

## Other Viewpoints

# Historic landmark worth preservation

Today's travelers don't have much need for "points of rock" to guide them on their cross-country road travels. But nonetheless, Kansas Department of Transportation officials should find a way to preserve such a point of history before they plow up ground to expand U.S. 50 through Dodge City.

A \$69 million, 16-mile project scheduled in 2018 will expand U.S. 50 to four lanes through Dodge City, leveling the "Point of Rock" on the west side of the city. Anyone who has traveled that road knows the landmark because it is the site of one of two steel sculptures – the other being on the city's southeast side – featuring a silhouetted band of horsemen atop the rock outcropping with the words "Dodge City."

But the site is more significant than just the sculpture, iconic as it is. The hillside and rock outcropping was a landmark long before the sculpture was put there. Travelers on the Santa Fe Trail used it as a marker and a place where they could get an elevated view of the route and the surrounding prairie.

"There are four points of rock on the Santa Fe Trail, and three of those are in Kansas," explains Gary Kraisinger, who is on the board of the Great Western Cattle Trail Association and a member of an area chapter of the Santa Fe Trail Association. "This is the very first one travelers would run across" on the road to Santa Fe, N.M.

Later, when cattle drives came north out of Texas in the 1870s it was a marker signaling trail bosses to take their herds west of the city and turn north toward Ogallala, Neb. It also was a point along the north-south Cherokee Trail, which came up from Oklahoma and eventually connected into the Oregon Trail.

The Department of Transportation doesn't think it has much of another option, because the right of way for expansion is restricted on the south side of the existing highway by railroad track, leaving only the space on the north, where the point of rock is located. The state originally proposed moving the whole highway route farther north, but locals objected to changing the alignment.

We wonder if the highway couldn't be split, retaining the existing part as the two eastbound lanes and building the new westbound lanes north of the monument. It actually could be a good way to protect this geological and historical feature of the land.

In any event, the objection to the highway plan has merit, and highway engineers should put their heads together to come up with a solution.

Few of the wagon wheel ruts from the old Santa Fe Trail remain. True, we need ribbons of pavement to travel today, so they serve no more functional purpose than a rise in the prairie that once was a lookout point. But this is important history worth preserving. And once it's gone, it can't be reclaimed.

— *The Hutchinson News, via the Associated Press*

## Write us

The *Colby Free Press* encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of general interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

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# Law change may offer rural opportunity

For farm and ranch families across Kansas, adding flexibility to our agribusiness laws represents a unique opportunity to access new markets, to diversify operations and to attempt a new strategy to invigorate rural communities and offer young people a rural alternative.

Our current law has restricted this state's ability to attract and capitalize on the potential in Kansas, keep families on the farm and rural communities alive and well. For many years we've simply watched as farm consolidation occurred and rural communities ceased to exist.

While no single concept is likely to address all of the issues of out-migration or depopulation, in rural Kansas, removing the real or perceived hurdles to bringing new business ventures to Kansas will encourage growth and industry and in turn attract jobs and residents to rural communities.

Revising restrictive laws is one step in the right direction to diversify economies, improve markets and give a brighter future to families who want to continue to live and thrive in rural Kansas.

Kansas is now one of just nine states in the country that prohibit or restrict certain farms from doing business in the state. Courts have struck down these restrictions in three of those states. Current family-owned farms in Kansas could be in violation of our existing law.

Agribusiness, swine, dairy and poultry pro-



**John Schlageck**

• Insights

Kansas Farm Bureau

ducers have approached Kansas about the possibility of locating here. Updating state law to reflect the reality of modern-day business structure will allow efficient, environmentally sound corporate citizens to revitalize many of our rural communities.

A crucial part of this story remains the privately held farms in Kansas. When comparing land values from 15 states, both with and without restrictions, there was no correlation between land values and restrictions on business structures.

Some say a change in law will hurt small farms. Research shows the opposite is true. Those states without restrictions experienced a growth of 5.24 percent in small farms compared to 0.35 percent in Kansas.

For farmers and ranchers of all sizes, increasing the flexibility of our laws represents a unique opportunity to access new markets, to diversify operations and to attempt a new strategy to invigorate rural communities and offer young people a rural alternative.

Whether in business as a sole proprietorship, as limited liability corporations or any other available structures, farmers and ranchers look at real numbers and real value, not emotional, unsubstantiated arguments. It's also why they support existing requirements for environmental measures that ensure they leave the land better than when they began caring for it.

In today's global economy Kansas will continue to struggle if we fail to embrace free and open markets. This is a concept farmers and ranchers have long supported.

Rural Kansans deserve the opportunity to open our state to new development by removing barriers for entering, or in some cases remaining in business, in Kansas. Changing the law will allow multi-generational family operations to continue to work in Kansas instead of imposing a system in which future generations may be ineligible to own or operate the farm or ranch.

It's time we rethink the status quo and focus all our energy on growing all parts of the state to ensure vibrant farms, ranches, schools, faith communities and food systems in both rural and urban areas of our state.

*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.*

# Property owners face loss of access

To the Editor,

As a farmer or rancher, have you ever stopped to think what would happen if you were suddenly restricted from the use of your property? What would happen if that restriction was placed upon you at the prime time of planting or prime grazing? What if your access to a property was denied because use of the access might disturb or endanger the habitat of a wildlife species?

What would be the effect on your county tax base as a result of reduced productivity of farm and ranch land or perhaps a reduction in mineral production due to federal restrictions? What if it became impossible to construct transmission lines or electric production facilities, pipelines or a new pasture fence and stock tanks?

This is not a far-out possibility. As I see it, we could all be forced into a management plan that has nothing to do with efficiency or production. The pending listing of the lesser prairie chicken on the endangered species list is something all landowners, mineral producers, electric companies, tenants, property owners and taxpayers should be concerned about, especially if you have property in or along a designated habitat for these birds.

Production could be prohibited for part of, or perhaps for the entire year. As it stands to-



**Free Press Letter Drop**

• Our readers sound off

day, you have no or very little say in your future. Remember what happened to farmers in California as the end result of that little minnow being listed as endangered?

Hopefully, there is a brighter side to this story. You do have a group working on your behalf. Landowners, tenants, royalty producers, energy companies and anyone who has an interest or investment in production of any kind from the land should be interested in joining in this group.

The newly formed Kansas Natural Resources Coalition represents western Kansas counties and county commissioners that have been working to resolve the issue with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. To date, 32 counties in western Kansas have joined forces. A small committee selected from those member counties has done an inordinate amount of research, produced documents and hand delivered those

to service officials in Washington.

The documents not only point out the law, but detail the steps required by law, prior to making any determination on the listing of the lesser prairie chicken by the service. After reviewing a small portion of those documents, I have a feeling this is the first time the service has ever seen anything like this and is not quite sure how to proceed at the moment. Let's just say our group is holding their feet to the fire.

As government rules and regulations continue to intrude our rural way of life, our liberty and our freedoms, I can see a real need for the group, not only today on the prairie chicken issue, but in coming years on many issues involving our land and our ability to continue production. When you control the land, you control the people.

We need your support and help to continue these efforts. Contact President Ken Klemm of Sherman County at [KNRC.counties@gmail.com](mailto:KNRC.counties@gmail.com) or your local county commissioners. Ask if they are a member of the coalition and if not, why not? Ask how you can help.

I believe this is a great investment in our future and that of future generations.

Jim Rice, Liberal Seward County commissioner

## Where to write, call

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[roberts.senate.gov/public/](http://roberts.senate.gov/public/)

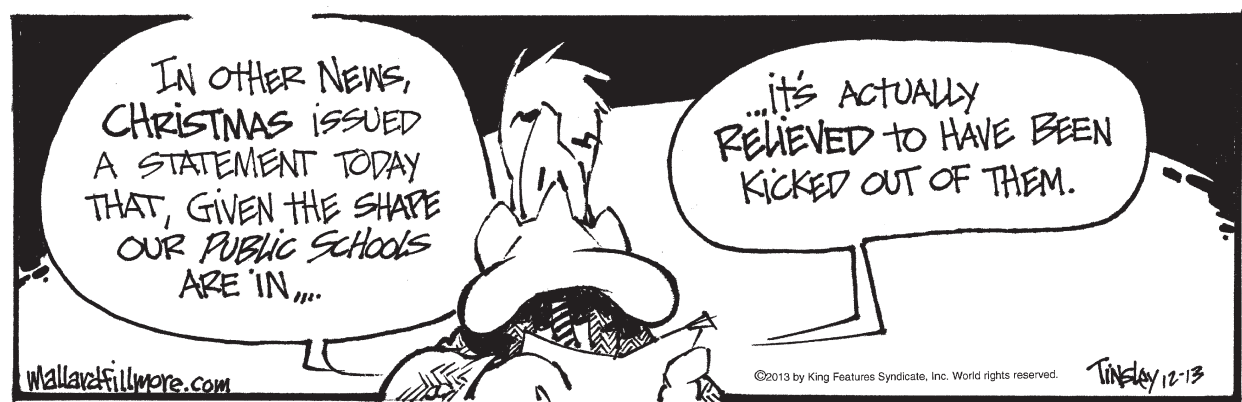
**U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran**, 354 Russell Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510 (202) 228-6966.  
Fax (202) 225-5124 [moran.senate.gov/public/](http://moran.senate.gov/public/)

**U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp**, 126 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715 or Fax (202) 225-5124. Web site: [huelskamp.house.gov](http://huelskamp.house.gov)

**State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer**, State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St., Room 136-E., Topeka, Kan. 66612, (785) 296-7399 [Ralph.Ostmeyer@senate.ks.gov](mailto:Ralph.Ostmeyer@senate.ks.gov)

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• Bruce Tinsley



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