

## Consolidation should not be forced

The "C" word. Consolidation. It's going to be the Big Thing over the next few years in Kansas, but don't hold your breath. There's another "C" word — Change — and people don't much like it. Nonetheless, we'll be forced to change as the world around us pushes on into the 21st Century. Consolidation of government units will be part of that, just as consolidation has changed farming, business and our economy while we weren't watching. Right now, consolidation is next to impossible for Kansas cities, counties and local governments. The state has nearly a thousand local units, way too many by anybody's standards, but state law does not allow them to consolidate easily. Wyandotte County had to go to the Legislature to accomplish a city-county consolidation, one of only 33 in the nation. That's wrong. Most of our counties cling to outdated township governments.

If the Legislature does anything, it ought to write clear laws allowing local people to make decisions on consolidating whatever they want. Counties should be allowed to consolidate. Cities and counties should be able to merge. Local government should be able to cooperate easily on any function they choose, all without "permission" from the Legislature.

The boys and girls in Topeka, after all, have more important things to worry about than whether Oberlin and Decatur County want to consolidate dispatching or law enforcement or road crews.

Today, only schools have a clear path to consolidation, and it's neither easy nor popular. Only a couple of districts, including neighboring Rawlins County, have consolidated since the mass school mergers of the 1960s.

That era gave consolidation a bad name in Kansas because many small towns felt it was crammed down their throats by the state. Thousands of small school districts disappeared in just a few years, and many towns died with them.

Let's hope that's not a model for future consolidation. Let's hope whatever comes is positive and voluntary. Let's hope we see consolidation because people want better government, not because somebody in Topeka says so.

We think that's the future. A few Kansas counties may give up the ghost, but not many. A few school districts will throw in the towel, but only because their population has left them.

Most of us want our county seat nearby and our school across the town, not across the state. For the most part, we can afford to pay the price.

But there is no magic in having a two-man sheriff's department and a three-man police department. Only turf battles separate those departments in most rural counties.

And there's no reason for having city and county road crews when one might do. Many counties already have a unified dispatch office. There's lots of room for consolidation. We suspect there's more likelihood of local consolidations — sheriff and police, city and county, combined offices or crews — than county consolidation, which puts services far away from many residents.

Having one county seat in northwest Kansas, for instance, is not an appealing idea. Sharing costs and functions among agencies while keeping local control is.

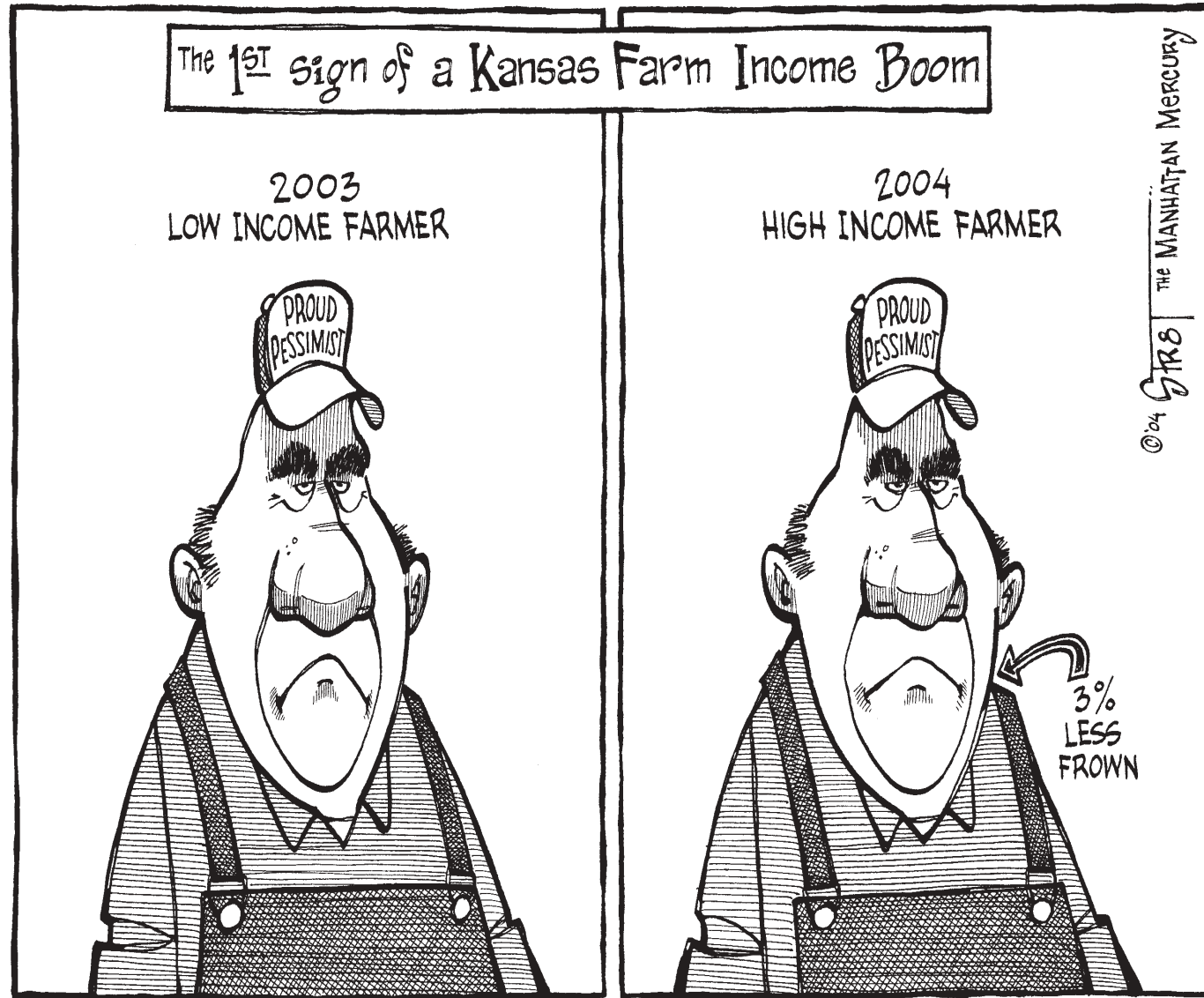
In an era when taxes are rising and people want service, what's to say most Kansans need or want separate city and county offices that often duplicate their efforts? Why have a city council and a county commission when it's hard enough to find good people to fill one board some years?

Those are issues Kansans ought to get to decide. The Legislature and the governor need to step aside and let us have our way. Yet, when two bills passed last year to allow law enforcement consolidation, the governor, responding to purely political pressure, vetoed them.

That's not good. But why should the Legislature decide? Why not let the people decide?

And let the "C" debate begin.

— Steve Haynes



## Christmas clock is tick-tocking

I make this mistake all the time. My ambition is writing checks my time and talents can't cover.

We try real hard not to get caught up in the commercial side of Christmas. Our own children know that when they had kids, they got cut off. We do cash or a little something for our kids and a little more for the grandkids. But it's that "little more" that gets me in trouble.

Our two older granddaughters love to shop, so gift cards suit them just fine. But the two younger girls want stuff. Taylor called me last week and said, "G'ma, will you make me some grape jelly?"

"Sure," I said, mentally thinking jars of jelly would look good in her Christmas box. Alexandria likes jelly too, so I'll make enough for her. Well, the other kids need some, and then I mustn't forget about Jim, and, and, and....

So, you can see why, in the middle of winter, I'm making several batches of grape jelly.

Then there are my little "projects". A friend showed me a neck scarf she had made with flannel using the chenilling technique. I had good luck making a chenille pillow out of an old pair of flannel pajamas. So naturally, I thought I could

### Out Back Carolyn Plotts



do the same thing for a scarf for Taylor. I wanted it "fluffy" on both sides, and that, automatically, doubles the time involved. Tick, tock, tick, tock, the Christmas clock is running. Last night I clipped strips until I couldn't see any longer, and I'm not half done.

If I tell you about my other project, you have to promise not to tell, because it's for Alexandria. When she rides in the car, she likes to wrap up in a blanket and take a nap. I thought a cuddly, fleece blanket would be nice for her. The fabric store had a display in their window of a double-sided blanket with tied edges. No sewing involved. Great. This would be a project I could whip out in an evening.

Do you know how long it takes to cut and tie a 65-inch-by-72-inch blanket? Me, either, because I'm not done yet. Tick,

tock, tick, tock.

Forget about Christmas candies. Being laid up for two weeks when I hurt my back really put a damper on my holiday cooking. I've resorted to making those quick-and-easy cracker candies, with sugar and butter syrup and almonds baked on top. Tick, tock, tick, tock.

Jim takes care of the outside lighting. On that score, we look pretty festive. Since we are leaving for Mexico on Sunday, we opted not to do anything on the inside. So, except for fabric everywhere, you can't tell any difference on the inside. We're in our usual helter-skelter mode.

Thoughts of wrapping and mailing are scary. Everything has to be in the mail now. Those poor mail carriers. Procrastinators like me make their jobs hard. But, I know every effort will be made to deliver everything they can before Saturday.

I shouldn't complain. We all have the same 24 hours in our day. Some people just seem to get more done in theirs than I do. But, ready or not, Christmas will come. And I hope we can all relax long enough to truly enjoy the day with our family and friends.

From the Plotts family to yours, have a blessed week and Christmas Day.

## Sherman county loses out with loss of economic development director

*Editor's Note: This was an editorial in The Goodland Star-News on Dec. 14 regarding the resignation of Carolyn Applegate as the director of the Sherman County Economic Development Council. Ms. Applegate was the former director of the Norton Chamber of Commerce and a resident of Norton.*

The resignation Thursday of the economic development director is a loss for the businesses and citizens of Sherman County.

We regret the decision by Carolyn Applegate to leave her post with the Sherman County Economic Development Council after two successful years, but her position had become untenable.

She took a fledgling office and made it into a program respected at the regional and state levels. Her untiring efforts were directed to help existing businesses and to bring new businesses to the county.

One of her best accomplishments was taking the county's foundering microloan program and seeing that all \$90,000 was loaned out to businesses before the end of the grant period.

She worked with 57 businesses to find the seven who got loans. Before her time, not one business had been able to navigate the program's complex and confusing application process.

Not everything Applegate tried worked, and at times people felt she was overbearing. She described herself as a prickly person who did not mince words because she wanted to get things done rather than tie up time in side issues.

It was those side issues that brought her

downfall, however. In one case, Applegate was chastised for getting the council to approve purchase of the welcome flags which now appear downtown during special events.

Members of the Sherman County Convention and Visitors Bureau complained about the way Applegate brought them into the discussion on the flags, which were a joint project of the Chamber of Commerce, the council and the visitor's bureau. In effect, they thought the project had been crammed down their throats.

There was an effort to push Applegate out last year, but in the end the council gave her a contract for a second year.

Before her resignation last week, Applegate said she felt the group spent over three hours behind closed doors listing all the mistakes she had made, but didn't look at the successes of the last year.

Applegate seemed to work well with

the Goodland Chamber of Commerce and had tried to get along with the Convention and Visitors Bureau. She said she felt it was important to work with the other offices, and tried to coordinate things when possible.

In the fight between her and the visitors bureau, there is plenty of fault to go around, but finding fault will not solve the problem. Nor will it produce the unified effort that is needed to bring people and businesses to this county.

The economic development office will continue, but it may be harder to fill Applegate's shoes than council members think. No matter who they bring in, it will take the new person time to get the feel and to make the contacts that came naturally with Applegate.

Much of the effort of the last two years will be left behind, and the county will be the worse for the opportunities missed.

— Tom Betz

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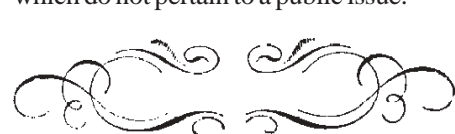
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