

Helpful laws aren't so helpful in rural areas

It's fashionable for politicians to say they care about rural America. It's fashionable for politicians to say they are going to do something for rural America.

But in truth, hardly anyone in Washington or Topeka knows what goes on out here. There are not very many of *us* any more, and *they* have never been here.

Washington gives a nod to rural America now and then, mostly when the Farm Bill is up. But remember, the Department of Agriculture is more about welfare and cities these days than it is about farming.

But in Washington, they pass laws all the time, one-size-fits-all laws that might work in cities (though it's doubtful) and just mess things up in rural areas.

Thus we have the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, which drives up the price of health care, destroys our sense of community and makes everyone afraid.

We get the No Child Left Behind Act, which puts the federal government squarely in the middle of every classroom, puts good teachers in fear for their jobs and makes it next to impossible for small schools — most of which do a wonderful job of educating kids — to meet "standards."

And now we have the Helping America Vote Act, passed after the ballot-counting fiasco in Florida four years ago.

All of these things sound, on the surface, like reasonable ideas. The health insurance law was aimed at allowing people to change jobs without losing their insurance coverage. No Child Left Behind aims to improve education, but teachers bogged down in its tentacles call it No Child Left Untested.

The voting act struck out at some real problems, but grew to include comprehensive federal standards which just won't fit rural America. It will centralize voting and may well mean the end of democracy in small towns all over the country.

Naw, *they* wouldn't do that.

Sure. *They're* from the government. *They're* here to help.

Helping America Vote may have started out as a good idea, but that was before all the special interests and pressure groups got a hold of it. As passed, it requires all voting places to be in buildings which meet standards of the Americans With Disabilities Act. All polling places must have fancy new touch-screen voting devices to help handicapped people vote.

Neither requirement has much to do with the problem the law started out to solve, but now that there are federal standards, they have to be politically correct.

But there are no ADA-compliant buildings in most small towns. And rural counties can't afford more than one of those touch-screen computers, which may cost \$10,000 each and haven't really been invented yet.

The government may put up some money to buy them and the state may put up some money, though it has none. And the counties may just get stuck with the bill. No one has *any* money to make 80-year-old buildings accessible.

The result: There will never be another local election in most smaller towns across rural Kansas. All polls will be in the county seat. If you can't drive in, you'll have to vote an advance ballot by mail.

So a citizen of Jennings or Almena or Norcatur, to vote in a city election, will have to drive 20 miles to another city. It's already happened in Sherman County, where citizens of Kanorado have to drive to Goodland to vote in their own elections.

How long will city government survive in small towns after this? Not long, we'd wager.

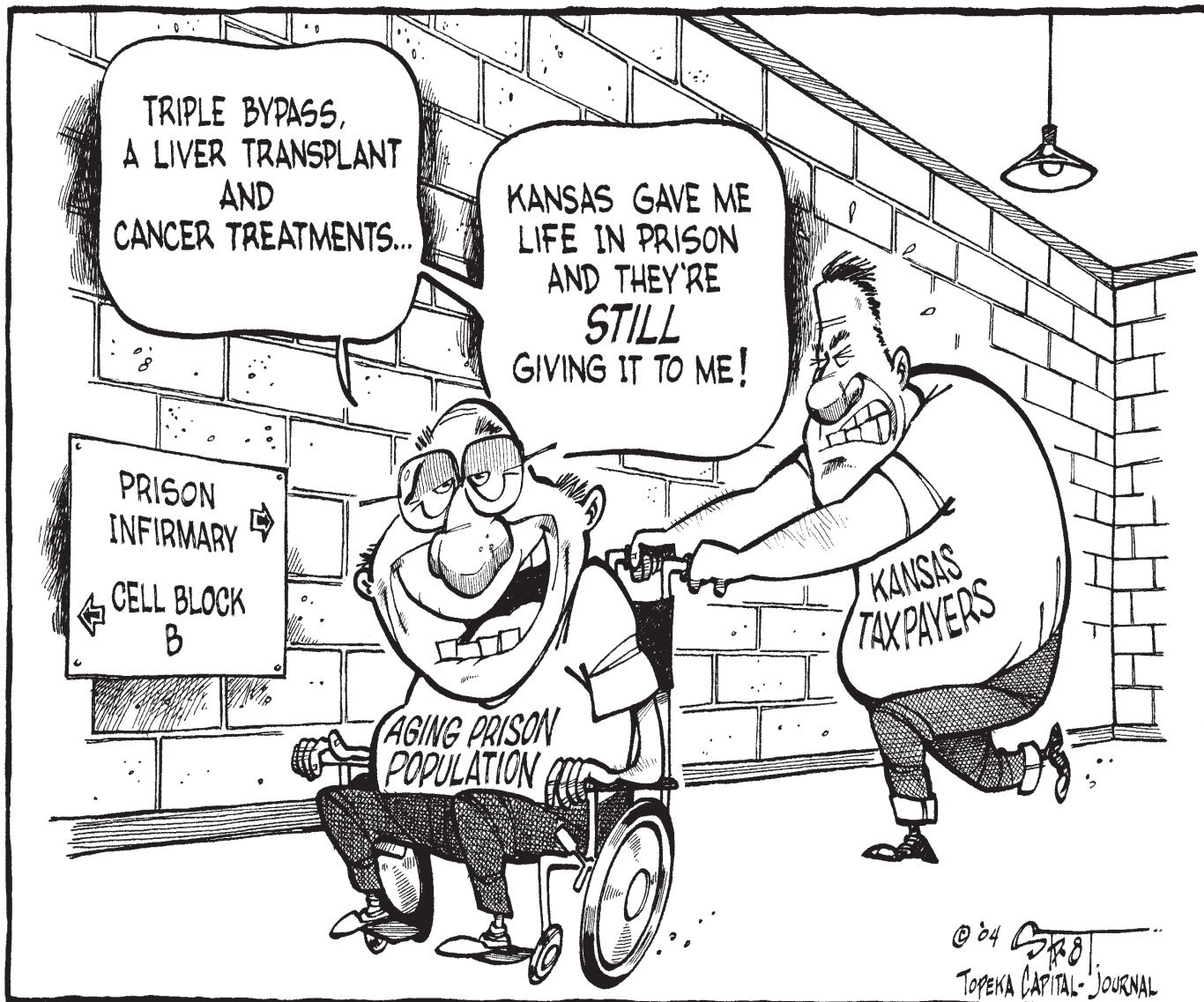
And the scary thing is, state and county officials have rolled over and just accepted this dictate from Washington. Not one county so far has said, "Take your fancy machines and your federal money and just stick 'em."

No state has stood up and said, "Our small towns are important, too, and we don't want to see them die."

Heck, in Topeka and Washington, no one knows where these towns are, though some may have been raised in one, and worse, no one cares much what happens to them.

It's just collateral damage to a good idea gone wrong.

— Steve Haynes



Fish tales are a big part of life

I heard a student saying that their gold fish had died and it reminded me of the beautiful goldfish that were in our cattle tank when I was young.

The cattle would eat their grain and then go to the water tank to drink and of course enough grain would fall from their mouths to feed the fish. These goldfish would grow to considerable length and they also had babies, so we had small gold fish in the tank also.

At one time, when I was quite young, I was allowed to bring one of the medium-sized fish into a bowl in the house.

I was good at feeding it and cleaning the bowl from time to time. One time after the fish had grown to be quite large, I was cleaning the bowl and it was cold, so the water was extremely cold and so to be "good" to the fish I put in warm to hot water, thinking the fish would like a hot

Memories Sonya Montgomery



bath.

Well, a short time later, I went to take a look at the fish and it was at the top of the water, very lifeless.

My mother told me what she thought the problem was — that the hot water did not have as much oxygen in it and the fish had died of suffocation.

Well, I didn't take that for an answer and feeling very badly, I placed the fish in cold water and began to massage it to

help it start breathing again.

When it started swimming around, I thought I had saved the fishes life, but it may just have been the cooler water.

Anyway, the fish went on to live a very long life after that.

My oldest son had a large aquarium in his room, but he had more exciting and beautiful fish and they took more care, but he certainly enjoyed them for a number of years while he was growing up.

In fact, the aquarium went to medical school with him and for years after that.

I was in a doctor's office in Wichita a few years ago where they had salt water fish and, the colors and shapes of those fish were awesome. Every color and hue. I could spend a lot of time watching those beautiful creatures.

If the bottom of the ocean looks like that; it must be gorgeous.

Little towns surpass the big with ease

I have an elderly cousin. She lives alone, trying to maintain a house and yard, which have become too large. Many of her friends have left their homes and relocated.

She still drives, but the Denver traffic is becoming burdensome.

Her true joys are visiting her sister in California twice a year and anticipating her sister's visits. She would love to have an apartment but they are all high-rises and very costly.

When considering her dilemma I couldn't help but think how fortunate we are here "in the middle of nowhere".

Some say how hard it is to get "out of Norton." Well, getting to the Denver airport from anywhere inside Denver is no easy task.

Last time our son from Tokyo was here he flew out of the McCook airport and vowed to never again be picked up or depart from Denver. McCook was an easy,

Phase II Mary Kay Woodyard



hassle-free and much less time-consuming departure.

Once in Denver he could connect with anyplace and we didn't have to try to remember where we parked our car.

As I sat at my desk last week I watched the medical helicopter come in and thought how in many ways we have become a triage unit.

Our local medical staff knows what they can and can't do, and they know where and when to send a patient for more intensive treatment.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR:

DSNWK thanks local community for their support

Dear Editor,
I want to thank you, *The Norton Telegram*, and especially the citizens of Norton and Norton County for the great support shown during the past few months pertaining to the funding cuts of the ICF/MR program across the state but especially to those residing here in Norton. The letter writing campaign was a success as it got the Governor's and the legislators attention to the problem of having these cuts made and how it would affect the services and lives of those most in need in this community. Thanks to each one who took time to write. There were several who talked personally to Gov. Sebelius and various senators and representatives. Thank you for your special attention to this issue.

We received word from Jim Blume, Tuesday, that funds had been reinstated for the ICF/MR programs throughout the

state of Kansas. The current fiscal budget for '04 and the future budget for '05 will remain the same as the '03 fiscal budget, which was less than it needed to be, but at least '04 and '05's fiscal budgets won't be less. The budgets for future years will need to be addressed for increases as the cost of living continues to rise.

On behalf of the 12 persons served here

in Norton, thank you Norton community and other entities who worked so hard to bring to light the issues affecting these people needing assistance to continue to live in this community.

With much appreciation and thanks,
Sondra Graham
DSNWK - Norton

WRITE:

The Norton Telegram encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of public interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise.

We do not publish form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area. Thank-yous should be submitted to the Want Ad desk.

Letters will not be censored, but will be read and edited for form and style, clarity, length and legality. We will not publish attacks on private individuals or businesses which do not pertain to a public issue.

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