



Free Press Viewpoint

Proposed district impossible to serve

Sen. Ralph Ostmeier is upset about the shape his district is in, or at least the shape it could be in if the latest map proposal for redistricting the state Senate becomes law.

The map, known as Ad Astra, would stretch the already huge 40th district into eastern Kansas and well into the southwest. It would be impossible to cover with a couple of days of town-hall meetings.

The 40th is already the largest in the state. Under the Ad Astra proposal, it would grow to 20 1/2 counties, adding Phillips, Smith and Jewell on the east, losing Trego and Ness and adding half of Hamilton.

But Jewell County is in the eastern half of the state; Hamilton is on the Arkansas River and two-thirds of the way to Oklahoma.

Sen. Ostmeier jokes that maybe the leadership is mad at him. More likely, someone is trying to draw a map that will satisfy the most people, including legislators who don't want to have to run against each other.

But whatever the reason, the result would be a district that would be tough to represent. Covering all or part of 20 counties, it would force the senator to keep in touch with fully one-fifth of the county commissioners in the state.

Today, from his home in Grainfield, near the center of the 18-county district, Sen. Ostmeier can be in any town in the 40th in a couple of hours.

It'd be 325 miles from Syracuse in Hamilton County to St. Francis in Cheyenne to Mankato in Jewell, near three-fourths of the distance across the state. And it'd be a six-hour drive.

The district would be almost impossible to represent. It would be a burden for any candidate who wanted to run for the seat. In Johnson County, the "new" 37th District spans just a few miles.

The thing is, Sen. Ostmeier said, all his district needs to meet the guidelines laid down by federal courts to add Phillips County. That would retain the basic square shape, he said, and keep the district as compact as it could be.

Our view: it's tough enough to represent the huge 40th District without making it impossible. The Senate leadership needs to take practical considerations into account.

This district already represents nearly all the northwest quadrant of the state, with a slice of the southwest thrown in. Stretching it into a gerrymander won't make things any better.

Anyone who votes for the district as it stands in the Ad Astra map ought to be made to come out here and drive it.

— Steve Haynes



Seventh-grade skills save the day

A seventh grader in Milton, Wash., a small town near Seattle, saved a busload of students when the driver had an apparent heart attack.

A surveillance camera caught the whole thing on tape and the young man was an instant hero.

He stopped the bus when he noticed that it was in the wrong lane and headed for a church and the driver was slumped over the wheel. He said he couldn't reach the brakes, so he just turned off the key and steered to the right.

He said he remembered reading about a super hero who saved a busload of people by doing this.

Hooyay for super heroes and seventh-graders with good memories and quick minds, I say.

Hidden in the body of the story are a few more heroes. While the one young man was taking care of the bus and his fellow students, a second seventh grader was giving cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) to the driver.

Other students called 911.

I'm thinking that these kids go to a small school. That's probably just my small-school bias talking, but I really think that you learn more about life and everyday living when you live in a small town and go to a small school.



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

Back when my girls were in junior high in Creede and Monte Vista, Colo., every seventh grader learned CPR. Seventh grade seemed to be the time that the youngsters got a chance to try a lot of new things. Everyone took shop for a semester and everyone took home economics for a semester. My daughters made coat racks and small bookcases and the boys learned to fry, saute, bake and take care of themselves. They also learned to sew on buttons and make small pillows.

It was a time to learn some of life's important skills.

I wish that they did those things here. My son took woodworking but he never had to take home ec. He can cook, but I don't think he can sew. He learned to cook at home but his mother doesn't sew. I know that he knows how

to iron, because his sisters taught him that. It's another thing I don't do.

But cardiopulmonary resuscitation is a skill everyone should have. Every young person, every adult. You don't need to be an emergency worker. You just need to be around people.

A friend of mine is alive today because his son gave him cardiopulmonary resuscitation after he keeled over during a family Thanksgiving dinner.

It isn't a cure-all. Not everyone whose heart stops can be saved. But even one person saved — if it's your child, husband, wife, sister, brother, mother, father or friend — is enough to justify teaching this valuable skill.

Yes, I've taken the classes several times. I've done CPR when I worked on the ambulance. I could use a refresher course, but I know enough to try to save a life.

Do you?

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@nwkans.com

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Redistricting battles set stage for drama

Bare-knuckled political battles over redistricting have set the stage for some high drama when the Kansas Legislature returns next week.

Gov. Sam Brownback has led by example, bringing Washington's brand of take-no-prisoners partisanship back to the state Capitol. House Speaker Mike O'Neal has joined with the governor and dropped all pretense of statesmanship while moving aggressively to gerrymander districts to ensure conservative Republican dominance of Kansas politics during the next decade.

First, the legislative body will have to address the search for a formula to add 58,000 residents to the 1st Congressional District while protecting 2nd District Congresswoman Lynn Jenkins' seat. Initially, O'Neal wanted to split Wyandotte County away from 3rd District Rep. Kevin Yoder's territory in order to make that district more safely Republican. Enough Republicans apparently became convinced that putting Wyandotte into the agricultural 1st District wouldn't pass court muster that the idea was dropped. So the battle now boils down to Jenkins, arguably Kansas' most vulnerable member of Congress.

Jenkins was narrowly elected in 2008, defeating first-term congresswoman Nancy Boyda. Once in office, she quickly became the butt of jokes from late-night comedians with a comment about the search in Republican circles for a "great white hope" to challenge President Obama. Other incidents followed.

In a normal year she would have been vulnerable, but she benefitted from the Tea Party tide in 2010 and won a second term, albeit with the smallest margin of victory of any of the four Kansas Republican congressional candidates that year.

One look at a map suggests that the logical way to balance the 1st District's population loss would be to add Manhattan to Tim Huelskamp's district, the map passed by the State Senate. But Manhattan officials are united in a bipartisan desire to stay out of Huelskamp's



Alan Jilka

• A Voice of Reason

district. Presumably, Democrats don't want to be represented by one of the most conservative members of Congress. Republicans don't feel Huelskamp has the commitment, or respect of his peers, to successfully push for continued funding for the proposed National Biodefense Lab at Kansas State University.

Gov. Brownback claims that Congresswoman Jenkins would be in the strongest position to advocate for such funding with her seat on the House Ways and Means Committee. His reasoning is suspect, since Ways and Means deals with tax issues, not appropriations.

Brownback claims to want to protect communities of interest, such as Leavenworth County. But he didn't seem bothered by the prospect of cutting up the capitol city of Topeka. A huge outcry scotched that plan. Meanwhile, it comes as news to residents of western Kansas that they don't have common interests with the home of Kansas State University.

Then there will be the state legislative maps to finish. With Brownback's agenda going nowhere in the Legislature, look for him to pull out all the stops to force through a map that will give conservatives an advantage in their efforts to oust moderate Republicans from the Kansas Senate. After the governor's allies rolled out eight primary challengers to moderate Republican senators prior to the session, moderates responded with a proposed map cutting most of the challengers out of their districts. Now Speaker O'Neal is threatening to intervene in the other body's dispute, a move without recent precedent.

Brownback has stated publicly that he will stay out of Republican primaries this year. But

word out of Topeka this past week suggests that his chief of staff is leaving his position to direct the conservatives' attempt to take over the Senate this fall. Brownback's disingenuous comments have further eroded his credibility in a state that elected him governor with 65 percent of the vote just eighteen months ago.

The stakes are indeed high for the governor. Without a Legislature controlled by his stripe of Republicans, his legislative agenda is dead, and he could wind up as a lame-duck in his final two years.

Alan Jilka is a former Salina city commissioner and mayor. He was the Democratic nominee for Congress in the 1st District in 2010.

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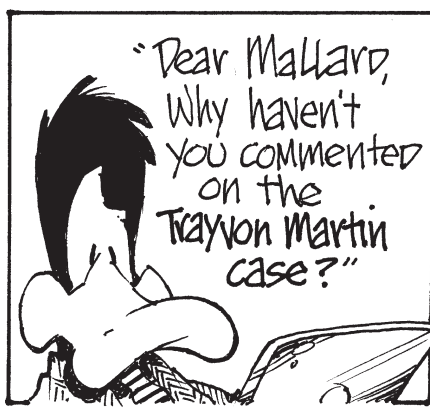
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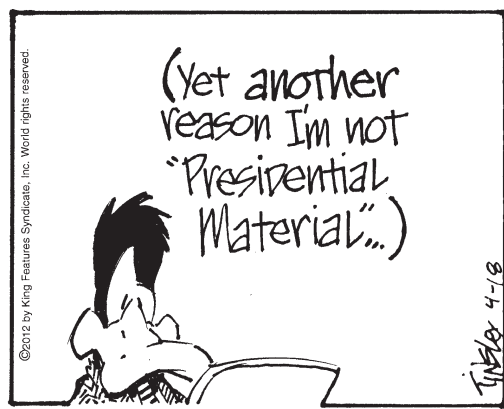
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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



It'd like to wait until the facts come out...



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