



Other Viewpoints

Big 12 schools need to be proactive

Perhaps Kansas University Chancellor Bernadette Gray-Little and Athletic Director Sheahon Zenger are inwardly frightened about the possible demise of the Big 12 athletic conference, but the public has no reason to believe this is the case. Maybe the truth of the matter is they are not that worried, but, if that is so, they are making a mistake. They should be vocal about the situation, urging fellow conference chancellors, presidents and athletic directors to be far more aggressive in doing whatever is necessary to retain the remaining nine members of the conference and add three more universities.

This effort should be a top priority. The breakup of the conference started when Nebraska left for the Big 10 Conference, making no bones about its belief it was too good to remain in the Big 12. Next, Colorado joined the Pac 10 Conference, and, recently, Texas A&M announced it wanted to leave the Big 12 and seek affiliation with some other conference. The A&M departure is understandable due to its decades-long dislike of the University of Texas and the manner in which Texas has dominated the Big 12, particularly with the formation of the Longhorn Television Network, from which Texas keeps the biggest share of revenues and parcels out smaller shares to other schools. In most every other athletic conference, all schools share equally.

Now, there is word that University of Oklahoma officials are studying the possibility of leaving the Big 12. This would be a mistake for Oklahoma as well as for the entire conference.

Maybe there is a tremendous amount of work going on behind the scenes at Big 12 headquarters, but there is no evidence of such concern. Chancellors, presidents and athletic directors should be meeting to investigate what three schools would be a good fit for the Big 12. Many factors must be considered such as the academic excellence of the schools, whether they are members of the American Association of Universities, their national reputations, their geographic location, the breadth of their athletic program, whether they run clean programs, and the size of the television audiences the schools bring to the party. This is where dollars come into the equation.

As one knowledgeable observer pointed out, Texas is the locomotive that drives the Big 12 train and is the focus of a great deal of animosity over the television network and the manner in which Texas plans to share these riches. This is both a blessing and a curse for Texas. They couldn't join any other conference and play by the same rules, and the Big 12 is the best conference for Texas – as well as Oklahoma.

Other chancellors and presidents must take a more powerful role in selling this idea, as well as selecting other universities to join the conference, rather than acting blasé.

It's time for Gray-Little to show some fire in her belly and urgency about this matter, if for no other reason than to show KU alumni and all Kansans she is genuinely concerned about the health and future of the Big 12. Granted, the top priority of the university is providing a challenging academic and research environment, but a strong, allied conference of like universities – for academic as well as athletic competition – is important and rewarding for all member institutions.

Let's see some strong, public indications that Gray-Little and Zenger are deeply interested and concerned and are taking meaningful actions and initiatives rather than KU being exposed as being caught off-guard in this conference realignment game.

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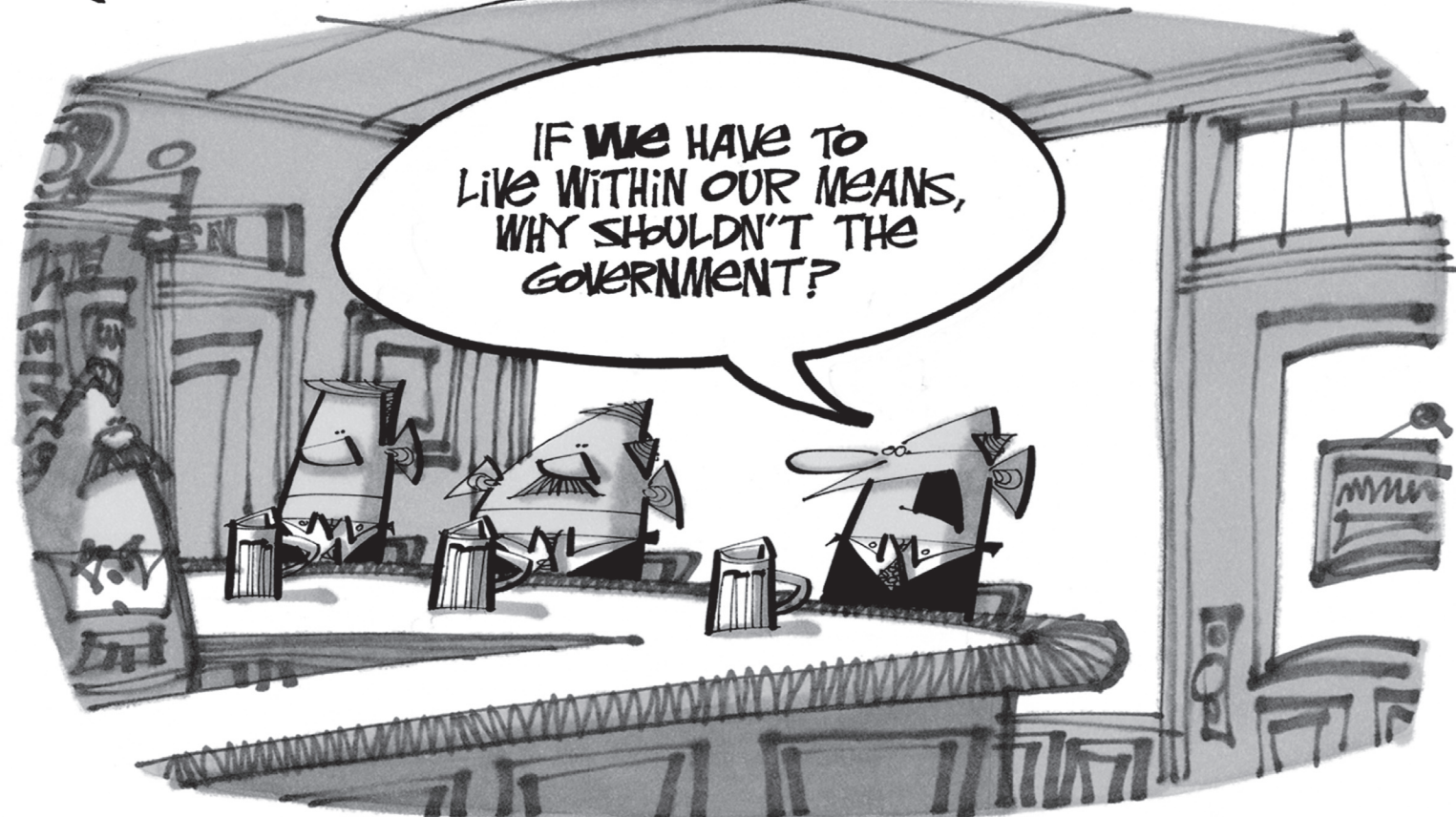
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*THIS MESSAGE BROUGHT TO YOU BY A MAN WITH A HOUSE LOAN, A CAR LOAN AND THREE MAXED-OUT CREDIT CARDS.

What I did on my summer vacation

There were five boxes of donuts sitting there. Closed. Surrounded by 49 or so of the fine citizens of Thomas County – reluctant, anxious, bored – waiting for a turn in the hot seat at the sweltering end of August.

So began my introduction to jury duty. By the end, the fresh donuts had given way to left-over muffins, the nervous reserve had given way to the bonding of weariness and frustration, and I had begun to wonder why one of the central hallmarks of a free society should be to metaphorically imprison 12 upstanding citizens in order to determine if others have done wrong.

Not that we were locked up or mistreated, I hasten to add. In fact, we were treated like royalty. OK, make that guests more welcome than the average in-laws.

That first morning, I learned several things that had never occurred to me before.

- Cell phones can actually turn themselves on. Personally, my cell phone is too lazy to want to turn itself on, but

- Courtrooms are the natural habitat of people who wear suit jackets and judicial gowns. This means that when it's 100 degrees outside, it's 50 degrees inside. While I work in an air-conditioned office, my desk is next to two large plate glass windows. In summer, my left arm is hot and my right arm is cold – assuming the electronics in the thermostat have not chosen that week to pout. Sadly, I could hardly complain since I was probably the only person there who was cold.

- Lawyers like to talk. While this comes as no surprise, it was a little depressing to be reminded.

Later, of course, we had to opportunity to



Marian Ballard

• Collection Connections

observe other things.

- The courtroom in Colby has all the bells and whistles, electronically speaking. Apparently, courtrooms elsewhere don't. Those talkative out-of-town lawyers seemed to have trouble figuring out how to use a microphone. Or a DVD player. Or a PowerPoint program.

- Lawyers are human. They forget what point they were trying to make, or to get a witness to make. They forget the names of their clients. They forget how to use a remote.

- When cell phones turn themselves on, the electronic bells and whistles in the courtroom turn themselves off.

- The chairs in the jury box start out relatively comfortable. They don't stay that way.

- You can't take notes. I've taken notes on everything since I was shorter than I am now – and that's saying something. I have trouble remembering my name without taking notes. They expect me to decide an issue based on my memory? I can't plan a menu based on my memory of what's in the freezer.

I read once that this rule had its origins in the days when few jury members were likely to be literate – to level the playing field as it were. Apparently it tends to distract jurors even today, or make them want to crib off each other's notes.

Fewer cows mean higher prices for all

The U.S. beef industry is in the throes of a severe drought that is burning up the southern High Plains – particularly Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas and New Mexico. Beginning next year, supplies of processed cattle should tighten. This will mean higher prices for beef.

This same drought that is burning up the middle of the country means consumers will probably pay more for their hamburgers and strip steaks.

Ranchers across these states are liquidating their herds at historically high rates as grazing land, feed and water supplies dry up. Texas is expected to lose 600,000 head of beef cattle.

Those livestock producers who have been forced to shrink their herds will be left with fewer cattle to sell. Because they've been forced to sell off heifers, many will have smaller breeding herds to rebuild supplies.

Kansas Farm Bureau economist Mark Nelson predicts that as 2012 and 2013 arrive, there will be tighter and tighter supplies of cattle to produce beef in this country.

"We've continued to reduce inventory and we haven't been rebuilding herds," Nelson says.

Early summer estimates suggested the number of beef cows in the United States could decrease 2 percent. This figure may easily reach 5 percent, Nelson predicts.

"If liquidation continues into the fall, the breeding herd on Jan. 1, 2012, could fall as much as 7 percent," the economist says. "This would be a loss of 2 million head of beef cows. This is huge and could mean a reduction in cow herd numbers this country hasn't seen



John Schlageck

• Insights

Kansas Farm Bureau

since the early '60s."

Still, livestock producers continue to liquidate herds like crazy. There's no grass and the price of hay to feed cattle has skyrocketed. This means cattlemen can't afford to pay for the hay so liquidation continues because there's nothing to feed their herds.

"We're still seeing slaughter cow prices in the \$60-65 range," Nelson says. "That's a good \$15 a hundredweight higher than we normally see."

To compound matters the hay supply is dwindling. That means far less cattle feed next year. Figures place the amount of hay at 151 million tons in the United States for 2011. This is the smallest supply since 1988, according to Nelson.

By May 2012 projections place hay stocks at 10-12 million tons.

"That would be one of the smallest beginning hay stock levels we've seen during the last 30 years," Nelson says. "This will drastically hurt the ability to rebuild cattle numbers in 2012 and 2013."

Those cattle producers in Kansas who have feed and plan to keep their cattle will also hold onto this feed supply. These cattlemen are

those primarily north of I-70 in the Sunflower State and into Nebraska.

Some of these producers who still have grass and hay may be asking themselves is this a time to expand?

This is especially true with cattle prices remaining profitable, Nelson says.

"Cattlemen who have the fuel to feed their herds may want to consider adding numbers now," the KFB economist adds. "Beef production will remain low as we head into 2012 and '13."

There could be a secondary spike in prices during this time period because once the rains begin to fall again, and they will at some point in time, producers will pull their heifers off the market and keep them to rebuild their herds.

Those producers who can hold onto a few more heifers this year will be sitting pretty to sell calves in 2013 and '14. Rebuilding this nation's cattle herd will not happen overnight and may be painfully slow.

To date the present drought continues. Who knows when it will end.

One thing is certain, cattle prices are going to get wild next year. Beef prices are sure to follow. If you don't have a freezer, you may want to buy one and stock it with beef before the price goes through the roof.

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

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

