

from our viewpoint...

Post office changes continue unabated

This week the residents of Edson and Kanorado will attend meetings on the possible closure of their local post offices, and the major question is whether anything they say can keep the local offices open.

The Kanorado community meeting is planned for 7 p.m. tonight at the Kanorado Senior Citizen Center. Kanorado citizens are planning a community meeting to be held at 6 p.m. prior to the postal hearing.

The Edson community meeting is planned for 6:30 p.m. on Wednesday at Cochran Farm Supply a mile west of town.

Last week the U.S. Postal Service announced preliminary approval of the second round of processing consolidation will take Hays and Salina processing work and centralize it in Wichita for the whole state of Kansas.

That change will effect Northwest Kansas as the plan is to take processing that was being done in Colby – before it was moved to Salina in September – and move it to Denver instead.

The meetings on the processing changes have not been announced for Colby, but are planned for Hays and Salina.

Again when the postal service representatives come to the meetings it is not to seek the input of the citizens, but rather to announce what they have decided to do with the postal delivery service.

This continues to be a bewildering process, as the Post Office seems bent on pushing the people away and dissolving before our eyes.

The people at Edson have attempted to enlist the help of Senator Jerry Moran in their drive to save the local post office. Unfortunately there is not a lot the good Senator can do other than maybe slow down the process or promise to try to get Congress to take up the cost-cutting issues the post office has been asking for over the past year.

One of those issues is the elimination of Saturday mail delivery, but with the post office in the red already that cut will not solve the problem.

Actually the post office problems go back more than a century to the time after the Civil War when political parties had the power of patronage, and at the local level the postmaster was appointed by the chairman of the winning political party. President Ulysses S. Grant's administration became known as the most corrupt in history for the way patronage jobs were handed out.

In the name of "taking politics out of the system" Congress established the Civil Service and set up the rules and process for getting a government job. Under Civil Service the number of appointees dropped. However, over the decades control of the bureaucracy of government fell more and more to the civil servants with less and less input from citizens, insulating the operation of government from the political process.

The Post Office had mostly escaped this process of being de-politicized. Because it was established before many other government agencies and was mentioned in the U.S. Constitution, it continued to have the local postmaster be appointed by the winning political party chairman.

This changed when Congress reorganized the Post Office in 1971 to "take politics out of the system." The United States Postal Service has been on a losing track ever since, and the local people have lost all control over their mail system. People are having to find other ways to deal with the communication process, their search for alternative technology hastened by the dismantling of our postal system.

We hope Edson and Kanorado people have better luck than we have seen in recent days. — Tom Betz

The Goodland Star-News

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

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Published every Tuesday and Friday except the days observed for New Year's Day, Memorial Day, July 4th, Labor Day, Thanksgiving 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. Advertising questions can be sent to: 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).

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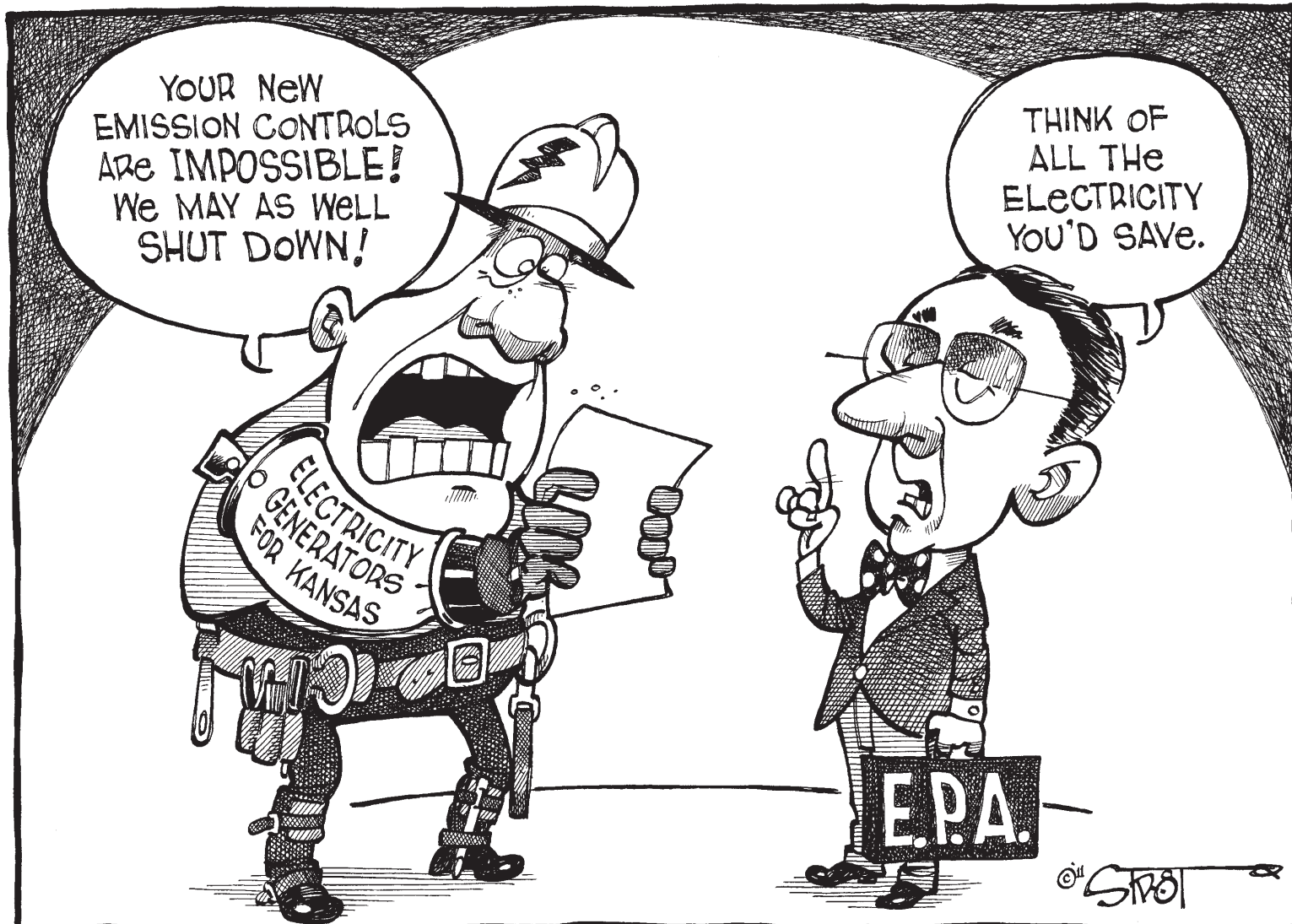
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Time to explain coined phrase 'tarmac'

Word abuse, I call it.

I first noticed it a couple of years ago when wire-service reporters were writing about people stuck on the aprons and taxiways of our airports.

In bad weather, they could be trapped out there for hours, waiting to be deiced, for a runway to open, for the tower at the destination airport to give the OK to leave. In a couple of extreme cases, people were held on the apron for most of a day, prompting new federal rules and stiff penalties for holding passengers against their will.

And that's when some bright and supposedly literate reporter – probably one who'd read a British novel or two – started referring to these people as "trapped out on the 'tarmac.'"

Sounds kinda cool, huh? Very British. I really noticed when my daughter was spouting the phrase when describing an airline trip.

Only tarmac isn't just a synonym for pavement, or even asphalt. It refers to a specific process for building up a road surface, the way many roads out here were paved from the 1920s to when I was a kid.

I sort of knew that, but I didn't know the whole story until I looked it up, and thereby learned a few esoteric facts to be filed away in that great vault of random information that makes me a fair trivia player.

First, the term tarmac comes from two origins, tar, or heavy oil, and macadamization, a technique for building up roads perfected in the 19th century by a Scots engineer named John Loudon McAdam.



steve haynes

• along the sappa

Mr. McAdam didn't invent tarmac pavement, as I had thought, and he certainly never envisioned paving the parking area at an air-drome. What he invented was basically the process still used today to build a gravel road – cutting a ditch on either side, grading out and packing the surface with only a slight crown, then putting down layers of small, crushed rock which pack to form a solid, relatively waterproof surface.

The engineer perfected this process about 1820, and within a couple of years, roads in America – and around the world – were being improved his way.

Wagon-wheel tires actually packed the top layer into a tight, smooth surface, and that worked until the advent of motor cars. Speeding vehicles sucked up dirt and gravel off the surface, causing a dust problem and tearing up the road. It fell to a Brit engineer, Edgar Purnell Hooley, to notice that tar covered with crushed rock made a dust-free surface for a Macadamized road.

Mr. Hooley secured a patent for his "tar macadamization" process in 1904, giving the world tarmac. And while modern hot-mix asphalt paving was invented in the 1920s, it didn't fully replace tarmac in this country until

about the 1960s.

I can remember contractors rebuilding western Kansas roads in the '50s by packing the base, then building up layers of larger rock which were worked back and forth with a grader as traffic passed. That left a pile of rock in the center.

My mother got stuck on that pile going through one job, probably on K-96 down by Dighton. Dad gave her a lot of grief, but a nice man from the construction firm came by and pulled her out. He said it was no big deal; he pretty much spent his days doing just that.

Anyway, the final layers would be smaller rock, just as Mr. McAdam specified, though undoubtedly broken by machine, not by convicts or laborers swinging hammers. Those were sealed with hot asphalt, sometimes before spreading, but always after.

Today, it's hard to find any tarmac pavement. Asphalt rules the highways, at least where the traffic doesn't justify concrete paving. You still find it on older county roads and on city streets in places like Goodland, where the paving has been built up over years and years of sealing.

But it's been 50 years or more since any tarmac was laid down on a U.S. commercial airport. Taxiways and aprons are mostly concrete today, with some asphalt here and there. Tarmac probably wouldn't hold a 737, which could sink into the goo on a hot summer day.

So, stuck on the tarmac? A romantic notion, perhaps, but hardly accurate. A stretch at best. But, for a while, at least, the phrase caught on, and that's how word abuse gets its start.

Fly your fanny flag high



Insight this week

• john schlageck

Kansas farmers have access to a safety tool that should always be used. The slow-moving vehicle emblem can save lives and machinery.

A slow-moving vehicle emblem (fanny flag) is designed for one reason to notify the public the vehicle motorists are approaching is not traveling more than 25 miles-per-hour, says Holly Higgins, Kansas Farm Bureau safety director.

That in turn allows them to slow down and proceed with caution because the vehicle ahead is moving slowly.

"Once an approaching motorist sees the flashing lights and SMV sign, the driver can react in a defensive way that will keep both operators safe," Higgins says. "We find when you mix these two vehicles together without the proper warning devices in place a number of things can happen."

One such example is a motorist who pops up over a hill traveling 65 miles-per-hour and finds a tractor moving at 20 miles-per-hour. The driver of the auto or truck may be forced to run into the ditch, the back of the tractor or into the other lane of oncoming traffic.

"Hazard lights and SMVs are there to pre-

vent these types of accidents," Higgins says.

Anyone operating a slow-moving vehicle should be sure the fluorescent orange emblem is properly mounted on the back of your vehicle. Every farm tractor manufactured or assembled after Jan. 1, 1975, shall be equipped with hazard warning lights visible from a distance of not less than 1,000 feet to the front and rear in normal sunlight, which are to be displayed whenever such a vehicle is operated upon a highway.

One alarming trend that has occurred in Kansas is the misuse of these signs. The emblems have been found nailed to fence posts, in front of driveways, as markers for washed out areas in the road and in one instance on cattle pens in a feedlot.

Use of slow moving emblems in such a manner gives the motoring public a mistaken impression of what is on the road in front of

them. They drive up slowly on a slow moving vehicle sign and assume a tractor or some other farm implement is going down the road in front of them. The next time they see the bright orange emblem, they may think it is something else and crash into the back of a slow moving vehicle.

SMV emblems help eliminate such accidents all together. For those producers, or anyone else operating slow moving vehicles, you can purchase them at your local machinery dealer or farm-supply stores.

Use common sense when it comes to displaying your slow-moving vehicle emblems, Higgins advises. She used the example of a farmer using a stinger on the back of a tractor to haul big round bales.

"What happens if you lift such a bale up for transportation?" the safety spokesperson asks. "You can't see the SMV emblem on the back of the tractor, right?"

So what's the answer?

Take a slow-moving vehicle emblem that has a steel rod or wooden stake attached and stick it into the back of the hay bale. And before you head down the road, turn on the flashing amber lights.

If a farmer or rancher has the SMV emblem, his lights flashing and someone hits him from the rear, he's done all he can, Higgins says.

"Proper installation and maintenance of SMVs isn't intended to make anyone's life more complicated," Higgins says. "They're intended to save lives and reduce accidents. If you don't keep your slow-moving vehicle emblems clean and in place, you're putting yourself in a position that can be avoided."

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau has been writing about farming and ranching in Kansas for more than 25 years. He is the managing editor of "Kansas Living," a quarterly magazine dedicated to agriculture and rural life in Kansas.

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