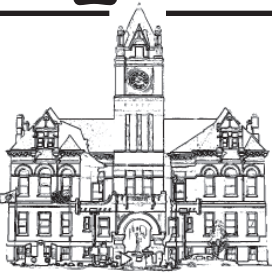


Opinion



A Kansas Viewpoint

Kansans should visit

From The Hutchinson News

Kansas’ 8 Wonders promotion seems an especially good idea now that two Hutchinson attractions have been named to the prestigious list, as well as three others in the vicinity.

Gov. Kathleen Sebelius announced the eight winners on Kansas Day. It culminated a 10-month promotion spearheaded by the Kansas Sampler Foundation. The public cast 24,000 votes to pick Kansas’ most wondrous features.

Among them are the well-deserved Hutchinson wonders — the world-class Kansas Cosmosphere and Space Center and the Kansas Underground Salt Museum, one of a kind in North America. Those accolades are well deserved.

Also on the list are Cheyenne Bottoms and Quivira National Wildlife Refuge, expansive wetlands that serve as key migratory stops for North American shorebirds; the “Big Well” in Greensburg, the world’s largest hand-dug well; and St. Fidelis Church, the “Church of the High Plains” of Victoria in Ellis County.

What is perhaps most interesting about the list is their locations: All but one are in central and western Kansas. And for some eastern Kansans who don’t know what lies west of Topeka, all 8 Wonders could be considered “western Kansas.”

The easternmost wonder is the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve, Kansas’ only national park, as such. It is located in Chase County, west of Emporia.

Central in the state is the Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum in Abilene. A person could spend a good day there exploring its collections, but many Kansans probably haven’t done so. ...

Kansans might have chuckled over the years about the “Great Ball of Twine” or world’s largest prairie dog advertised along Interstate 70. But the 8 Wonders on this list are no joke.

As much as Kansas may want to promote its 8 Wonders to out-of-state tourists, we first should promote them to our own.

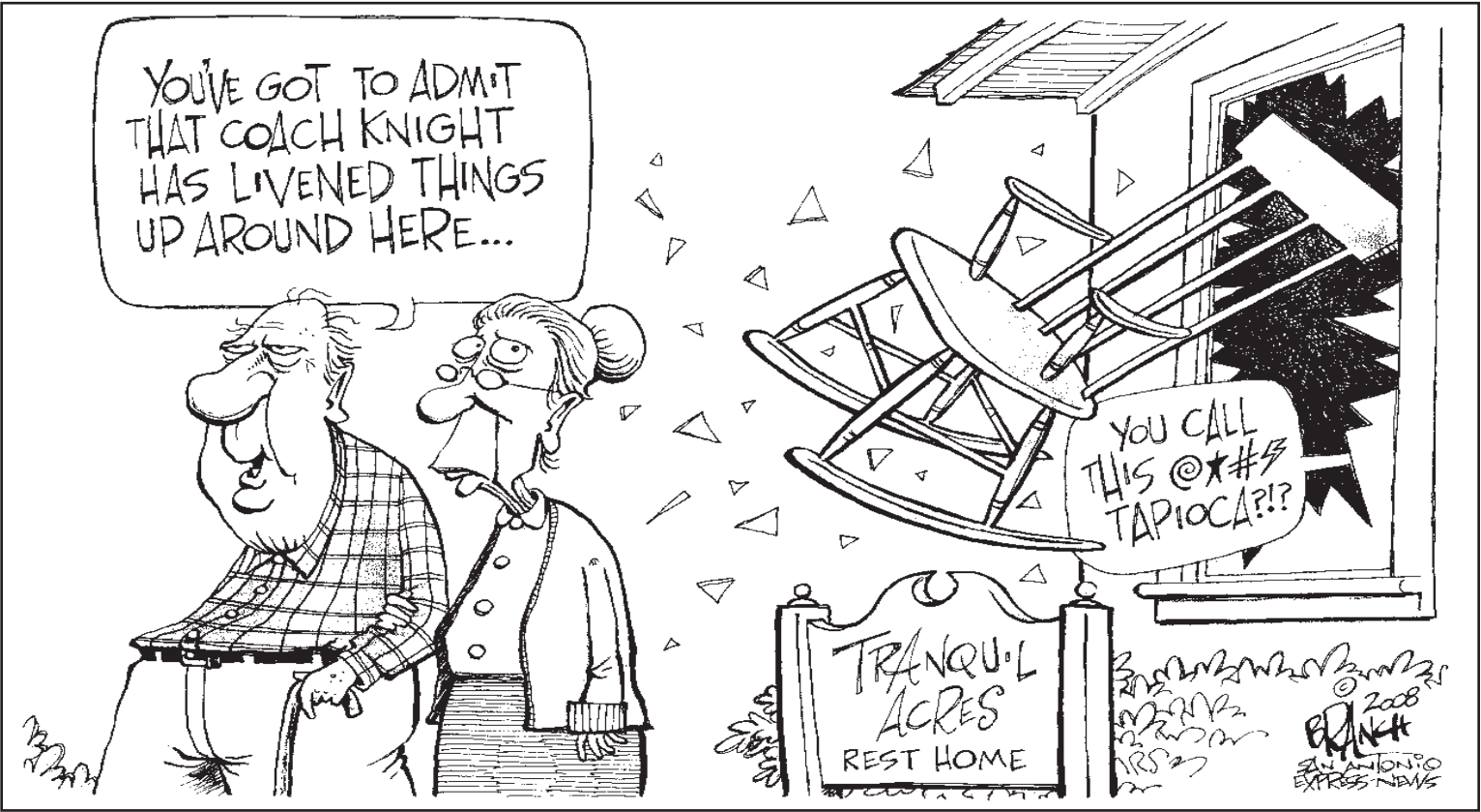
We already know that few people have visited — or even know about — the Kansas Underground Salt Museum, which has been open to the public less than a year. We would wager many Kansans have not visited all the other Wonders, either.

Armed with the list of the eight most wondrous sites, Kansans should venture forth and experience each.

About those letters . . .

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Only the beginning



Joe Falkoff

• A Sideline View

So much for the supposed dead period in sports we usually have after the Super Bowl.

Just four days since one of the most shocking upsets in NFL history, we’ve had the best left-handed pitcher and one of the greatest NBA players of all time get traded, possible incriminating evidence against Roger Clemens and his steroid use presented to Congress and more information about Spygate leak out, which could lead to a whole range of possibilities for the New England Patriots.

Whew.

You would think the sports world would give us some time to catch our breath. Instead, this has been one of the wildest weeks in recent history.

Let’s start with the Super Bowl or the Super Disaster if you’re a New England Patriots fan. First off, will everyone please stop all the talk about this being the greatest Super Bowl of all time? For the first three quarters, that game was about as exciting as watching paint dry.

The only saving grace was the score being close. If it wasn’t for the exciting ending, I would say it would have been the worst Super Bowl ever.

I thought for sure after New England went ahead 14-10 there was no way the Giants were going to drive down the field and win the game, but I was wrong. What I haven’t heard a lot of people talk about is how many chances New England blew on that last drive to seal the game. They let the Giants convert a fourth-and-one, Asante Samuel had an easy interception go right through his hands and they let Steve Smith pick up a third-and-11 on what looked like a simple eight yard pitch and catch.

Honestly, the way New England played offensively for most of the game, they didn’t deserve to win. I think most sports fans want to see perfection capped off with a dominant performance, and that was far from dominant.

The worst part in all of this is how New England coach Bill Belichick and the Patriots front office has to deal with the Spygate rumors the whole off-season. Talk about a fall from grace.

They’ve been the bully picking on the rest of the league all year, and now they’re a punching bag for everyone else.

If it’s proven they filmed the Rams walk-through before the Super Bowl in 2001, who cares? It’s over and done with, and the Patriots have proven time and time again this year they don’t need to film people to win. I don’t see how the league could justify suspending Belichick for a year for something that happened six years ago.

Moving on to the two monster trades, I really think Shaquille O’Neal is going to be the missing piece for the Suns. Clearly, their roster, as it was constructed, wasn’t good enough to get it done in the playoffs.

A lot of people assume Shaq is going to bog down their offense, but look at the Lakers of the 1980s. They had a hall of fame center, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, who commanded the ball inside. They won four championships that decade, so I don’t think it hindered what they were doing too much.

This trade only spices up even more what is setting up to be one of the most exciting post-

season’s in NBA history.

Johan Santana, on the other hand, is a huge risk for the Mets. By giving him \$150 million over six years, they’re basically putting their fate in his hands. We’ve all seen how well that’s worked out for the Yankees with Alex Rodriguez. Baseball is so much more of a team game that I cringe any time a franchise mortgages their future for one player.

I know the Mets thought they had to make a big splash after their collapse last year, but if this doesn’t work out, it’s going to set them back for so many years.

If the Colorado Rockies didn’t show other general manager’s you don’t need a high dollar superstar to win in the post-season, I don’t know what will. I hope it works out for the Mets, but I can already see Santana getting hurt in June and the whole thing just blowing up right in their face.

Moving down the east coast to Washington D.C., I don’t even know what to think about Clemens’ situation. With the latest developments of syringes and pictures being brought in to incriminate him, this has turned into one of the weirdest stories I can remember.

I want to believe Clemens is innocent, but something about his demeanor when he talks just seems fishy to me. If I had to vote right now, I would say he was guilty. I think McNamee would have backed down by now if he was lying.

I can’t wait to see how this whole thing plays out in front of Congress. This is more entertaining than any good soap opera or reality show you could find on TV. But what a week this has been.

Funny thing is it’s probably only just the beginning for what is going to be a wild year in sports.

—Joe Falkoff is a reporter for the Colby Free Press.

Farmers, not truckers

By John Schlageck
Kansas Farm Bureau

The Kansas Corporation Commission (KCC) recently announced its intention to regulate the first leg of transportation of a commodity as interstate (between states) commerce. The KCC believes that grain on its way to the elevator, from the producer’s field, will one day wind up in Missouri, New Jersey or China.

For years, the standard operating procedure has been an exemption for agriculture from government regulations during this first leg of the journey. This initial step has been defined as intrastate commerce (within a state) and agricultural transportation has been free from most regulation.

Farmers farm to produce food and truckers transport products. Farmers produce crops and livestock and haul them to market so people in this country and around the world can eat. That’s what they’ve always done.

There’s a big difference between a farmer hauling his own grain down the road a few miles to his country elevator and a trucking company transporting appliances across several states. For-profit truckers have the capital and manpower to handle these chores, farmers don’t.

This country became a global power because of its infrastructure and its ability to transport crops, livestock, automobiles and other goods fast and efficiently. Exporting our crops to other parts of the world will do us no good if this nation can’t get the grain off the farm, out of the field and ultimately onto the barges and planes for shipment around the world.

The recent KCC designation creates a host

of problems and headaches for Kansas producers. Sedgwick County grain producer Dennis Gruenbacher farms approximately 1,600 acres. He hauls all of his grain no farther than 30 miles from his farm.

“We rarely operate our trucks more than a couple months out of the year,” Gruenbacher says. “The rest of the time our vehicles sit in the shed.”

Gruenbacher says he can’t afford to pay the additional insurance, taxes, fees and licenses that an over-the-road trucker would. The extra time to make sure annual inspection medical cards and United States DOT numbers would also be difficult to do during the busy, harvest season.

Washington County crop producer Gary Benteman, grows wheat, corn, milo and soybeans on 550-acre farm. He helps his brother who farms an additional 1,500 acres. Benteman is worried about how the new interpretation will affect his farm.

Farmers believe their trucks are a necessity to move the grain from the field to market. They make sure their vehicles are safe, serviced regularly and should be subject to a completely different set of rules than professional drivers who operate rigs every week of the year.

“We don’t over-the-road truck and we don’t feel that we should have to comply with the same rules they do,” Benteman says. “We’d just like to see the KCC back off and leave things the way they were.”

Benteman and his brother have three tractor-trailer rigs. Some of the crops are transported approximately 12 miles to the local elevator. Other crops are hauled directly from the harvest field to the grain terminal in Concordia.

The brothers corn is trucked to the feed yard in Minneapolis.

Competing with professional truckers is not an alternative for most Kansas crop and livestock producers. Hiring over-the-road truckers is also not an attractive option.

“When you try to hire a professional trucker, they’re always busy,” Benteman says. “They’re never available when you need them.”

Sen. Mark Taddiken (Clifton) explains producers aren’t the only ones worried.

“I’m very concerned that the KCC, a state entity, that’s supposed to be helping folks, seem more directed towards enforcing laws that just don’t make sense” he said. “I think we’re making progress, and I think it is due directly to the involvement of the Kansas Farm Bureau.”

KFB has taken the lead while opening dialogue with the KCC, legislative leaders and the congressional delegation trying to find a solution. Farmer/rancher members of Farm Bureau in Kansas would like to maintain the status quo when it comes to a farmer hauling his grain in Kansas. The goal is clarification of trucking laws and regulations while defining a clear distinction between a farmer and an over-the-road trucker.

Kansas agriculture, and agriculture across this nation, has its work cut out for it on this transportation issue. Farmers will rapidly lose their competitive edge if they are subjected to overzealous regulation.

John Schlageck is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. Born and raised on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

