

from our viewpoint...

## Forums show contrasting futures

Two nights of public forums Wednesday and Thursday showed contrasting views of the future of that the Goodland School District and the people of the district face.

The session on Wednesday brought nearly 150 people, more than two-thirds of them teens from junior high to high school age, and their parents, to hear what alcohol can do to their developing brains.

Thursday, it was the adults' turn, with a school district task force on facilities asking parents and school staff to look at the future of the district and come up with some ideas for the task force to consider as they weigh the options.

The young people had fun with the bags of stuff they got for attending the alcohol forum, and talking to their friends who came. The audience was mostly attentive to a video about the damage alcohol can do to a teenager's developing brain.

The teens all got a snack, and watching each other wander around with the "fatal vision" goggles made many of them laugh, but the organizers hope the night was enough of a lesson to keep them sober through their school years and maybe beyond.

The organizers said later they felt it had been a great evening and they were thrilled with the turnout.

The mood on Thursday was more somber as parents, some students, teachers, principals and members of the task force went over the future needs and options facing the Goodland schools.

Enrollment estimates for the next few years show a continuing downward trend that will further reduce the district budget, and make the school board look at cutting staff and closing building.

The youngest buildings in the district are North and West Elementary, but those two are about to celebrate their 40th birthdays, having been built in 1969. The strongest building in the district is Central Elementary, built in 1950, and based on the cost figures, it is the cheapest building to operate, including maintenance and utilities.

A parent asked about the trends in educating students and wondered if the district was focusing too much on bricks and mortar rather than how the students are being prepared for the technology in the world today.

No amount of online courses can provide all the aspects of a good education, though, and we agree the schools provide an avenue for personal growth and the development of relationships which are part of a well-rounded person.

Declining enrollment could turn around, but it is better to be realistic and prepare for the future.

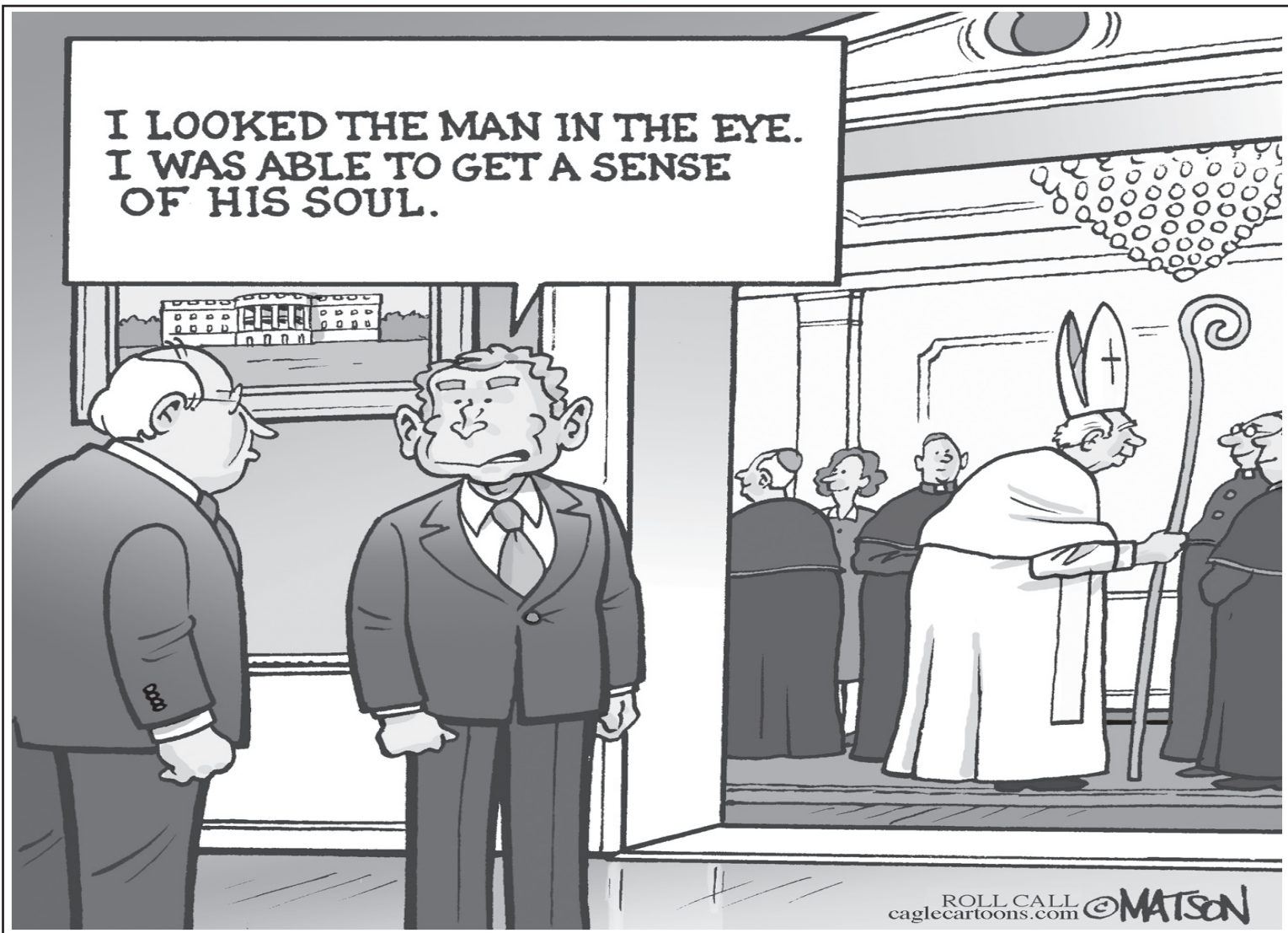
There were no snacks or door prizes at the facilities meeting, but both groups were trying to get the people in their audience to grasp the importance of the message. In both cases, the answers are not going to be quick.

More meetings will be held to try to educate young people about the disastrous effects of falling into the trap of alcohol.

More meetings will be held to try to identify and build support for the best options for the future of the school district.

Superintendent Shelly Angelos had a quote that fit: "Change is always a threat when it is done to people, but is an opportunity when it is done by people."

Organizers of both forums should get a gold star for effort. It is up to all of us to support both the kids who decide not to drink and the school district people with the tough task of planning a vision for the future. — Tom Betz



## Looking for telltale signs of spring

Has spring sprung, or did it just peek around the corner and run away?

While it didn't seem very springy last week, I wore a pair of sandals. I almost froze my toes off — and that was before it snowed.

Still, I keep looking around for those telltale signs that spring has indeed arrived despite the vagaries of the weather.

The wheat crop is a pretty good indication of the time of year. When it gets all green and furry looking, spring is here.

Other good signs are the red-wing blackbirds. When those fellows start showing up to build a nest and raise a family, summer can't be far behind.

The male red-wing finds a conveniently tall weed, fence post or low branch to perch on while guarding his nest. In the spring, these guardians can be seen along the highways, keeping a close eye out for predators in the wheat fields.

Robins, of course, are a good sign of spring, but give me a row of red-wing blackbirds guarding their homes anytime.



**cynthia haynes**

• open season

Mr. Robin's just a show off. The redwings are heeding the call of duty to protect their home and their children.

Another sign of spring is noisy nights.

On Saturday, we were headed home from Junction City and we could hear the first frogs of summer. While it snowed out here, it just rained in central Kansas, and the frogs took the resulting puddles as a sign it was time to come out of hibernation and start croaking.

I just hope when it got colder that night, they were smart enough to dig back into the mud — if not to go back into hibernation, at least for a little nap.

Out in my yard, the daffodils are blooming — the ones along the wall, the ones in the back yard, those along the front porch, and even the

ones in the lily beds.

I know that the crocus is supposed to be the first spring flower, but the ones in my yard are so tiny and spread out they're hardly noticeable. The daffodils come a little later, but they make a brave show and can be seen from both the street and my bedroom window.

When I look outside in the morning, it's spring in my back yard. At least after the snow melts.

Then, of course, there are people's allergies. As the trees do a spring fling with their pollen, half the population seems to be sneezing, wheezing and grabbing for a tissue. You can really tell that spring is in the air when the sale of decongestants jumps at the drug store.

So I'm sure that spring is here.

I know it. I'm ready. I've got my pink, yellow and light-blue sleeveless dresses, my capri pants, my sandals and my tank tops ready. Now, would someone explain to Mother Nature that it's time to bring on the warm weather.

The blackbirds, the frogs and I are getting impatient.

## It's the cost stupid

A recent story in the *Wichita Eagle* may point the way towards health care reform in the future. With costs for procedures growing due to an archaic pricing structure set by government programs like Medicare and by the power of private insurance companies to provide discounts to providers, few individuals have any idea of what health care costs.

Go into your doctor's office and ask the price of an office visit. They may be able to tell you what they charge for an office visit (that is, what the discounted price of a visit is after the insurance company is billed for services).

The doctor doesn't set the price for services—the third party payer establishes the price. If you were paying cash or using a health savings account—in other words paying for services rendered at the time of service—a doctor may be able to negotiate a price with you, saving expenses and hassles by not dealing with the paperwork required by Medicaid, Medicare or insurance companies.

One way to lower costs of health care would be to rearrange the stacked deck in favor of third party payers and free up individual consumption of health care. Health Savings Accounts are a powerful tool to do this as is the rewriting of the federal tax code to allow individuals the ability to deduct their health care expenses to the levels businesses are currently allowed.

But another way to reduce costs was discussed in the Feb. 24, story in the *Wichita Eagle*. Galichia Heart Hospital, a private hospital specializing in heart-related diseases, has decided to charge a flat fee of \$10,000 for a common open heart procedure.

Galichia CEO Steve Harris said, "We're very serious about presenting cost-effective products and options for our community. . . This isn't just a good rate. It's a world-class rate."

Indeed it is. Consider that the two largest hospitals in Wichita, which have exclusive contracts with insurance providers, charge as much as \$35,000 for open heart surgery.

Galichia is hoping to attract individuals without insurance, to reach out to those who are cost-conscious and to attract medical tourists from abroad, particularly England and Canada where waiting lists for surgeries in their socialized medical systems are the norm.

Galichia as a private surgical hospital has some advantages over other providers when it comes to offering the lower rate. They are outside the Medicare and private insurance pricing structure. They don't have to see Medicare patients as other hospitals are required



from other pens

• commentary

to do. They also are not required to charge for services based on the provider-insurance company contract. This gives them the advantage to be able to charge what they want for a service.

However, in their favor, by reducing the costs of the basic open heart surgery procedure they have opened up a necessary discussion in the pricing of health care.

If Galichia can do this much more efficiently and at a lower cost, why can't the government

and private insurance systems promote a more price sensitive, consumer-driven health plan which promotes lower costs, price transparency and allows individuals to choose for themselves where they go for procedures?

If Medicaid patients could be included in such a reform of the basic way health care is funded and individuals are insured, costs would go down.

Galichia has shown a possible path other providers may want to emulate.

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