

## Other Viewpoints

### School efficiency spells fewer districts

A big irony of Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback's quest to root out inefficiencies in school spending and direct more dollars to the classroom is his stated opposition to what might be the biggest inefficiency of all – too many school districts. And that seemingly makes school district consolidation off limits for his School Efficiency Task Force when it should be a top focus.

The task force is creating plenty of controversy even without consolidation on the table. With partisan politics and combative education interests swirling in the background, Hutchinson's Ken Willard has his hands full as chairman of the task force.

Brownback's first misstep was assembling a task force stocked full of accountants but without a single school administrator or teacher. He appeared to try to rectify that this week with the addition of Iola schools Superintendent Brian Pekarrek. Good move.

It is curious why Brownback isn't interested in looking at school district consolidation. Speculation is that Brownback, who was raised in small-town Parker, is protective of schools in small towns. That is the fear of many whenever the words "school consolidation" are uttered. But that should be differentiated from school district consolidation, which could happen without a single school building closing its doors.

Kansas has 306 school districts, which is about three per county, when Kansas also has way too many counties. Besides that pie chart Brownback is carting around the state showing that only 54 percent of tax dollars to schools are getting into the classroom, he should promote another statistic: Kansas has 3,807 units of government, which ranks fourth-highest per capita in the U.S.

Getting into county consolidations could be tricky, but the state clearly has a big stake in the bureaucracy of its public education system. If Brownback's goal is to reduce administrative costs so more dollars can go into classroom teaching, he's ignoring the white elephant in the room. The administrative costs that are duplicated by having so many small school districts are an opportunity for savings.

Maybe school district consolidation is a whole other task force. But Brownback can hardly get serious about efficiency unless he considers it.

Brownback announced the establishment of a website where people can report inefficient spending in the educational system anonymously to the Governor's School Efficiency Task Force. The website is [governor.ks.gov/efficiency](http://governor.ks.gov/efficiency).

– *The Hutchinson News, the Associated Press*

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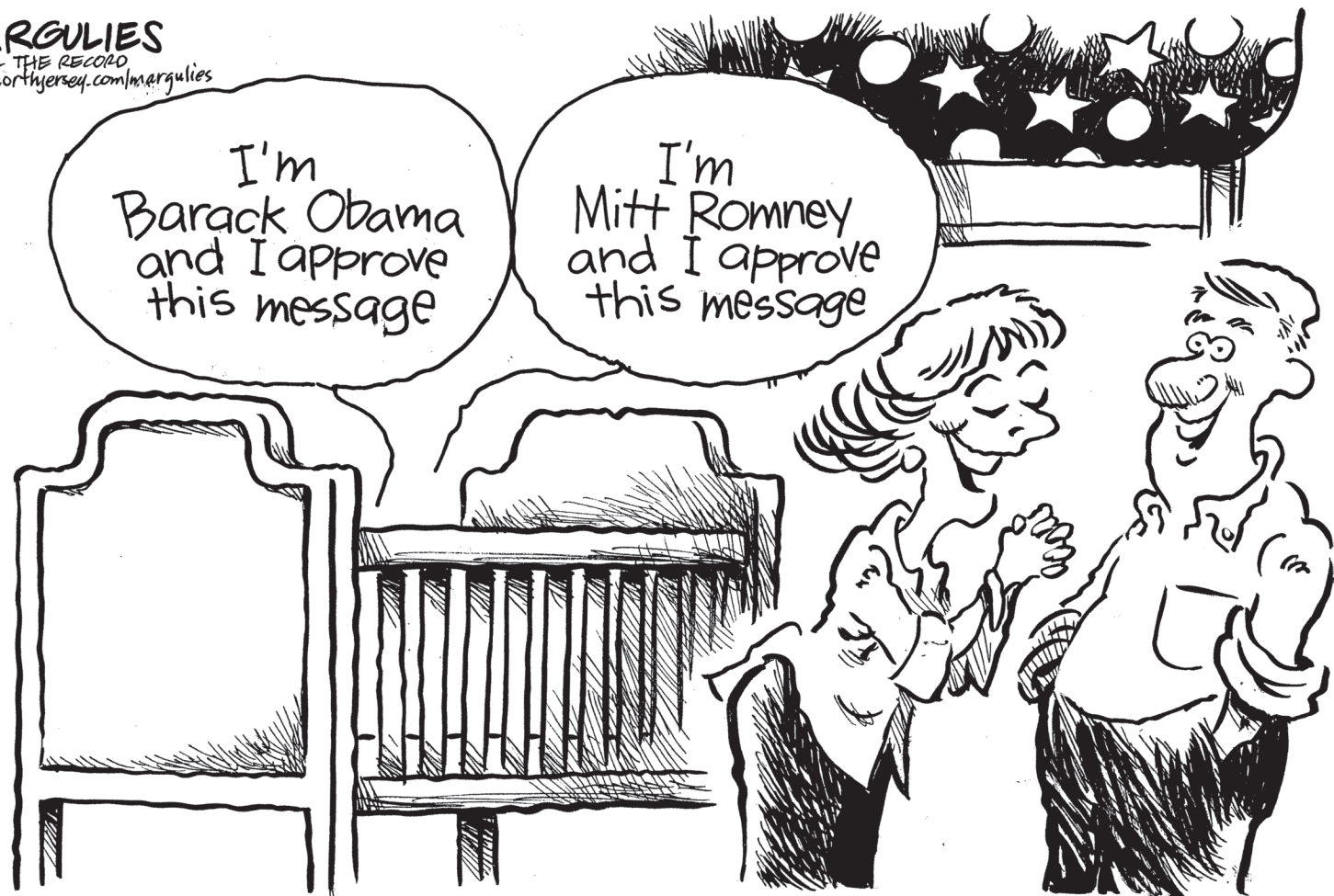
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"Honey, the baby said her first words!..."

### How refreshing – candidates out to serve

#### Other Opinions

Stephanie DeCamp  
Oberlin Herald

One thing that really impressed me while putting together the paper this week was the candidates running for state Senate.

Sen. Allen Schmidt, the Democrat, and Sen. Ralph Ostmeier, the Republican, have different approaches toward finance and the role of the state, but what struck me most was a question that they both answered the same way – "What are your future political ambitions?"

Both candidates answered that they had none. Neither one wants to climb the political ladder to a more powerful office or make more than they do today. Granted, a state senator probably makes more than I do, but all the same, I saw real value in this response.

Today, more than ever, most of us believe that a politician without a desire for power is an oxymoron, and it's refreshing to hear the two men vying to maintain such a powerful position acknowledge that they want nothing more. Of course, they could be lying, but I don't think they are. Both men told me they had been encouraged to run for office because others believed in them, and that they saw their

jobs as a public service, not unlike serving in the armed forces.

It's hard, even for a person as sunny and positive as me, not to be jaded about politics. When I watched the presidential debates, I walked away feeling even less informed and more frustrated than I already was. On top of that, you have an all-time high of party bickering, which in unregulated forums like Facebook and Twitter, can take incredibly harsh and tactless swings for the worse.

Where is the dignity in serving your country, I've wondered? Where is the respect for the office, such as I hear people had when John

F. Kennedy was president? I've never seen that respect. I've grown up with comedians defiling every president, and talk radio tearing them to pieces.

I guess what I'm trying to say is, there can't be any compromise without mutual respect and a firm commitment to each other and our communities, instead of our pocketbooks and influence. If our leaders don't quit seeking to get ahead of the other guy, stonewalling legislation because it comes from someone we don't like, and throwing mud at each other's personal politics and reputations, then we'll never make it.

It's time we – and especially our politicians – rise above the muck, and start doing our jobs like the adults we are, instead of the petty, greedy children we've become.

Stephanie DeCamp is a reporter for The Oberlin Herald. A graduate of Metro State College in Denver, she originally is from Johnson County, Kansas.

### Farmers need to speak up on issues

Life experiences teach plenty to those willing to learn. From the time I was a small boy, I remember my dad, uncles and grandfather talking and debating the issues of the day whenever we visited one another.

As I grew older, I began to hear some of what they said. I began to understand what they were talking about. But it has taken me nearly 30 years to understand what my grandfather used to say about understanding issues.

About the time I was halfway through high school, something he said finally sunk in. Grandpa Bert always said when you know a little about an issue, it's easy to form an opinion. When you learn a little more, it becomes a little more difficult to make a decision. And when you learn even more about an issue, your decision becomes, "just plain hard."

Lately, I've been thinking a lot about the issue of farmers and ranchers who often toil long days away by themselves. Sometimes they feel isolated with their backs against the wall. More than one farmer has expressed a feeling of, "It's me against the world."

Never before in agriculture has it been more important for farmers to express their basic wants, hopes and needs. Things like protection of personal property, a sound education for their children and a responsible, nonintrusive federal government, to mention a few.

Never before has there been such an opportunity to express agriculture's needs. Today there are hundreds of satellites in orbit around our globe. Our cable system is loaded with hundreds of networks. The information high-



**John Schlageck**

• Insights  
Kansas Farm Bureau

way continues to speed forward and we can communicate with people around the world instantly. Smart phones and social media keep us connected at every turn.

Today's technology allows individuals to access videos, music, news, weather, markets, and consumer information – literally anything happening in our world today.

It's been nearly three decades since newspapers entered the era of national and international publications. In this country, *Christian Science Monitor* and the *Wall Street Journal* pioneered the way. Magazines and newspapers from all over the world are online today, available for anyone with the time and desire to read them.

With all of these different information avenues, it may be easy for some to tune out and turn off. Farmers, ranchers, businessmen, bankers and professionals cannot afford to do that. We must utilize these communication tools to tell our story.

One way to help do this is by becoming active in the farm organizations and commodity groups of your choice. They can provide the vehicle to help you tell agriculture's story

while developing sound farming policy that must be communicated.

Agriculture finally arrived as a headliner during the farm crisis of the mid-'80s. Every day, newspapers, radios, televisions and computers are chock full of stories on agriculture. Subjects range from food additives in processing to agricultural chemicals. Stories include animal care, cholesterol in the diet, sugarless foods, the farm bill and finding ways to increase agricultural trade.

Remember, farmers and ranchers must continue to voice their message in the public information arena. Agriculture must utilize this medium to promote and persuade others to bring about change – change that will benefit agriculture and a society that relies on U.S. farmers and ranchers for the safest and most abundant food source in the world.

A Kansas citizen said it best approximately 90 years ago, "This nation will survive, this state will prosper, the orderly business of life will go forward only if men can speak in whatever way given them to utter what their hearts hold – by voice, by postal card, by letter or by press."

William Allen White wrote this in his *Emporia Gazette* during the post-World War I recession in 1922. These words ring true today.

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.

### Where to write, call

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**U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp**, 126 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715 or Fax

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### Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

