



Other Viewpoints

Nonpolitical map has Senate upset

Give credit to the Senate half of the Statehouse building in Topeka. Despite the expectation that redistricting would be a wholly partisan exercise, the Senate Reapportionment Committee has passed to its full chamber a nonpartisan map of new congressional district boundaries.

It is a good map – as good as any possible, that is. It puts Manhattan and Riley County into the Big First that already consumes two-thirds of the state’s geography. But it gets all of Lawrence into a single district. And overall it makes sense, keeping areas of common interest together.

But to hear some partisans describe it, the map is an abomination.

Kansas Republican Party Chairwoman Amanda Adkins said the proposal “appears to be a coldly calculated attempt to create a Democrat 2nd Congressional District to the detriment of the dean of our congressional delegation.”

Oh, yeah, the map does make the 2nd District 30 percent Democrat compared to 29 percent today. Calculating indeed.

And the “dean” of the congressional delegation, that would be Rep. Lynn Jenkins, who if she had her way would get rid of all of liberal-leaning Lawrence and push Wyandotte County on the Missouri border into the First District. The “dean,” by the way is a three-year veteran of Congress in an otherwise freshman set of House members.

Just in case anyone thought that the Kansas Chamber of Commerce was a business advocacy group like your local chamber, the chairman of the state chamber’s political action committee reminded everyone that it is an organ of the conservative wing of the Republican Party.

“This map hurts Republicans and helps President Obama’s agenda. Just the latest example of why we need a new state Senate,” Ivan Crossland said.

To the contrary, just when it appeared that the only way to take politics out of redistricting was to hand the job over to a nonpartisan commission, the Senate has shown remarkable leadership.

“It’s as nonpolitical as we can make it,” said Committee Chairman Tim Owens, a Republican from Overland Park.

Well done, sir.

– The Hutchinson News, via the Associated Press

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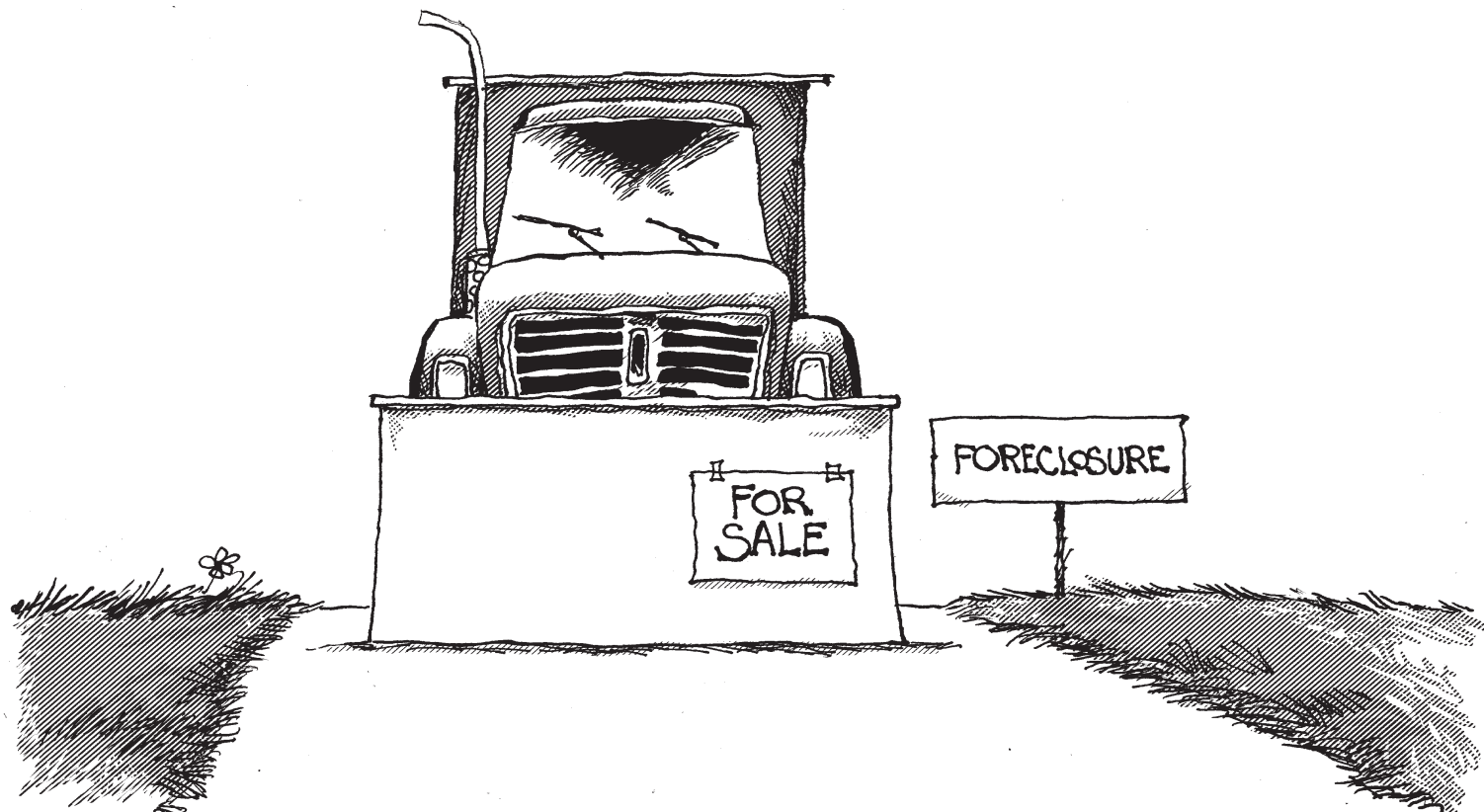
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Winter of 2011-12



SNOW BUSINESS

Partisan politics skew view of Keystone

I know full well that Republicans will win the argument over the proposed construction of a pipeline that would pass through Kansas on its path from Alberta, Canada, to Port Arthur, Texas.

The public, unfortunately, is too skeptical of environmental groups for me to think otherwise.

By blocking construction of the Keystone Pipeline, which is about a 2,673-kilometer (1,661 mile) 36-inch crude oil pipeline, President Obama opened himself up to a barrage of criticism from Republicans accusing him of kowtowing to the environmental lobby. It should be noted, however, that Obama did not reject the project altogether, he just said it would take the State Department more than the 60 days set by Congress to assess the project.

I have to admit this delay does seem politically motivated.

“President Obama’s decision to block the Keystone pipeline is another example of this White House putting election politics before economic recovery,” U.S. Rep. Lynn Jenkins, R-Kan., said in a statement. “While the president’s friends in the environmental lobby may be cheering, the tens of thousands of hard-working Americans who won’t have a job because of this decision are certainly not.”

Jenkins projected construction of the pipeline would create 20,000 jobs and more than 100,000 indirect jobs while making America less dependent on Middle Eastern oil.

Arguments of the Jenkins variety are not without merit. But it’s hypocritical for Repub-



Andy Heintz

- Wildcat Ramblings

licans to accuse the president of playing politics while engaging in the same behavior. Their decision to insert the pipeline into a temporary payroll tax cut extension was clearly meant to ensnare the president. Their actions were just as politically motivated as Obama’s decision to deny TransCanada a permit to build.

Political games aside, the question we should ask is whether this issue is really as black and white as critics would like us to believe? Did the president really nix a project capable of creating more than 100,000 jobs?

A study by Cornell University’s Global Labor Institute estimated the construction of the pipeline would create between 2,500 and 4,650 temporary jobs. The study also stated that this project “may actually destroy more jobs than it generates.”

The labor institute came to this conclusion because of the effect the project would have on fuel costs in the Midwest. The study found the project would divert the Tar Sands oil that’s supplying Midwest refineries, so it can be sold at higher prices on the Gulf Coast and export markets.

“As a result, consumers in the Midwest could

be paying 10 to 20 cents more per gallon for gasoline and diesel fuel,” the study concluded. “These additional costs (estimated to total \$2 to \$4 billion) will suppress other spending and therefore cost jobs.”

In addition, high fuel prices would increase the cost of farming, which would increase the price of food for all Americans.

Shawn Howard, spokesman for TransCanada, said the study is highly flawed. He estimated the construction of the pipeline would create 20,000 jobs – 13,000 construction jobs and 7,000 manufacturing jobs – during the two-year building period. However, Russ Girling, TransCanada chief executive, previously told the *Washington Post* the pipeline would employ 6,500 construction workers each year along with creating 7,000 manufacturing jobs.

Critics of the labor institute believe the study was corrupted by conflicts of interest. The Goodman Group, coproducer of the study, counts among its clients Greenpeace USA, the Sierra Club and the Environmental Defense Fund.

If this were the only way to create jobs and decrease America’s dependence on Middle Eastern oil then the pipeline should be built. Thankfully, other cleaner, more renewable options – wind, solar, reducing energy inefficiency – exist that are capable of creating just as many jobs without leaving America tied to fossil fuel for another generation.

Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate, loves K-State athletics and fishing, sports and opinion writing.

Water policy a focus of House

On Feb. 24 the session will enter a deadline called turnaround. All bills, with specific exceptions, must be passed out of one chamber. With the approaching deadline, committees will be meeting and holding hearings and voting on legislation in anticipation of sending legislation to the full House for consideration.

Water Policy (HB2451)

This bill will remove the current “use it or lose it” policy that forces water allocation rights to be used or be taken away. With this new legislation, the law would not force the water to be used and prevents water rights from being taken away. House Bill 2451 is only for closed areas where new irrigation wells cannot be drilled.

One of the main focuses of Gov. Brownback’s policy is the water issue. He recognizes the need to preserve the Ogallala aquifer as key to the economic future of Western Kansas. Agriculture and agribusiness would not be sustained without water from the aquifer and our towns and cities in the area would struggle to survive. This legislation will help establish a foundation of good stewardship along with other policies under consideration.

Frankfort Boys Memorial Highway (HB2273)

During World War II, Frankfort had 37 men who lost their lives – the most for any small farm community. This bill will designate Highway K-99 from the south city limits of Frankfort to the U.S. 36 Junction as Frankfort Boys World War II Memorial Highway.

Redistricting 2012

The redistricting process made significant progress this week with the introduction of HB 2606. The house map contains boundaries for each of the 125 state house districts. Monday the bill was scheduled for hearings on the



Rick Billinger

- This week in Topeka

proposed map known as Cottonwood 1, which shifts two west Kansas districts and one southeast Kansas district to Johnson County, which has the largest population growth and will require additional representation. With the announced departure of Larry Powell, who will be running for the senate, this allows his district to be collapsed. This map and other map proposals may be seen at redistricting.ks.gov.

Home-Owned Carnivals

Jan. 30, Senate Bill 356 was introduced concerning the regulation of home-owned amusement rides. It will repeal the exemptions which small home-owned carnivals currently receive from inspections from an outside source. We will keep you informed.

Open Records Act

Last week the Shawnee County District Attorney’s office filed a complaint against Gov. Brownback for allegedly violating the Kansas Open Meetings Act at social gatherings with legislators. Legislators have been told to keep documents that would relate.

According to the Kansas Attorney General’s office in 2009, the governor’s legislative dinners do not fall under the statutory definition of “meeting,” therefore the act does not apply.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formally known as Food Stamps, has

served the nation’s nutrition program by providing food assistance to low-income families and individuals. Undocumented non-citizens have never been extended eligibility. In October, the Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services revised the policy for income calculation for the program.

The previous policy discriminated against Kansans by setting a higher threshold for U.S. citizen households to qualify than households with members who are not in the country legally by allowing them, on average, to earn an additional \$908 a month and still qualify.

With a family of four citizens and a household income of \$2,425, the income standard of \$2,389 per household is exceeded. If one is an undocumented non-citizen, 3/4 of the \$2,425 household income, or \$1,819 would be countable and three citizens would qualify.

The policy since October is that the amount of assistance received is based on household size and income after deductions. So, a family of four citizens would count 100 percent of income to determine eligibility. A family of four with one undocumented non-citizen and three citizens count 100 percent of their income, with only citizens receiving assistance. Income and resources are treated equally.

I am happy to have Jake Kling, a senior at Kansas State, interning for me. If there are any high school students interested in paging, contact my office at (785) 296-7659.

Anyone who would like to meet with me, please call my office and I will set up a time. If you have input on any issues which will come before the legislature, please contact me at rick.billinger@house.ks.gov or call me at (785) 899-4700.

Rick Billinger is the state representative from the 121st District.

Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

