

Secrecy provision slipped into farm bill

It's a legislative horror story, really. Last year, Senate and House conferees inserted a provision in the new Farm Bill closing records of most business between the Department of Agriculture and farmers. About the only thing you can find out now about a farmer's relationship with the government is how much federal money he or she got last year. This means that farmers will continue to show up on those embarrassing lists put out by environmental groups. But a lot of information that used to be public will be behind a screen of secrecy, thanks to this bill.

That may or may not be a good idea. Our view is that farmers have nothing to hide, and the details of their interaction with the government — while of little interest to most of us — might as well be out in the open. That's how public business ought to be done.

Closing records, however, is keeping county tax assessors from finding out whether farm land qualifies for lower assessment rates. Assessors say that makes their job more difficult and forces them sometimes to just use the higher rate until a landowner protests. So the change is causing some problems for farmers, too.

Otherwise, the issue is open to debate, and we'd like to report that Congress had one. It didn't, though.

The secrecy proposal never went through hearings. Citizens had no chance to protest or complain or praise the proposal. Lobbyists for most groups never heard it was coming. It bypassed the normal legislative process.

Then when the compromise Farm Bill came

back to the floor, the train was a rollin' and no one wanted to be in the way. No floor debate. No notice, really, of this small provision in among hundreds of pages.

How did this happen when Congress has a system for handling legislation, you ask?

Well, Congress does have a system. It's full of loopholes. Many state legislatures work the same way, Kansas among them. Whole bills can be inserted into another law at the conference stage with little or no notice, no debate, no chance for opposition.

It's bad government, bad lawmaking, but it happens all the time. The system is short-circuited and the citizens are cheated.

To make matters worse, our own Rep. Jerry Moran reportedly was on this conference committee. He has yet to make any statement on the issue, that we know of.

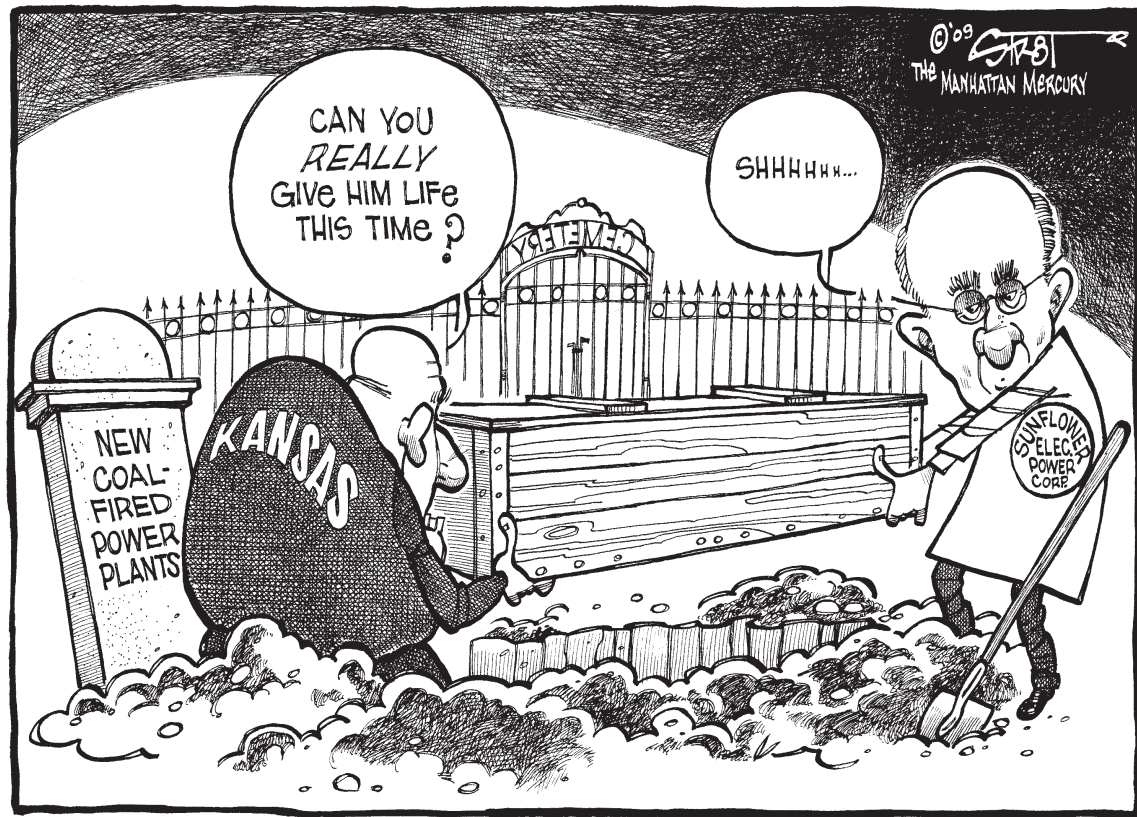
This is the same kind of poor lawmaking that got Kansas strict requirements for carnival inspections that could put our home-owned carnivals out of business. There was no debate on that bill, either; no chance to tell why it could be a disaster for rural Kansas.

Our legislative process — state and federal — is broken. It will be flawed until legislators give up this awful loophole of theirs and pass rules that make all proposals go through the committee process, public hearings and a chance for opponents to speak.

In a democracy such as ours, where the people are supposed to be partners in government, that's just the way it should be.

We'd like to see our Congressman leading the charge. What about it, Mr. Moran?

— Steve Haynes



Kids keep mom on right road

You get lost once or twice, sink up to your hubcaps in mud and have to call for help and your children think you can't get where you're going without a global positioning device.

Oh, they warned me. That, they said, was what they would get us for Christmas because mother was not to be trusted out on the road by herself.

Hey, I'll have them know, I've been out on the road by myself since I was 16 and I've only gotten lost once or twice a year since then. (Oh dear, that is a lot, isn't it?)

Still, I know how to go around a block to get back on the right track. One time, that block was several counties square, but hey, that was in Colorado, and they don't just have roads over every mountain out there.

So, it wasn't with any great surprise when Steve unwrapped the little Garmin on Christmas morning.

The girls figured that it would go in my car — and it probably will some day.

However, right now their father has a new toy and is he having a ball with it. He punched in how to get from our house to the *Colby Free Press* office. He's been going over to that office every day for four or



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
c.haynes@nwkanssas.com

five months. Now he has to have a mouthy little machine to tell him how to get there.

He soon turned off the sound. That woman in the machine kept telling him to turn right, and she has a real nasty way of saying it after about the fifth time. Steve may ask for directions but, he doesn't necessarily take them.

We went to Lawrence over the weekend, and Steve put in our son's address. Since he lives on 21st Terrace, not exactly the middle of town, I always have a hard time finding the place, and the Garmin gave us all the right turns and got us there right when it said we were supposed to arrive.

The last time I went to see my son on my own, I drove right past the turn to his house as he stood out in the yard, watching me go by. If I don't toss that pushy little machine out the window, it may come in handy yet.

Steve says that I have to use it next time I leave town, and he's probably right. My son was laughing so hard when I got back to his house, he was almost in tears.

My biggest complaint about all these time-saving things is the time it takes to figure them out. I like my devices simple: Turn it on, and it works.

That is one of the reasons my cell phone doesn't take pictures, send e-mail or tell me the time. I just want something that rings. I answer. I talk. I hang up.

When oldest daughter saw my cell phone last month, she smiled and noted that she hadn't seen a cell phone that big that didn't do anything but make calls in years.

Well, maybe I should look for a newer phone.

Maybe I'll turn the Garmin's voice back on, and the two of them can talk to each other — and leave me alone.

Tax stuff takes over table

As per last week's column, I have been working on our first annual newsletter. It is completed and, with a minimal amount of editing, all on one page. The big push now will be to get the letters all addressed and mailed.

Keep your fingers crossed that I don't lose them in the chaos of tax preparation. It's income tax time again, and bank statements, receipts and ledger books have taken over the table. We still do our bookkeeping the old-fashioned way: by hand.

Television news shows have been covering the release of the additional \$350 billion of bail-out money. That's billion with a "B."

Right now, I don't even remember if it's car manufacturers, banks or mortgage companies that the government is bailing out. But a thought crossed my mind: why not "bail out" every man, woman and child in America by splitting the money up among them.

I did an on-line inquiry and found out there are 303,824,650 people in the United States. Divide \$350,000,000,000 by the number of people and everyone would receive \$1,151.98.

Not a huge stimulus package, but car manufacturers would benefit, mortgage companies would benefit and banks would benefit. Some people might even save a little.

Why doesn't George call and ask



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
cplotts@nwkanssas.com

me these things? It's so simple.

- ob -

Jim is working on a new house and has recruited me to do clean up and hang insulation. It's been itchy, but the insulation is almost done. Clean up, however, is never ending.

As soon as I get floors swept, somebody cuts a piece of lumber or sheet rock and dust goes everywhere. At least it's job security.

So, until that check comes in the mail, I guess we better keep our jobs.

Honor Roll

Welcome and thanks to these recent subscribers of *The Oberlin Herald*:

Myron Johnson, Spokane, Wash.; Thomas Miller, Gold Canyon, Ariz.; Robert Pavlicek, Memphis, Tenn.

Colorado: Jerry Fear, Aurora; Nebraska: Leo Hartman, Danbury; Mrs. Doris Crosley, Arapahoe.

Kansas: Paul and Barb Marak, Salina; Ron Juenemann, Phillipsburg; Carolyn Lunsford, Easton; Carl Neff, Norton; Earle Niermeier, Atwood; Mary Anderson, Osborne; Mr. and Mrs. James Ross, Weir; Ellen Osborne, Wichita.

Jennings: Gary Gillum.

Norcatour: Scott Hartzog
Selden: Eleanor Rogers.
Oberlin: Stuart Euhus, Gary Juenemann, Mrs. Evelyn Meitl, John Juenemann, Karon Scott, Darrell Hickert, John Simonsson, Jay Anderson, Terry Rush, Alberta Ritter, Calvin Ufford, Dorothy Hunt, Eunice Martin.



Holiday lights cease to shine

The Christmas lights are off, the extension cords rolled and put away until summer. But it wasn't easy, I'll tell you.

Cynthia never wants to turn the holiday lights off.

I told her this year, they could stay until the weekend after Epiphany. Epiphany was last Tuesday — we missed church — and that meant the lights went off on Sunday.

She agreed. Sullenly, but she agreed.

So after we napped Sunday — twice in her case — I went out to the yard and unplugged all the orange extension cords. That's the most important thing to me at this point: once they're unplugged, the lights are disabled. Then I can roll the cords up and they won't be hidden by a blizzard, only to reappear in May.

Then I disconnected the electric-eye box that turns the outdoor lights on at dusk and off at daybreak. We've used that for several years to save money, though in December, there's not much daylight for the lights to be off during. Still, I figure I saved some money.

Cynthia finally came out and, a little groggy from the second nap, started pulling colored lights off the bushes. She did this not exactly cheerfully, but she didn't complain too much.

I rolled the extensions and hauled them to the garage, then pulled lights off the "little" cedar tree by the house. We call it the little cedar because it was only a foot tall when we discovered it growing beside the old garage a few years ago.

The contractor who tore the garage down put it in a bucket, and we planted it where it would screen the



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
s.haynes@nwkanssas.com

back yard some day. That was about 15 feet ago.

Working lights on a cedar can be a little prickly, but it sure smells good.

By that time, Cynthia had cleaned up the front bushes and was taking those lights indoors. I moved her bird-feeder stand away from the house — she thought it was too close to the windows to attract any birds — and she went to get the white lights off the aspen tree.

While refilling the bird feeders, she mentioned that we'd need a ladder to get the top string of icicle lights out of the aspen. I decided we'd get those when we got back from walking the dog.

Walking the dog is kind of a euphemism around there, by the way. We walk; the dog trots, canters, leaps, bounds, jumps and rolls. While we were out, I figured out how to hook the light string out of the top of the aspen with an edger tool. Safer than a ladder at our age, I figured.

And so it was that at sunset, I was pulling icicle lights out of the last tree and Cynthia was rolling them up and storing them for the year.

She's already started putting the wreaths and Santas inside away. That just leaves a few dozen little trees and angels scattered around, plus the Christmas cards.

Oh, and the big tree in the living room and the little one upstairs. I told her those'd have to go before vacation. Having a lighted tree in the living room in March would be a little too weird.

She said, what if we just unplug them and put them away when we get back?

That just leaves the strand of lights on the cedar chest in the dining room. I figure I'll unplug them next weekend.

As long as no red and pink lights appear in the yard for Valentine's Day, I'll have this thing under control until fall. Addiction is a terrible thing.

From the Bible

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:

And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.
John 2:1-2

THE OBERLIN HERALD

Serving Oberlin and Decatur County since 1879

USPS 401-600

Phone: (785) 475-2206 Fax (785) 475-2800

170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749-2243

E-mail: oberlinherald@nwkanssas.com

Published each Wednesday by Haynes Publishing Co., 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749. Periodicals postage paid at Oberlin, Kan. 67749.

Steve and Cynthia Haynes, publishers
Official newspaper of Oberlin, Jennings, Norcatour, 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, \$33 (tax included) in Decatur, Norton, Rawlins, Sheridan, Thomas and Red Willow counties; \$38 (tax included) elsewhere in Kansas; \$42 elsewhere in the U.S. Foreign subscriptions, \$50-\$250 (in US dollars only) 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.

Nor'West Newspapers

STAFF

Steve Haynes editor
Kimberly Davis managing editor
Mary Lou Olson society editor
Leslie Nolette proofreader/copy editor
Carolyn Kelley-Plotts columnist
Cynthia Haynes business manager
David Bergling advertising manager
Pat Cozad want ads/circulation
Karla Jones advertising production
Joan Betts historian



Owners say they're still in business

To the Editor:

According to rumors around town, we have sold our business, Hansen Plumbing Inc., in Oberlin and Atwood.

No, we have not sold to anyone. We have no agreement or contract and worst of all, no money.

We've also heard we are asking \$500,000. Whew! We only wish. We are asking \$150,000, which includes a full inventory in the Atwood and Oberlin stores. Plus a back hoe, back-hoe trailer and truck, enclosed sheet-metal trailer, two

trenchers, one trencher trailer, four pick-ups, sewer machines, tools and the building at 118 E. Commercial in Oberlin.

Yes, we have bought a house in North Platte, Neb., to be close to our family. We do have plans to move there sometime soon. For anyone wanting to stop by, we are at 210 Cherokee Road — if you can ever

catch us at home.

If you have any further questions or concerns, please stop by our store at 118 E. Commercial and we will be happy to visit with you.

Again, we have not sold our business!

Marvin and Bee Hansen
Oberlin