

# Fix for high gas prices is opening up more wells

While traveling across Kansas for 13 more town hall meetings during the past three weeks, I heard a myriad of concerns and ideas from constituents. One issue that arose in places like Sharon Springs, Colby and elsewhere was the concern about rising gas prices.

The high cost of gasoline hits Kansans who just need to get from point A to point B, to take their kids to school and to operate their farm or other business. The high costs are also placing a tremendous burden on business people, who have to charge consumers more. But Kansans aren't looking for another 1970s approach demanding we consume less energy by doing fewer things—they are looking for answers that do not disrupt their ways of life.

What some environmentalist elite just don't get is that in Kansas, there is no alternative to driving. There is no other way to get from point A to point B but with a car. There is no way to transport western Kansas products to market but by truck or train. Therefore, the solution is more energy, not less.

Increasing production not only lowers prices, but also creates jobs, helps families trying to make ends meet and enhances national security by reducing our dependence on foreign sources.

High gas prices are a matter of supply and demand. When Washington chokes the supply, costs go up. When Washington empowers drillers to add to the supply, costs go down.

This week, I joined some of my colleagues in the Republican Study



**On the Potomac**  
By Rep. Tim Huelskamp  
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Committee in cosponsoring the Consumer Relief for Pain at the Pump Act. This bill adds to production by offering short-term solutions for dealing with high prices of gasoline now and long-term solutions for improving the energy marketplace in the years to come.

First, it repeals the President's "permatorium" on drilling on the outer continental shelf, which includes the Gulf of Mexico. Though the President has officially lifted the ban on drilling imposed after the Deepwater Horizon explosion last spring, the administration has effectively maintained that ban by delaying permits for new leases. If the President truly cares about reducing unemployment, then stalling drilling permits and effectively killing tens of thousands of jobs is not the answer.

Second, this bill repeals the "Wild Lands Policy" that permits the Department of the Interior to stop energy development in America. Not only does it lift this authority from the department, but it also streamlines the bureaucratic process and establishes a judicial review process for permitting procedures. Trial lawyers and special interests are al-

lowed to exploit the current system, harming consumers.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, this bill releases the regulatory grip of the Environmental Protection Administration on America's energy production. Through this legislation, the agency would be barred from imposing regulations in the name of global warming without Congressional consent. Unelected bureaucrats have been handed too much power over our energy policy. Decisions over energy policy should rest with those who can be held accountable by the voters.

This bill is a step toward reducing gas prices. Even more importantly, it is a part of a comprehensive, all-of-the-above energy strategy that is about meeting our needs and preparing for the future. It also recognizes that we are not going to transform the way we consume energy any time soon. Instead, with less regulation and more production, we have a real solution to high energy prices.

Rep. Tim Huelskamp of Fowler represents the 1st Congressional District of Kansas.

# State will have to face up to need to consolidate schools

When Kansas was admitted to statehood in 1861, we already had 200 school districts "up and running" — mostly in eastern Kansas.

Each elementary school was its own district, governed by a five-member board of education. By the end of the 1800s, there were more than 9,000 school districts in Kansas. New high schools, each also with a school board, created a mesh of overlapping districts.

In 1901, the Kansas Legislature authorized the first school consolidation, a voluntary process. Districts could vote to unify and the state would pay for the transportation of students. Elected county superintendents had authority to combine adjoining districts with less than five students each.

After World War II, the Kansas Legislature forced reorganization of the school districts in an attempt to provide equity in financing. Over 8,000 elementary districts merged to less than 5,000 before the law was ruled unconstitutional in 1947.

In the late 1950s, the Kansas Legislature contracted with the University of Minnesota to survey Kansas schools. There were now about 2,800 school districts, many still operating one or two-room schools in rural areas. Only 238 offered the full range of grades, kindergarten through high school.

The study recommended each school district have 1,200 students in the 13 grades and be centered on a county. But many rural counties lacked that number, and the Legislature allowed other plans to be submitted. At the time, the state provided 22 percent of district budgets, local taxes 74 percent and the federal money just 3 percent.

Kansas's next unification law was in 1963. Each county formed a planning commission, except Johnson County got two. Instructions were

to form one or more school districts per county, each with 200 or more square miles of territory and at least \$2 million in property valuation.

A statewide vote approved the recommendation of 311 unified schools districts. At this same time, the position of state superintendent was eliminated and our current 10-member elected state Board of Education was created. It in turn hires a commissioner of education to lead the department.

By 2002, the Legislature had commissioned a \$200,000 study from Augenblick and Myers. The firm found Kansas has 1 percent of the nation's pupils, 1.6 percent of the nation's schools and 2.1 percent of the nation's school districts. They found districts that are too large, such as Wichita and Shawnee Mission, but also 50 school districts that were too small. They recommended options dropping the number of districts to either 284 or 255. At the same time, two Kansas superintendents, Ken Kennedy at Pratt and Sharol Little at Manhattan, used a model similar to regional hospitals and clinics, to propose consolidating into a few regional school districts. Neither plan was adopted by the Legislature.

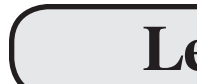
These last few years have seen the steady drumbeat of rural school consolidation (from 303 to now 293) as smaller schools lose students and can no longer afford to provide a full curriculum. By statute, schools that

consolidate get to keep their higher pre-consolidation funding for several years — a provision intended as an incentive to consolidate. Ironically, this also prevents any immediate savings: if we had known the 2008 economic crisis was coming, major school consolidation earlier in the decade would have helped.

With no bold leadership, and a system that makes "consolidation" political suicide, we have seen the gradual forced consolidation of small rural school districts by bankruptcy. The resulting gerrymandered districts will lack the logic of a larger intelligent plan. The agonizingly slow process prevents any substantial savings.

Even with proposed tax incentives for out-of-state folks to move to rural Kansas, we cannot expect to turn around this population shift, especially with young families with schoolchildren. Consolidation is inevitable and should center around school quality, recognizing that some loss of community identity when high schools are merged is inevitable.

If only there was a consolidation czar that everyone could trust, who could build an acceptable consensus, district by consolidated district. But short of such a "Jimmy Stewart" figure, Kansas is destined to slouch along in perpetual indecision and political timidity.



**Education Frontlines**  
By John Richard Schrock

# Reader praises our proofreader

To the Editor:  
I think the editorials are good in *The Oberlin Herald* and reflect my opinions most of the time. I appreciate that the editor is one of the best, and has a first-class paper.

Some of the papers I have been reading do not appear to be proofread. They contain punctuation and word-usage errors that make me believe the editors weren't taught

proper grammar and punctuation.

We older citizens had good training in such matters. I remember diagram exercises at the blackboard in eighth grade, learning phrasing and where to put commas, etc. The comma seems to be a problem for

some writers.

I also enjoy reading about what the students are doing at school and their accomplishments.

Joan Hall Davison  
DCHS Class of 1945  
Beatrice, Neb.

## 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.)

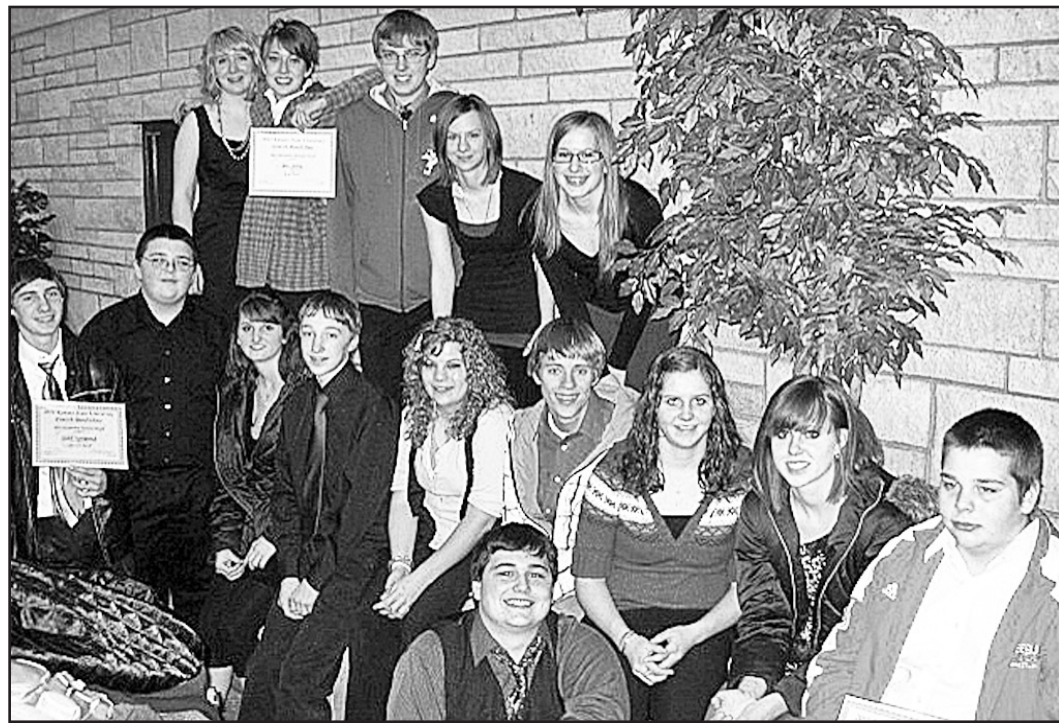
We do run wedding and engagement pictures and "mug" shots with stories and obituaries, when they are provided to us. Please remember that we need a clear, sharp picture. Dark or fuzzy prints will not work.

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