

# Opinion



## A Kansas Viewpoint

### What we need

Bad idea.  
A plan to take 100,000 acres in the Arkansas River valley out of crop production to retire water rights.  
Bad, because it could cost businesses in 10 southwest Kansas counties \$8.7 million a year.  
Bad because it relies on a federal program, Conservation Reserve, to pay farmers to idle the land. There's no guarantee the government will foot the bill or that Congress will continue the program.  
Bad, because the world may well need the food — and fuel — being grown on that land.

Kansas does have a water shortage, especially out west. Most basins are over appropriated, that is, more well and ditch rights have been granted than there is water in those wells.

Despite the fact that Kansas won a court order forcing Colorado to allow more flow at the state line, the Arkansas is dry west of Garden City most of the time. Farm wells suck up the flow.

The situation on the Ark isn't unusual — the other major basins of western Kansas, the Smoky Hill, Solomon, Saline and Republican — are over appropriated as well. Pumping has lowered the fabled Ogallala Aquifer to the point where wells are dropping in many areas. Some are close to running out of water.

But taking land out of production isn't necessarily the answer. Conservation Reserve, in fact, already has done that in many areas.

Better to shift farmers back to dryland production. With new seeds and optimum crops, they can produce efficiently on non irrigated fields, continuing to contribute to the economy.

U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran has asked the secretary of agriculture to allow dryland farming on land taken out of production on the Ark. We agree with his plan, but still, the federal government is not a dependable partner in a long-range effort such as this.

Whatever plan is adopted is liable to spread to other basins. Kansas has lost too many rural towns, businesses and schools as is. The state cannot and should not be pushing a plan to put even more of us out of business.

Yes, we need to save water.  
No, we can't afford to irrigate as much as we have.  
But the state shouldn't be paying to idle farmland. We need the production, we need the money, we need the grain.

This is a bad idea. — *Steve Haynes, President of Nor'West Newspapers, including the Colby Free Press*

### Where to write, call

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**U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback**, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202/224-6521  
**U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran**, 2443 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. 202/225-2715 or Fax 202/225-5124  
**State Rep. Jim Morrison**, State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St. Rm. 143-N, Topeka 66612. 785/296-7676 e mail: jmorriso@ink.org web: www.morrisonfamily.com  
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### What was not done was best

The Sheridan County Commissioners made a turn down the right road.

At their less than two-hour long meeting Monday, Sheridan County Commissioners David Zimmerman, Keith Kennedy and Ron Schamberger decided not to spend nearly \$6,000 to sue Sheridan County Clerk Paula Bielser for \$601.20. Bielser serves as county election officer and she spent money for a recount of last November's general election in which her husband, Victor, lost, then won, then lost the bid for Schamberger's District No. 1 county commissioner seat.

The commissioners didn't authorize the recount, which according to state law, is the responsibility of the canvassing board, which is also the commissioners.

But to think about suing Bielser, that's ridiculous. It's nothing short of one huge vendetta.

In late November, after oodles of phone calls and letters back and forth with the Kansas Secretary of State's office, county attorney Mike Haas told the commissioners the only fair way to settle the dispute was to conduct a completely new election. That advice fell on deaf ears and the commissioners went out and hired Oberlin attorney Steve Hirsch as a special prosecutor and paid him \$1,164.

Now isn't that smart? Spend almost twice as



#### Jan Katz Ackerman

- From Where I stand

much as you are going after?

Oh well, let's just hope it's a done deal and the dirt in Sheridan County settles soon.

Oh wait, that won't happen until Zimmerman's replacement takes over later this month. Since Zimmerman resigned on Feb. 19 to take a job in Kinsley, the Republican Party has to get together to appoint someone to replace him.

I've been told a couple people have changed their party affiliation from Democrat to Republican in an effort to fill the seat. Wow, now that's a bold move and one worth watching. Whoever takes Zimmerman's place is going to have to get up to speed quickly and figure out that he or she will have votes to canvass following the April 3 election.

That election is set so voters can elect local city officials, school board members and some

of the hospital board members.

Whew, I just hope Sheridan County doesn't have a repeat of the last election and that all goes well.

Gee, it could be a long time until the dirt settles.

— — —  
Speaking of dirt, my new favorite color is brown.

Brown is the color of the ground, of which I have not seen since way before Christmas.

While I did not take time to look up the day northwestern Kansas took on the color white, it was fantastic to see the ground while driving to church Sunday.

I've seen brown in other forms than on the ground recently. Cars, trucks and roadways are nothing but brown.

Visiting with a woman who lives between Hoxie and Oakley, I was told she has a new nightly ritual after driving on county roads. Pull into the garage, get out of the car, grab a bottle of window cleaner and paper towel and start wiping down windows, tail lights and head lights.

"It's like tucking the truck in for the night," she joked.

Jan Katz Ackerman is a reporter for the Colby Free Press.

### A populist fancy



#### Jay Kelley

- Speaking MyMind

experienced.

Actually, the popular vote has given us some pretty good presidents as well, but it does bear notice that empowering the people, which is the populist rationale for direct elections, has resulted not in a reduction of Federal power, but a reduction in the power of the states.

Add the primary to the concept of popular vote at the national level and we have the situation in which we find ourselves only a few states with early primaries select the two candidates from whom everyone else will have to choose a president, regardless of their preference.

In addition, the immense amount of money required to cover the entire country with one's message leaves the candidates open to the kinds of temptations that come with such things.

Understand, democracy is not bad, in and of itself. We had democracy in 1788, but we had it in a more manageable form. Of course, having a man like George Washington to choose helped, but I'm sure some smart campaign manager would be able to make something out of his marriage to a rich widow.

I seem to remember a Democratic candidate

who had that problem recently.

No, what is bad about our current form of democracy is that it has removed power from the states, who were supposed to be our representatives to ensure that we did not end up with what Franklin called the "tyranny of the majority."

There is more to states' rights than simply giving legislatures the power to choose senators and presidential electors. There is responsibility with any authority. Our current system encourages elected officials to buy votes with projects.

If the power were returned to the states, FEMA would no longer be responsible for New Orleans and No Child Left Behind would be up to the state legislature, but funding such programs would also be up to the states.

I don't know if such a thing is possible anymore. Reagan tried and failed miserably when Congress balked at losing control of the purse strings.

No one has tried it since and the last two presidents have done the opposite by encouraging reliance on the federal government to solve even local budget problems.

Direct democracy in a country this size is only a little better than anarchy, but giving the power back to the states means being responsible.

I'm not too sure we're up to that anymore.

Jay Kelley is a local write who speaks his mind from time to time. His e-mail is jkelley@st-tel.net.

#### About those letters . . .

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### Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce

Tinsley

