

from our viewpoint...

## Kansas voter fraud not a big problem

The recurring plan to make Kansas voters show photo identification at the polls seems like a solution in search of a problem.

Kansas has no record of vote fraud. Since only registered voters are allowed in our elections, there's not much chance illegal aliens, or even legal aliens, will be voting.

Republicans, who are pushing this bill as a party-line vote, apparently think Democrats are less likely to carry a driver's license.

Why that will give one party an advantage we can't figure. In fact, we can't figure out why we need this bill at all.

We have enough red tape and bureaucracy today without making election clerks slow down to check ID. If a voter is known to them, they should just give him or her a ballot and send the voter off to a booth?

If a judge has any reason to suspect a voter isn't who he says he is, the judge should be allowed to ask for identification. And the voter ought to be happy to produce it.

Unless fraud becomes a problem, though, why make voting more difficult? Why insult us with requirements to remember our identification and, perhaps, keep some people from voting?

You'd think Kansas Republicans have more important fish to fry, like finding a program to base their platform on, or finding candidates for governor and senator in the coming 2010 elections. Gov. Kathleen Sebelius will leave Cedar Crest and likely seek a ticket to Washington, if she's not vice president by then.

The prospect of the likable, if liberal, governor replacing Sen. Sam Brownback and the turncoat former GOP chairman Mark Parkinson taking her place in Topeka ought to be enough to scare the wits out of Republicans.

They should quit wasting time on bogus issues like voter ID and get down to business. This bill deserves an early death. — *Steve Haynes*

## where to write

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## South Dakota not all carved mountains

South Dakota is not all carved mountains and motorcycles, we discovered last week.

As part of Steve's duties as National Newspaper Association president, we are visiting as many state's press conventions as we can. Last week was South Dakota's turn.

We headed north on U.S. 83 and found ourselves in Pierre, the capital city. It was nightfall and we weren't expected in Aberdeen until late the next day.

The central and southern parts of South Dakota are dominated by the Missouri River. West of there, it's hundreds of miles of prairie all the way to the Badlands and the Black Hills.

Pierre, with a population of about 14,000, is one of the smallest capital cities in the country. It seems less a seat of government than a medium-size county seat with lots of official-looking buildings.

Since we had extra time, we visited the Capitol, a stately structure on a hill overlooking both the town and the river. From the back door, you could see open prairie. Try that in Topeka or Denver.

Inside, the Capitol was eerily quiet. The Legislature had gone home. In fact, by state law, the South Dakota Legislature meets for only two months. Then everyone goes back to their regular jobs.



**cynthia haynes**

• open season

The building is open 365 days a year, with nothing to keep visitors from enjoying the spaces: No guards, no guides, no metal detector. You just walk in.

At the door there is a little rack with booklets about the building and grounds. Take one and go look around.

So we did.

Later, we took a walk on an island park in the middle of town on the Missouri. The dirt trails were a little muddy and there was snow on the north side of everything. A giant cottonwood had fallen across one trail, and we had to go around it. The trunk came chest-high on us.

Then it was time to head on to our goal — Aberdeen.

We had planned to continue on up U.S. 83 to U.S. 12 and then turn east to Aberdeen, but a blinking light on the gas gauge changed our plans. The next town to the north was about 40 miles, but Gettysburg — slogan: "Where the

battle wasn't" — offered gas only five miles to the east.

With a full tank, we left for Aberdeen, dodging pheasants along the way. South Dakota has a zillion pheasants and a short hunting season, we found out.

In Aberdeen, we met Gov. Mike Rounds, who signed a cookbook for me. We also met a lot of old friends and made a bunch of new ones.

Those of us from western Kansas could feel at home looking out over the endless rolling prairie now covered with wheat and corn stubble. The people are friendly and helpful — just like back home.

South Dakota does have a pimple on its nose, however. Tacky little casinos everywhere — like dog dropping on a favorite trail. Everywhere we looked, there were ugly combinations — fancy restaurant, bar and casino, fast food and casino, dress shop and casino, insurance agency and casino, real estate office and casino — I guess on that one you could lose your home almost before you sign the contract.

Needless to say, I didn't drop any money in the casinos. Raising children and running a business is more than enough gambling for me.

## Old school values

My old Catholic elementary school has been struggling, and that's not good for anybody.

St. Germaine School in Pittsburgh, Pa. will merge with another Catholic school because of declining enrollment at both schools. St. Germaine's enrollment dropped from 172 students just six years ago to 86 this year.

Sister Dale McDonald, Director of Public Policy and Education Research at the National Catholic Educational Association, told me that declining enrollment is a national trend. Though there is some growth in the South and the West, Catholic schools are shutting down at the rate of more than 100 per year.

Why? Catholic families are having fewer children. Costs have gone up — health care, teacher salaries, liability insurance — driving tuitions up. And Catholic families aren't as attached to their parish as families were when I was a kid.

Lucky for me, I came out of a rich Catholic tradition that was set in motion by millions of European immigrants who immigrated to America 100 years before I was born. They paved the way for me to enjoy a terrific experience at good old St. Germaine.

I entered the school in the first grade. I knew right away things were going to be different from the public school where I attended kindergarten. The sisters were clearly in charge of St. Germaine. The place was so orderly and clean you could eat off the floor.

The school was packed with kids. The church was built to service our growing suburban community. Many of the families that lived in our neighborhood moved there to be near the church and the school. Our parents were determined that we receive a good education and be taught solid values.

And, boy, did the sisters deliver.

Every day they taught us to embrace the virtues: prudence, temperance and courage. They demanded we fend off the seven deadly sins: pride, envy, gluttony, lust, anger, greed and sloth. They made us sit up straight and keep our shirts tucked in.

When they weren't pounding values into us, they worked us



**tom purcell**

• commentary

hard in math, science, reading and writing. Unlike many of today's public school teachers, the sisters didn't dwell on boosting our self-esteem; that was something we had to earn by producing results.

I didn't know it then, but the sisters gave us the gift of clarity. They portrayed the world as it really is — a battle between good and evil. Every moment of every day, we are moving toward one and away from the other. The sisters were determined to give us the fortitude we would need to make the right decisions and move in the right direction.

My years at St. Germaine were eventful. The lead-ups to Christmas and Easter were always giant affairs — the ceremonies, the planning, the excitement.

The sacraments of Holy Communion and Confirmation were huge deals that involved a special Mass and a family gathering — a giant celebration that confirmed something

important had occurred.

The sacrament of Confession was a big one, too. Confession is where you examine your conscience and soul and admit, out loud in front of another human being, exactly what you did wrong. I always tried to disguise my voice so that Father Kram wouldn't know who I was, and just when I'd think I got away with my disguise, he'd say, "God bless you, Tommy. Your penance will be three Hail Marys, three Our Fathers and..."

There were many times when my elementary school experience was unpleasant. The sisters demanded a lot from us, and I often failed to live up to their standards. But the fact is the values and lessons they hammered into me as a kid are in me still — they guide me still.

As the world gets more confused every day — as we lose our grasp of right and wrong and some people debate whether such concepts even exist — we need more kids to have the elementary school experience I had.

Like I said, it's not good for anybody that so many Catholic schools are struggling.

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## The Goodland Star-News

(USPS No. 222-460. ISSN 0893-0562)

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Inland Press Association Colorado Press Association  
National Newspaper Association  
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Published every Tuesday and Friday except the days observed for New Year's Day, July 4th and Christmas Day, at 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

Periodicals postage paid at Goodland, Kan. 67735; entered at the Goodland, Kan., Post Office under the Act of Congress of March 8, 1878.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Goodland Star-News, 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

TELEPHONE: (785) 899-2338. Editorial e-mail: [star-news@nwkansas.com](mailto:star-news@nwkansas.com). Advertising questions can be sent to: [goodlandads@nwkansas.com](mailto:goodlandads@nwkansas.com)

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SUBSCRIPTIONS: In Sherman County and adjacent counties: three months, \$29; six months, \$46; 12 months, \$81. Out of area, weekly mailing of two issues: three months, \$39; six months, \$54; 12 months, \$89 (All tax included). Mailed individually each day: (call for a price).

Incorporating:

**The Goodland Daily News**  
1932-2003

**The Sherman County Herald**  
Founded by Thomas McCants  
1935-1989

**THE SHERMAN COUNTY STAR**  
Founded by Eric and Roxie Yonkey  
1994-2001

**Nor'West Newspapers**  
Haynes Publishing Company

