

Closing car dealers could be tough on us

Congress and the Bush and Obama administrations need to take care that, while trying to save the Big Three automakers, they don't deal a death blow to small-town America.

A sensible, controlled bailout of the Big Three is a must.

So is preserving the new-car dealerships in rural America.

Our towns depend on these dealers for jobs, tax income and economic health. Over the years, the government has done plenty to hasten the decline of our towns. We do not need another body blow.

Yet, in talk about the auto rescue, the supposed "need" to reduce the number of dealers' automakers use has come up again and again. Who determined this need is hard to pin down. It became one of the "assumed" facts of the debate.

The National Association of Auto Dealers says its members already are an endangered species. More than 700 already have closed their doors in the last few months, the group says.

If someone decides many — some estimates are as many as half the 20,000 dealers in the U.S. — should close, where would they be?

Not, you can rest assured, in cities dominated by block-long superdealers. No, the ones Detroit might like to ax would be in your town and mine.

These are businesses we depend on out here, far from the city. They provide not just cars, but employment and a tax base for our cities and counties.

An auto dealer often is the largest single

sales-tax source in a small town. If the dealership closes, the tax revenue goes to some larger city. The county or town where it was located just loses a big chunk of its income.

Rural dealerships may already be disappearing. Their numbers have been in decline along with rural population in many areas. Already this winter, one Kansas dealer announced that he'd close his "store" in a small Kansas town but keep open one in a nearby city.

Government may not be able to prevent this. Government certainly should not encourage it.

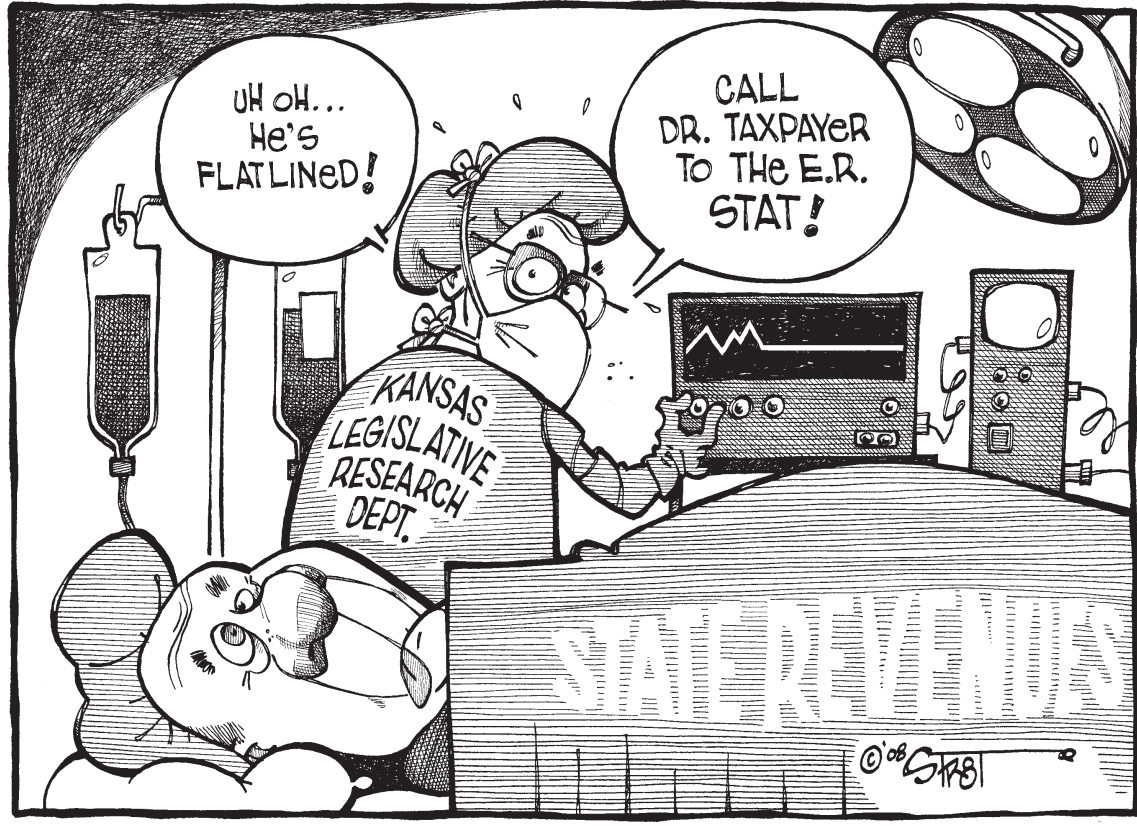
Neither Congress nor the administration should do anything to force small-town dealers out of business. Nor should the Big Three be encouraged in any way to slight rural areas.

It'd be a grim day if all of us in the hinterlands were forced to drive to some city to buy a car, where sharp dealers would lurk, knowing they'd never have to give warranty service on a car that was going 400 miles away.

City services, schools, county roads all could deteriorate if car dealers go away. Even state tax revenue could be affected if, say, everyone in western Kansas decided to go to Denver to buy cars.

Thousands would be jobless, families would have no income, public workers might be laid off. This is no small matter, and the government must not take it lightly. Something that sound like a "good idea" can have terrible consequences. This is one of those times.

— Steve Haynes



Winter arrived ahead of sun

As I peel off my thermal underwear, gloves, stocking cap, ski jacket and sweater, I think I might punch the first person who tells me that Sunday marked the "official start" of winter.

That's poppycock when we've already experienced 10-below nights and 12-degree days.

It's true, Sunday was the day of the winter solstice this year, sometimes known as "midwinter day," or incorrectly as the "start" of winter.

In Kansas, though, winter rolls in sometime around the first of December nearly every year, and rolls out around the end of February. If you figure seasons at three months, then, the solstice is neither the start nor the middle of winter.

We may be well into the season, but we've got a long way to go before we're done.

Still, the solstice is a good day. It marks the end of ever-shorter days. Today, and every day until June 22, each day will be a little longer than the last.

And we're funny about that. People are diurnal. Most of us like light, not dark.

The darkness this time of year can trigger depression. Some scientists think that may explain why we're so fond of brightly colored lights around the holidays. They're pretty, of course — the lights, not the scientists — but they also represent escape from the dreariness of the longest nights.

Men have known about the solstice for centuries. Some cultures celebrated it and other solar events; indeed, some say we mark Christ's birth in December mostly because the dates coincide with pagan festivals of old.

And maybe that's why, in this era of cheap lights made in who-



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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knows-what-part-of-Asia, people are starting to hang orange lights for Halloween and pink ones for St. Valentine's Day.

Soon, we'll be able to get through the winter without ever missing the sun. I pretty much have to pull the plug on our Christmas tree by mid-January. I think Cynthia would leave the lights on until spring — at least.

It could be there's some sharp marketing involved here, too. Selling strings of lights used to be a short-season business, but today, those plants keep right on cranking.

Interesting fact: the solstice is an instant, not a day. It's the time when the sun is as far below the equatorial plane (in relation to the hemisphere it's viewed from) as possible. That would have been about 6 a.m. Sunday, if I have this figured out.

Myself, I treasure the long days of summer. I'm a little nocturnal, but I enjoy a good sunny day as much as the next person. I just like to wait until it's up to enjoy it.

I take hope in the solstice. I count the extra seconds of sunshine in every day this week and through the winter.

I don't like cold and I don't think much of the dark. So celebrate the solstice if you wish; I'm with you as long as I don't have to go out at cold night for any sacrifices.

I'll go out for midnight Mass, but

not for the solstice.

Longer days are a cause to celebrate, though, even if it means sunshine when I could be sleeping in the morning.

Still, there's two more months of winter to go, and three months until the spring equinox, when the days start exceeding the nights. It's a long time to be in the dark, so bring on another string of those tiny, twinkling lights.

Pink this time.

From the Bible

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.

And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

Luke 2:10-14

Some coyote may be starving

Put down the green cookie. Step away and no one will get hurt.

If this notice has failed to reach you in time — I, I, I'm sorry. I'm afraid I can't pay your dental bills, but I didn't know. No one told me you can't use old mini-marshmallows to make green-wreath Christmas cookies.

You know the ones I'm talking about. They're just like Rice Krispie cookies except you use corn flakes instead of rice cereal and you add green food coloring. The sticky treats are dropped by spoonfuls onto waxed paper, where three red hot candies are added to simulate holly berries.

I thought everything was ready to go. The cereal was measured into a bowl, the butter was melted in a pan on the stove and the red hots were waiting. Where were the marshmallows? Nowhere to be found. Out of all the grocery items I bought for holiday baking, I had neglected to pick up a bag of marshmallows.

"Oh, well," I thought, "This bag in the cupboard will do. So what if the expiration date is December 2007. If they melt, they'll be fine." Folks, I'm here to tell 'ya, they won't be fine. Oh, they look good. But don't be deceived.

I finished making the cookies and had already given away several of the cute confections before I actually sampled one. One bite and my jaws were welded into a semi-



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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permanent closed position.

It seems that old marshmallows, when melted and then cooled, become more like sweet tar than the little flavorful puffs we all love in our hot chocolate. If my partial plate had not come loose, I might still be stuck with a festive, green Christmas wreath jutting from my mouth and green saliva "goo" oozing down my chin.

Toy manufactures do a recall if they discover a defective toy. How do you "recall" a homemade treat?

It was easy enough to warn off our children. I had already packed and mailed their Christmas boxes before the discovery was made. But, how do I tell my Secret Sister and the receptionist at my dentist's office that they shouldn't — let me re-phrase that — they can't, they mustn't eat the green wreath cookies that were on the sampler plate I sent them?

Jim had taken a plate of treats to the job with him. When I called to tell him of the hazard, he promptly confiscated the green offenders

and heaved them over the fence. Next spring, we'll probably find the moldering carcass of a coyote or a Jack rabbit out in that field. They will have had the misfortune of stumbling across the "green menace." Thinking they had found a free meal, they will attempt to eat it and become hopelessly lock-jawed.

So, if I gave you a plate of Christmas cookies and candies that includes a really cute green wreath cookie — don't touch it. It could be hazardous to your health. I don't think my homeowner's insurance covers me if I inadvertently cause someone to lose a tooth.

The rest of my Christmas cooking has been pretty uneventful, and I have managed to give away almost everything. Now, I can relax and enjoy next week. I might even bake something just for us.

Here's wishing you and your family a very Merry Christmas. Let's all try to remember the Reason for the Season.

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Giving nice all year around

What is giving?

At Christmas time, you hear people say it's better to give than receive, which leaves me asking, what exactly is giving? How much do people think is enough? At what point do you start giving and when do you stop?

Yes, Christmas time is a wonderful time to give. But what about keeping it up throughout the year?

Christmas is a time to celebrate the birth of God's only son, Jesus. God continues to give gifts to us daily, throughout the year.

Since God continues to give, not only at Christmas, shouldn't we be givers year around as well?

I have a friend who is always talking about "paying it forward." Recently she bought a new office chair. The plan was to take the used chair, still in great shape, and put it in on the street with a "free" sign. I happened to be in the market for a new chair, so guess what? She paid the blessing forward.

People have been doing that all month.

Walk into Fredrickson Insurance Agency downtown, and look at all of the gifts purchased for the "Angel



As I See It

By Kimberly Davis
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Tree" kids in this county. Individuals, groups and businesses made a donation to buy gifts for children they don't even know. These are kids who may or may not have warm coats, clothes, socks, hats or gloves. Kids who may not otherwise get a toy Christmas morning.

As I sit and write this, there's close to 1,000 items in the front window in Stanley Hardware, all donated for the county food pantry. There's more to come, as the Teens for Christ prepare to go pick up another round of items.

All of these things have cost someone money, but giving isn't only about money, or the things money can buy.

Giving comes from your heart. It can be a smile, a kind word, helping

your neighbor shovel snow, showing up to mow someone's lawn without getting paid, carrying a bag of groceries to a person's car for them, handing down clothes, volunteering at the senior center, babysitting for free, and on and on. The ideas are endless.

Over the years that I've had the opportunity to call Decatur County my home, I have learned that the people here are very generous. They give and give.

Sometimes that can get weary.

But, I say, keep up the good work. Keep giving. Use your imagination, find someone in need and remember that the benefit, that feeling of joy that comes with paying it forward, definitely outweighs whatever the cost might be.

Angel Tree benefits many

To the Editor:

Red and white bows, green and blue paper, gold ribbon and boxes and bags and that's just a start! Who would have ever thought that 66 "angels" could be blessed with so many socks and shoes, coats and hats, jeans, shirts, toys and even a bag of fruit.

The Jaycees Angel Tree this year had 66 children up to age 17.

Due to the generosity of many families, organizations, clubs, groups and businesses, we were able to provide not only the necessities of clothing and bedding, but movie passes to the Sunflower Cinema

Letter to the Editor

for the school-age children and baby bath or bubble bath for those younger. We have Red Devils T-shirts to those who attend Oberlin Elementary School and Decatur Community High School and sacks of fruit purchased from the FFA with donated peanuts and candy.

We are so thankful for all of you who helped, whether it was with money or by purchasing gifts for a child or children. We couldn't do it without all the extra help from *The*

Oberlin Herald, KFNF and First National Bank to get the word out, Fredrickson Insurance Agency for a location for the tree and the others who help to make it all work!

It is a great feeling to know that as all of the presents are given to the parents that we, as a community, have really helped to make Christmas a little brighter than it might have been for a lot of children.

Abby Hissong, coordinator
Oberlin Jaycees Angel Tree