

## Is federal government really broken? Yes, No

Is our federal government really broken? Maybe, maybe not.

Former Sen. Bob Dole argues that the Senate needs more co-operation and more civility, less name-calling and partisan hardball.

In his day, to some extent, we had that, and the system worked a little better on routine bills like transportation and budgets. Today, every bill seems to be a battle, every move political.

It's not that the parties shouldn't look out for their own interests, and especially, their beliefs. But the hard liners on both sides tend to forget that the vast majority of Americans sit somewhere in the middle.

Americans believe in compromise, in getting along, in working things out. The great majority do not want either the ultra-left-wing agenda of the Obama administration nor the far-right destination of the ill-defined "tea party" movement. While both visions are helpful in shaping our debate, neither is likely to prevail.

Some argue that slow government is not necessarily bad. They say the founders, including both Hamilton and Jefferson, intended the system to move slowly lest it lay an egg. That's not a bad argument, and 20 to 30 years ago, you could see things that way.

Today, when the budget seldom is approved until we are well into the new fiscal year, and when many parts of the government move along with only "continuing resolutions" to authorize spending at last year's levels, their appropriations tied up in hopeless wrangling, you might not.

Careful deliberation and gridlock are not quite the same thing.

Yet, when the Democrats were in charge and "got things done," they passed a 2,000-page health care bill that many still have not read. The Department of Health and Human Services continues to issue regulations which, if anything, make things worse.

"Doing something" often is not the answer, especially when no one understands what they've done.

Congressional practices, from holding up judicial appointments to endless delays, do not serve the nation. Both parties have been guilty, and both must change.

People don't want burdensome regulations, but often they push for the government to "make things better," and the end result is more regulations, more government control. That is almost never good.

Americans tend to expect far too much from government. They expect the president to fix the economy, create jobs and make us safe, when in fact he can't do much. In short, we expect a miracle worker, candidates cater to us, and then we're disappointed.

The parties need to get together and make government work, but in a commonsense way. That could start tomorrow, or even after the 2012 elections, but it needs to start soon.

Government shutdowns, a shortage of judges and endless delays do not bespeak good government. Neither do huge bills that no one understands, or reams and reams of stifling regulations.

The change that's needed is not in our laws or, for the most part, in what government does. It's in the lack of responsibility shown by our "broken" system and the endless gridlock. Those can, and should, stop. — Steve Haynes

## A whole day off? Not likely

We don't take an entire day off very often, but we did last weekend. And you know what? We kinda liked it.

When I heard about the local museum's tour of the Great Western Cattle Trail, I was at the top of the ticket-buyers' list. Jim had been pouring over every detail in his copy, and I knew he would enjoy the tour.

We packed onto the school buses with the excitement of second graders on a field trip. Our tour guides shared little-known facts about the trail and about the 1878 Cheyenne Indian raid in Decatur County that left 18 men dead.

These two events, the cattle drives and the Indian raid, didn't just cross paths; they often used the same trail. The Indians followed the trail left by the thousands and thousands of cattle herded north through Kansas.

We soaked up every detail on the tour and were almost sorry to see it end. I was doing double duty as a reporter on the tour, and I wanted to see the pictures I had taken, so we stopped by the newspaper office and I downloaded them off my camera.

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We were about to leave town when I saw what was playing at the cinema, the movie "The Help".

"Oh," I squealed, "I re-e-e-ally want to see that movie."

Jim said, "Well then, why don't



### Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts  
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we just stay in town and go see it."

We did a drive-through banking drop and then had a nice restaurant meal before heading to the theater.

The theater was almost full when we settled into our seats. I still get a kick out of it when the lights go down and the music comes up. I'm not going to spoil it for you by telling you about the movie. I'm just going to say that we, out here in white-bread America western Kansas, don't have a clue as to the cultural differences between black servants and their often mean-spirited and prejudiced employers.

There were some teenagers in the audience, and I would have loved to have interviewed them following the movie for their perspective. In their lifetime, they've never known "Whites Only" water fountains, blacks having to ride in the back of the bus or all-white professional baseball, basketball and football teams.

A black president is probably the first president they will remember as adults. Schools, sports and society

are totally integrated. It's not perfect yet, but in just my lifetime, we have come so far.

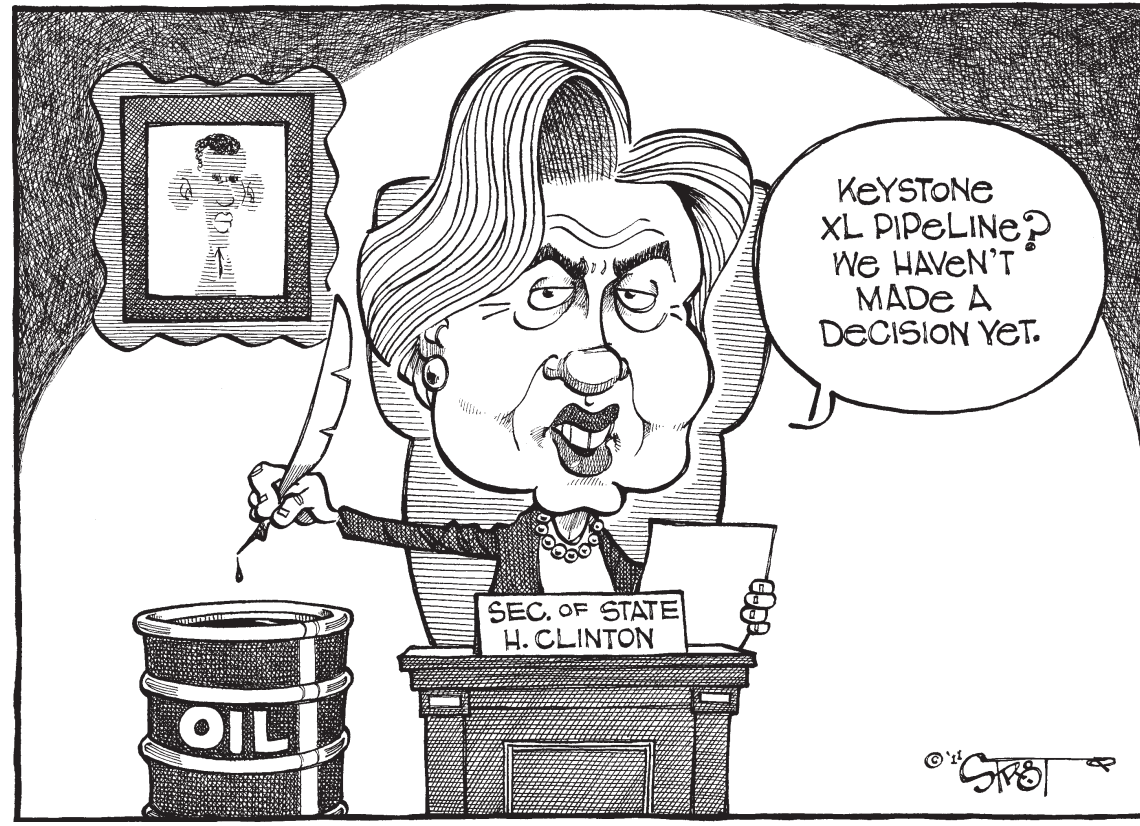
It was a great movie, and now I want to read the book. However, I'm trying to hold out on buying the book until I can get it on a Kindle.

That is at the top of my Christmas wish list. I think Santa may get one so that Jim and I both can enjoy it.

### From the Bible

Jesus saith unto them, "Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."

- Matthew 21:42-43



## Newspapers remain No. 1

Despite all the doomsayers out there writing obituaries for the nation's newspaper industry, 150 million Americans — two out of three adults — read a local newspaper last week.

Newspaper Association of America research from 2011 by Scarborough USA indicates almost 70 percent of your neighbors read either a printed newspaper or its online counterpart within the past seven days.

How could that be? Well, it's because newspapers still represent the most trusted source of news in America. I know that's hard to believe when you hear the "mainstream media" criticized at every turn on cable television.

But it's true. When citizens want to get the facts, they turn to their newspaper. This is National Newspaper Week, and this year's theme, "Newspapers — Your No. 1 Source for Local News," underscores the importance of the nation's newspapers in the daily lives of its citizens.

Newspapers certainly have their competitors out there: a hundred million websites, hundreds of thousands of bloggers, Facebook, Twitter, billboards, radio and television. And that competition is



### Opinion

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formidable.

But where does the vast majority of the "authoritative" news coverage originate that other outlets utilize? Simple... the nation's daily and weekly newspapers.

If print is dead, then why do more than 7,000 weekly and 1,400 daily newspapers still open their doors every day and report what is happening in their communities?

Because they take seriously the importance of local news. They know those who plunk down their hard-earned cash want their newspaper to cover those events that are unique to each community.

Every day, newspapers in our communities cover the big stories and the routine as well. Editors take to heart the newspaper's role as the most comprehensive source of a community's historical record, so births, deaths, weddings, engage-

ments, business accomplishments, crime, courts, real-estate transactions and a myriad of other day-to-day news events are covered along with important government decisions that affect our lives.

Newspapers are the No. 1 source of local news in every city and county in America, because we show up each and every day and cover those stories. It's what our readers have come to expect.

And it's what we do better than any other news source in America.

Doug Ansteatt is executive director of the Kansas Press Association and president of the Newspaper Association Managers, representing association managers nationwide. As publisher of the Newton Kansan, and later at the Topeka Capital Journal, he was an award-winning editorial writer.

## This is one movie not to miss

If you haven't seen the movie "The Help," now showing at the Sunflower Cinema, do yourself a favor and do it this weekend.

It may well be the best movie to play Oberlin in the last two decades. It's not perfect, but it's good enough to move you.

It's the story of a young woman just out of the University of Mississippi in 1963. Skeeter wants to be a writer. She knows she can't live the same life as the women she grew up with, now up-and-coming Junior Leaguers in Jackson, Miss.

She needs experience to get a job in publishing, and she settles on writing the stories of the colored maids she knows. It's not easy to get anyone to trust her, or to take the project seriously. But, of course, it happens.

Along the way, you'll laugh, cry and feel the pain and the fear of the women in the film, white and black. The acting ranges from so-so to brilliant. At times, these young southern matrons appear to be nothing more than caricatures, vacuous, bubbly Barbies with Mississippi accents, nasty attitudes and empty brains.

Real life is a lot more complex, of course. I know some of these southern women, the ones who grew up in the '60s and their daughters. There's a lot more to them than the film shows.

But the fear, the prejudice — a central theme of the movie is one Junior Leaguer's drive to require separate, outside bathrooms for all black maids — were and are real.

But of course, we know how things turn out. The country changes, all that is left behind. The lives of those involved were complex, in-



### Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes  
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volving many good and courageous actions by those of both races.

For those who lived through those times, the attitudes are all too real. Talking later, Cynthia and I turned to our experience in 1980, when our house in Kansas City, Kansas, sold to blacks. Neighbors we thought of as friends, we learned later, led a boycott of our going-away party. (The ringleader was a prominent Junior Leaguer, as well.)

Others we barely know came to make a statement of support. We found out, as they say, who our friends were. It was a lesson for a couple of small-town Kansas kids who hadn't grown up with much of an idea of segregation.

As much as anything, the movie is a measure of how much the country has changed since 1963. It's marked by two pivotal events, the shooting of civil rights leader Medgar Evers in Jackson that year and the shooting of President John F. Kennedy.

Both seem so far in the past, given the changes since, but we know the prejudice and hatred that killed both men remains somewhere under the surface.

We live in a better world, but not a perfect one.

"The Help" includes some fine performances, including Viola Da-

vis as Aibileen, the maid who first agrees to tell her tales. She pretty much carries the film. Emma Stone is understated as Skeeter, and Bryce Dallas Howard arch as the segregationist Junior Leaguer Hilly.

Two fine performances in minor roles reminded me that we're all getting older: Cicely Tyson as a frail older maid who raised Skeeter and her siblings, and Sissy Spacek as Hilly's forgetful but insightful mom. Both are way beyond playing the ingenue, I guess.

As a period piece, it's nearly flawless, the buses and cars properly 1950s, the hairdos and dress early '60s to a "T." The Mississippi accents are a little light, perhaps, and now then a figure of speech is off: If you've been to the South, you know no one would offer you a "cola" or a "Coca-Cola," but a Coke. In the South, that's the same as saying a "soda" or a "pop" would be here.

I know, we don't often cater to movie reviews, but it's not often we get a movie of this calibre. "The Help" should be up for Picture of the Year, but that's not the point: You'll be entertained, and you'll be moved.

## THE OBERLIN HERALD

Serving Oberlin and Decatur County since 1879

USPS 401-600

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

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  
Kimberly Davis, assistant publisher

Official newspaper of Oberlin, Jennings, Norcat, 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, \$38 (tax included) in Decatur, Norton, Rawlins, Sheridan, Thomas and Red Willow counties; \$42 (tax included) elsewhere in Kansas; \$48 elsewhere in the U.S. Foreign subscriptions, \$50-\$250 (in U.S. 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.

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