMARK machine. Our maintenance billing will begin for the year 2007 and continue until the state designates an updated version or the federal government outlaws paper ballots.

I could have purchased the maximum of eight machines — one for each of the polling places that have been open for all past elections — but the maintenance costs would have then been \$24,000 instead of the "now planned cost" of \$6,000.

The County election budget this election year has had to pay for the

special ballot paper costs (the office of the county clerk has used regular copy paper in the past and printed up our own ballots, since the law states "the County Election Officer shall see to the printing of the ballots," as well as new ballot boxes and other supplies for the voting machines.)

I am sorry you have waited so long in voicing your concerns, as before your letter we had a couple persons speak to me about going to one polling place, but when the question was put in the paper about four months ago, the residents spoke to me about not purchasing more machines but only one more polling place open.

About 10 years ago, many of the townships voted in their areas, but the polling places were to be handicapped accessible. At that time LINK (Living Independently in Northwest Kansas) out of Hays came and after visiting all the polling places in Decatur County, many had to be closed and those voters were asked to come to Oberlin to vote.

All voters from each area polling place will still vote in a group. All ballots are not thrown into the same ballot box. Most of the same election judges and clerks will be helping with this primary election. Some have conflicts and are unable to help.

The voting machine is a necessity for the handicapped but anyone who is wanting to take the time to use the AutoMARK may do so at the polls.

Otherwise, there is one paper ballot, with each precinct candidate listed on their individual ballot and tabulations will be for any township that has more than 25 voters. This has been the law for many years, and there are a few townships that are combined for the national and state ballot tallies, but otherwise their individual ballots are still available.

I do hope this helps with any questions you might have, and I am sorry you feel this was not discussed before it took place.

Marilyn Horn
Decatur County Clerk
Oberlin

Students make it to Panama

This letter from Rebecca Helm of Norcatour was taken from the July 11, 2006, edition of the Norcatour News:

Right now, I'm in Panama City, Panama. My trip started on Friday, June 30. I went to Wichita so I would be ready for the flight the next day with my mom, Deb Helm, Cameron Nedland and his dad, Dan Nedland.

The next morning, we checked in our luggage at 9 a.m. Then we left to do some shopping while we waited. We went back to the airport at 11 that morning and got some lunch. I went through security just fine and boarded the plane at 12:30 p.m. We landed in Atlanta and waited for two hours for our next flight. There were a large number of Army men taking flights to Munich and Frankfurt, Germany. A couple was also headed to Moscow.

The plane going to Panama ended up being late. There were a lot of people going on the flight. When we got on the plane, we found out that it is unusual to have such a large

flight. The flight attendant said that usually they take small flights to Panama. We had dinner on the flight. I thought it was pretty good.

When we got to Panama, I made it through customs easily. Then I went to the baggage claim and waited for my luggage. The wait ended up to be in vain, because my suitcase never came. We checked with the Delta people, and were informed my bag was still in Atlanta.

By that time, I had met some of the family I would be staying with. I had met the mom, Marilyn de Troetsch, and the oldest girl, Gretel. My Panama family gave their address where my suitcase could be sent to if we didn't pick it up when it came in at 10 o'clock the next night. We got home at 11 that night and I sent an e-mail to my family to inform them I made it to my new home

safely. Then I went to bed so I would be ready for the adventure to begin the next day.

While in Panama, I will be living with the Troetsch family. The family has four girls. The oldest, Gretel, is 14; Ana Lucia is 12; Monica, 7; and last is 4-year-old Marifer. Their parents are Marilyn and Carlos Troetsch. Carlos is a partner at the Morgan and Morgan Law Firm, the biggest in Panama. Marilyn works as an insurance agent.

(to be continued)
Rebecca Helm
Norcatour

Editor's Note: Sixteen-year-old Rebecca Helm, who will be a junior this year at Decatur Community High, is on a Rotary exchange in Panama. Rebecca is the daughter of Debra and Mike Helm, Norcatour.

Letters to the Editor

Primary choice vital to school

To the Editor: July 4, we celebrated another year in this great country, the United States of America. We have friends and relatives fighting in battles around the world to keep our freedom. We all know our freedom comes at a cost. A major freedom we have that too few citizens exercise is our right to vote.

Aug. 1 is the primary election. It comes during a busy time of county fairs and family vacations. Some believe that the primary is not as important as the general election in November.

There are several positions for which the primary will determine

the candidate on the ballot in November. The Republican candidate for the state Board of Education in District 5, covering most of north-west Kansas, will be determined by the primary.

Connie Morris of St. Francis is running for re-election. During her term, she has been the center of controversy and taken positions that most voters do not agree with, based on news articles and editorials over the years.

Sally Cauble is a moderate Republican running for this position. She believes in teaching all students as the law requires and will listen to content experts when reviewing

content area state standards. Republican voters have an important decision to make in this primary.

Voting in the primary is easy. A registered voter has three ways to vote: 1) He or she can go to the assigned voting place between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. on Tuesday, Aug. 1; 2) to the county clerk's office in the courthouse during business hours now through Monday, July 31; 3) or request a mail ballot from the county clerk's office and mail the completed ballot back to the clerk.

The direction of public education as guided by the state board will be affected by primary elections, as half the seats are up for election.

Board members do not represent the majority when they are elected by less than 50 percent of the registered voters. We allow that to happen when registered voters do not take the time and effort to vote.

Let's honor our soldiers by getting out to vote in the primary now and in the general election in November. Let's truly elect candidates with a majority vote of the registered voters.

Bernadine Samson
Ludell

Photo Policy

The Oberlin Herald wants to emphasize photos of people doing things in the community. If you know of an event or news happening that we should attend, please call 475-2206.

Please be sure to allow a couple of days' notice so we can arrange to be there.

Space in the paper is limited and so is the time of our staff, so we may not be able to get to every event, but we will try.

Because space is so limited, we cannot run team or group photos, any pictures of people lined up or of people passing checks, certificates and the like. (We will always try to make room for a story about any of these events, however.)

CONFUSED

ABOUT PURCHASING A NEW CAR?

Should I buy or lease a new car? What's the best value for my money?
Which car has the most safety features for my growing family?
How can I be sure the pre-owned car I'm buying is reliable?
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