

Opinion

Let's hope our rural schools can survive

The atmosphere in the Capitol reminds me of a rodeo. The bull is in the chute and the rider is fixing his grip on the rope. When the gate opens, the 2006 Legislative Session will be underway.

Without a doubt, the main issue this session will be funding education. Much time will be spent studying the results of the Post Audit Study. It is too early in the session to know how the results of the audit will be used. The eventual funding calculation is not known at this point, but based on the audit, I have serious concerns with the following points:

- Much of the Base State Aid per pupil raise is gleaned from lowering the low-enrollment weighting.
- Approximately 80 percent of new money will go toward large districts.
- The staffing prototypes for our smaller districts are unrealistic.
- The formula used to calculate at-risk moneys is unfair.

I will work hard to make sure our rural districts will not suffer by decreasing the enrollment weighting. The result of that is increasing percentages to urban Kansas, and that does NOT meet the adequacy and equitable standards set forth by any educational institution.

When we consider our at-risk children, I find the difference in funding percentages of 48.4 percent for "Rural at-risk" compared to 72.6 percent for "Urban at-risk" to be downright unfair.

When asked to compare the school districts in my 40th District to our urban friends, I boast of excellent graduation rates, excellent daily attendance, and our state testing at or above state averages. I will be vigilant in convincing

Senate Doings Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer



our urban friends that we are educating with excellence using a bare-bones set of electives, and because of that, rural students perform very well at all institutions of higher learning.

Once again consolidation is being heavily considered for our rural schools. According to G. Edward Mills of Fort Hays State University, students graduating from our rural schools have higher achievement, better discipline and attendance, and higher graduation rates. Additionally, students and parents from these small schools reported a high level of satisfaction with their schools.

On a final note, one thing we all learned after the 2005 Session is that we have found ourselves at the mercy of the Kansas Supreme Court. You can be sure I will work hard to make certain that the "Peoples House" isn't being controlled by anyone other than the voters of Kansas.

Back to our rodeo...the gate is about to be pulled open and I can only hope the rural schools survive the eight-second ride.

Please feel free to contact me with your thoughts and opinions. I appreciate all of your questions and concerns. After all, that is the only way I know what you are thinking. I assure you I will do my best to protect our rural schools.
Ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us



It was the end of another school day. Three Norton Junior High Students lowered and folded the Kansas State flag and the United States flag. Taking their responsibilities seriously are left to right, Sophie Mills, Kaylen Rossi and Lindsey Tacha.
— Telegram photo by Charlotte Stephenson

Hospital board's decision a great disappointment

I was greatly disappointed when I read the hospital board had decided not to name *The Telegram* as its official newspaper seemingly because the administrator was upset because the newspaper published his salary. The claim was because it "causes problems for employees". I would imagine most of the employees already had a pretty good idea of how much hospital personnel make and the other official's salaries as well. It may cause talk among employees and perhaps that is the problem.

Why do I feel like I am in the midst of "if you don't play the game my way I will take my marbles and go home". I have not heard one person complain they felt anyone was making too much, but I have heard complaints from people whose salaries (or friend's salaries) were published. And why is that?

I don't know. Most of the people earn what they make; for those who don't they might be subjected to increased scrutiny, but that is the joy of public life.

These salaries are a matter of public record. It isn't a matter of spying or prying, it is important information and once again, I say,

Phase II Mary Kay Woodyard



it shows the value the county places on education and years of experience.

These actions coupled with the campaign last year to "boycott" a certain business because the group opposed the owner, personally, is unlike the image I like to think, as a community, we portray. Certainly driving a person out of legitimate business cannot be beneficial to the community to say nothing of the proprietor.

The newspaper was doing its job, just like the hospital tries to do. I don't applaud everything the newspaper does, nor do I approve of all the actions at the hospital, but I do believe we are in the business of supporting one another.

Deciding to oust the official newspaper because we're mad does not show the level of sophistication or education that I have come to expect from our local community.

County checks ambulance's options

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money and the past performance of grant funding within the county.

The county can apply again in the fall for 2007 money, she said. The commission asked her to look into financing from other entities within the county.

- Changed the mileage reimbursement rate from 48.5 cents per mile to 44.5 cents per mile. County Clerk Robert Wyatt said 44.5 was the federal rate and anything over it would have to be taxed and reported on the employee W2.
- Asked County Counselor Doug Sebelius to draft a policy requiring property owners to make a deposit to the county for constructing a road when building a new house in a remote rural area.

Road and Bridge Supervisor Tom Brannan said the county has been asked at least three times to build a road where a home was going to be built, only to have the house never built. He said it costs the county several thousand dollars to build a road which will never be used.

Mr. Sebelius said the county can initiate a private contract with the property owner, requiring a deposit, and then when the house is built, the deposit will be returned.

- Heard from Mr. Brannan that he has ordered more pipe for the landfill screens. He said they have enough screens to cover both the south and west sides. When the pipe arrives, they will be able to build 37 more screens, which will add to the 33 already built.
- Learned from Solid Waste Supervisor Curt Archibald that a private contractor will be used to plant grass at the landfill. Originally, the county was going to have the Soil Conservation office plant the grass, but they are behind and wouldn't be able to get to it for a while.

- Heard from Mr. Archibald that on windy days, they put trash in the incinerator building rather than in the pit, and then haul the trash to the pit later when it isn't so windy. Although it is labor intensive, he said it helps to stop trash from blowing.

The commission complemented the landfill crew of getting the trash that was blown on a windy day cleaned up quickly.

- Received an annual report from Register of Deeds Wanda Vincent. She said in 2005, they had a total of 427 deeds, 178 mort-

gages and 689 other documents recorded for a total of 1,294. That total is down from 2004's 1,423. The total amount collected for the general fund was \$33,282.66 after \$6,740 was put in the Register of Deeds' Tech Fund.

- Talked to Roger Sprick about his gravel pit. Mr. Sprick said the county signed a contract with him in 1992 which said once the term of the contract was completed, the site was to be filled in and seeded by the county. He said the county hasn't used the pit in several years, but that it hasn't been leveled or reseeded yet either. The commission said they weren't aware of previous agreements made by former commissioners and would have Mr. Brannan look into the matter.

Farming conference to be Thursday in Oberlin

A conference designed to focus on the latest technology, methods and conservation practices to improve agricultural production on the High Plains will be held Thursday in Oberlin.

The "Cover Your Acres Winter Conference," sponsored by Kansas State University Research and Extension and the Northwest Kansas Crop Residue Alliance, will begin with registration at 7:30 a.m. at the Gateway community center.

Educational sessions during the day-long event will cover more than 20 topics by university edu-

cators and researchers and industry representatives. Some of those topics will include "Northwest Kansas Crop Rotations," "Skip Row Corn and Grain Sorghum," "No-Till Wheat Versus Conventional Till," "Wildlife Enhancement on the Farm and Rodent Control in No-Till," "National Grain Sorghum Producers: The Next 50 Years and GRP/GRIP Insurance for Sorghum," "GPS and Auto Steer Solutions," and "Do=B4s and Don=B4ts of Strip Till."

An early session at 7:45 a.m. on "Management of Jointed Goat-

grass" will precede the concurrent sessions, which begin at 9:25 a.m.

Vendors displaying farm machinery and information will also be available.

'Bee' winner is eighth grader

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graders Melissa Hawks and Kenzi Husted round out the Top 10, missing "applying" and "loneliest", respectively.

Other participants and their order of finish were: Matt Dole, Gunnar Hays, Miriah Florence, Alex Stevens, Regan Simpson, Erika Chandler, Alex Tharman, Jordan Herman, Kenzie Chandler, Sean Braun, Kelsey Raburn, Kolton Hilburn, Patience Coffman, Haley Graham, Daniel Field, Aaron Pinzenscham, Ian Vincent, Hunter Chandler, Jordan Baird, Dakota Hilburn, and Alison Cole.

Helping judge this year's contest were: teacher, Tiffany Van

Der Veen; eighth graders, Megan Cole and Sam Field; and teacher, Jim Springer pronounced the words.

Advancing to the Norton County Spelling Bee to be held at 4 p.m., Feb. 15 at the Lenora Grade School will be the top three junior high and elementary school spellers, taking into account the round in which they went out. Representing the junior high will be: Amber Sheley, Christina Anderson and Staci Dole; Jim Mattison the alternate. Tyler Montgomery, Olivia Lowry and Melissa Hawks comprise the grade school representatives. Kenzi Husted is the grade school alternate.

Food Check-Out gives rewards

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ter, a 3 ounce box of Jell-o, and 1 pound of chicken. You have until 5 p.m. Friday to enter your guess. The person who guesses the closest value of the items will be announced Monday and receive a \$50 bag of groceries.

Other give-aways include \$50 gift certificates to be given away at Jamboree Foods, Norton Shop 'n Save, Almena Market and The Country Corner in Lenora.

Listen to KQNK's Party Line Trivia Show and you could win a pot roast dinner, or all the fixings for a sausage and waffle breakfast. Farm Bureau Association placed table tents in area restaurants with most of the trivia contest answers on them.

Funding assistance for the week's activities was provided by the Kansas Farm Bureau Foundation.

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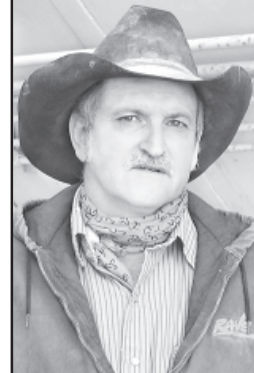
Become A State Certified First Responder

Norton Co. EMS is offering the First Responder Course from 2/25/06 — through Mid June Certification Includes License and CPR

Only 10 Seats Available—
Call for Costs and Information



785-877-5784
Until 4 P.M.
AFTER 4:00 P.M.
785-202-0048 Andy, Director
785-202-0080 Ruth, Asst. Dir.



Help us Celebrate Bob Smith's Retirement from Ag Valley Coop

**Friday, February 3
2:00-4:00 p.m.
at the Ag Valley Coop Norton Office**

Refreshments will be served

Have a story idea? Call 877-3361 and let us know ... we'd love to hear about it!