

Opinion



Free Press Viewpoint

Rural counties are easy budget target

While the prison in Norton, with its nearly 270 state jobs, appears to have dodged the bullet for now, the fact that it was targeted for closing says a lot about how officials in Topeka think about rural Kansas.

It's not a pretty sight. Secretary of Corrections Roger Werholtz told employees he might have to close prisons in Norton, Winfield and Stockton to close the gap created by a proposed 3.9 percent budget cut. That's two of four prison facilities in western Kansas and three of four in rural towns. No mention was made of cutting facilities in eastern, urban areas.

Losers would be rural counties where the state has converted old hospitals into prisons, as in Norton and Winfield, and built the honor camp at Stockton.

There are several ways you can look at the situation. Rural prisons suffer from their very distance from the bulk of their "customers," most of whom come from the state's cities. It can be expensive to haul them out and back, to administer far-flung enterprises, to deal with dispersed employees.

The Norton and Winfield prisons occupy recycled state hospital campuses, and the older buildings may drive up costs, but probably no more than at historic prisons in Lansing and Hutchinson.

The loss of 300 state jobs would be a drop in the bucket to Wichita or Kansas City, a bee sting for Salina, but a devastating blow to rural Norton, where jobs already are scarce.

You could argue that rural Kansas already has more state jobs than it deserves, in proportion to population. Most taxpayers today, after all, live in urban Kansas, not in rural areas.

But one thing Kansas should do — for the sake of rural and urban counties alike — is try to help repopulate our rural counties. We need to do this both because it will help save the rural way of life in our state, and because rural Kansas can more easily absorb growth than our already-burgeoning urban counties can.

A healthy rural economy helps urban taxpayers as well as rural folk, because a healthy economy out here means rural Kansas can pull its share of the load. We're not looking for subsidies; just a chance to live and work where the sky is blue, the land fertile and the people friendly.

The late Sen. Stan Clark started a movement to move state jobs out into rural towns rather than adding more and more office buildings in Topeka. He had the right idea. Disperse state workers, and there'll be no need for expensive improvements in the capital city.

His cause has been picked up by his successor, Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, who proposed rural offices in place of a new state office building. It's a good idea, but for now, we'd settle for the state leaving us with the jobs we have now.

We need them, and Topeka, Wichita and Hutchinson will hardly notice the difference.

We'll talk about bigger steps when the economy looks better and the state could afford to renovate old schools and other buildings out here.

— Steve Haynes

We encourage comments on opinions expressed on this page. Mail them to the *Colby Free Press*, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

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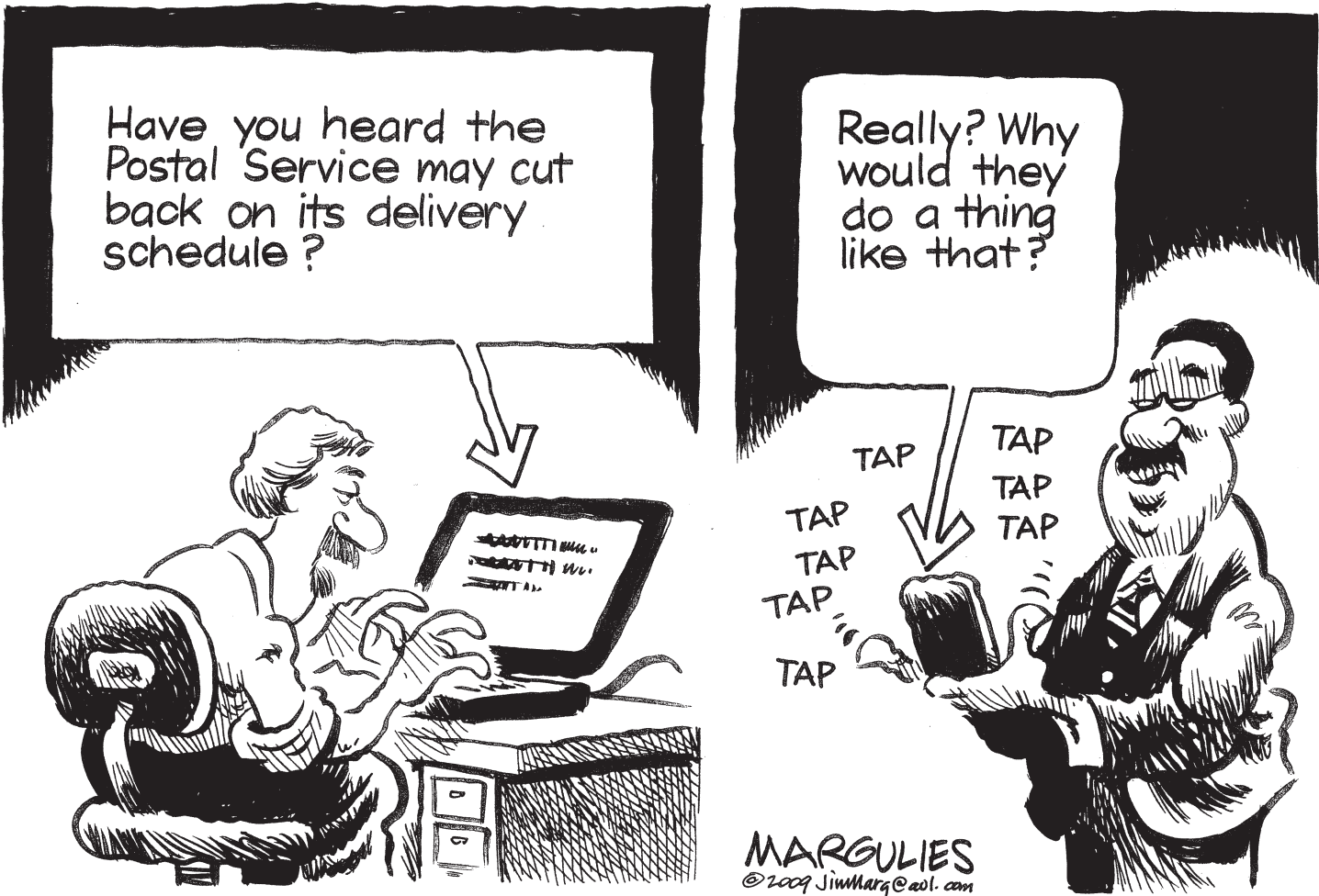
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Just call her 'Spot'

Things are a little spotty right now for Daughter Doodle and me.

We're both covered with red blotches, and all her friends are calling her Spot. In fact, both her father and I are calling her Spot, which she admits is a pretty accurate description right now.

Neither of us is infectious but, while my friends aren't avoiding me, she says several of hers are a little nervous around her.

She probably made a mistake when she told them that her infection — *pityriasis rosea* — is like having mononucleosis with spots.

I should explain that Daughter Doodle, aka Lindsay aka Mrs. Bradley Blake, lives in Augusta, Ga, with her husband, a pair of gerbils and a miniature Schnauzer named Zoey. She is a librarian at the Medical College of Georgia, so I shouldn't have been surprised by her description of her problem.

"I'm tired all the time and I have spots," she told us on the phone. "The doctor said they will last for four to six weeks."

But, no, I had to know more. I had to ask for a more complete description.

One piece of advice, never ask a librarian for more information, especially one with access to the Internet.

Her reply was to send me a monograph on *pityriasis rosea* from UpToDate, the clinical information service on the web, which is avail-



Cynthia Haynes

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able through the university.

According to the five doctors who wrote and edited the article, "*Pityriasis rosea* is an acute, self-limited, exanthematous skin disease characterized by the appearance of slightly inflammatory, oval, papulosquamous lesions on the trunk and proximal areas of the extremities."

In other words, you get spots on your stomach, back, arms and legs.

"Pityriasis rosea is largely a disease of older children and young adults. It is slightly more common in women than men. A prodrome of headache, malaise and pharyngitis may occur in a small number of cases, but except for itching, the condition is usually asymptomatic."

While I still think of daughter as an older child, she is pushing 34. She didn't complain of headache or sore throat (pharyngitis) but, she did say she was tired (that's malaise).

"The eruption spreads centrifugally or from the top down for a few days. Erythema gradually subsides, desquamation is completed

and the eruption fades, leaving little residual changes, except occasional mild post-inflammatory changes in light-skinned individuals. Most cases are clear in four to six weeks."

Daughter said that her spots were drying up and getting crusty. Right now, though, she said, her stomach looks "gross and it itches."

Well, Spot, you only have another three to five weeks to go. Sorry about that, Baby.

Daughter said that she had to show her spots off to the medical students and was told that she had a textbook case.

Well, what did you expect? She's a librarian at a medical school, after all.

Oh yes, my spots. Bug bites. I was on vacation last week in an area with lots of mosquitoes. I have them on my arms, legs and face. I even have them on my rear.

No, I'm not looking them up on the Internet. They're red bumps. They itch. They're going away.

I don't need to know that they are exanthematous, papulosquamous lesions or whatever.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor'West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes@nwkanas.com

Coal power plants would meet a need

With all of the emphasis on our state's economic well being, there's another issue you may not have heard about that's also very important to all Kansans, a western Kansas utility seeking legislative approval for two coal-fired power plants.

Sunflower Electric Power Corp. is determined to build these plants near Holcomb in Finney County. Gov. Kathleen Sebelius' administration has been blocking the plants for more than a year because of their potential carbon-dioxide emissions.

Expansion of the Holcomb station is driven by growing energy needs among electric cooperatives in Kansas and neighboring states. Power generated from the expansion would supply additional electricity for 1.5 million consumers in seven states.

Implications of this decision extend far beyond Holcomb. Concerns about the uncertainty of our state's regulatory environment have been echoed by independent businesses, manufacturers, agriculture producers and others from Scammon to St. Francis, from Rolla to Reserve, and all points in between — not to mention those outside our state's borders might want to do business in Kansas.

Power demand requires additional generation facilities. These will not only reinforce this region's power supply needs, but the investment and creation of jobs from plant construction and operations will provide additional taxes and employment in western Kansas.

The project is expected to cost more than \$3.6 billion and has the potential for 1,500 construction jobs. The new plants would be on the site of the existing 360-megawatt Holcomb station. The two additional supercritical pulverized coal units would each be capable of generating 700 megawatts.



John Schlageck

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Kansas Farm Bureau

Construction of these new units, next to existing generation units, will allow for common use of a number of facilities, including the rail spur, coal receiving and handling system, water treatment, waste disposal system and warehouse and control facilities. This will minimize overall ground disturbance and environmental impacts associated with development of these plants.

This expansion plan is a solid move to fill ever-increasing demand with cleaner coal generation that Kansas currently has. This project's state-of-the-art technologies will enable it to meet federal regulations to protect public health and the environment.

Last year's Kansas Department of Health & Environment's decision to deny an air-quality permit not only denies our state the expansion of much needed electricity generation and increased revenues, it sets a terrible precedent for economic development in Kansas.

"We believe KDHE exceeded its authority and our members are concerned about what arbitrary decisions could be next that very well could impact agriculture," said Steve Baccus, Kansas Farm Bureau president and an Ottawa County farmer. "Our state Legislature attempted to address this in the last session by passing bills to reverse the decision."

Farmer and rancher members of Farm Bureau continue to support regulatory certainty

in Kansas, and therefore support efforts to ensure a clean, abundant and affordable energy supply, including coal.

Rural regions of our state are already paying higher energy costs than customers in urban areas. This is due in part to the higher costs to serve areas of sparse population.

"We will continue to seek clarification on this issue and will further develop recommendations for energy policy that is environmentally responsible and promotes a viable economic solution to Kansas energy needs," Baccus promised.

More than two dozen separate pieces of legislation have been introduced on the issue, which will likely be at the forefront throughout the session.

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

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Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

