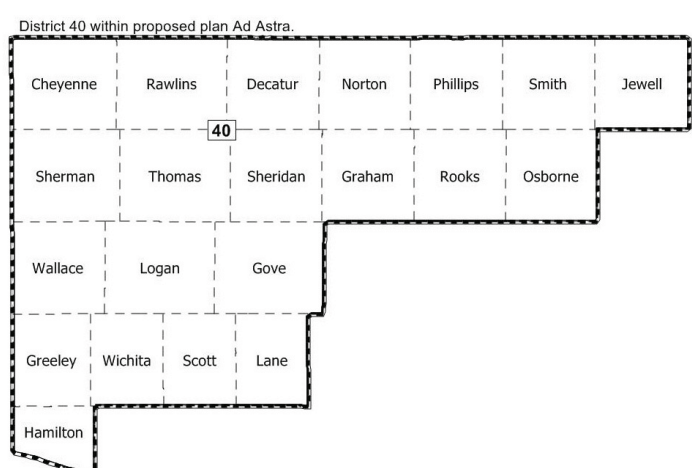


from our viewpoint...



'Ad Astra' map obviously not made by anyone from here

Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer is upset about the shape his district is in, or at least the shape it could be in if the latest map proposal for redistricting the state Senate becomes law.

The map, known as Ad Astra, would stretch the already huge 40th district into eastern Kansas and well into the southwest. It would be impossible to cover with a couple of days of town-hall meetings.

The 40th is already the largest in the state. Under the Ad Astra proposal, it would grow to 20 1/2 counties, adding Phillips, Smith and Jewell on the east, losing Trego and Ness and adding half of Hamilton.

But Jewell County is in the eastern half of the state; Hamilton is on the Arkansas River and two-thirds of the way to Oklahoma.

Sen. Ostmeyer jokes that maybe the leadership is mad at him. More likely, someone is trying to draw a map that will satisfy the most people, including legislators who don't want to have to run against each other.

But whatever the reason, the result would be a district that would be tough to represent. Covering all or part of 20 counties, it would force the senator to keep in touch with fully one-fifth of the county commissioners in the state.

Today, from his home in Grainfield, near the center of the 18-county district, Sen. Ostmeyer can be in any town in the 40th in a couple of hours.

It'd be 325 miles from Syracuse in Hamilton County to St. Francis in Cheyenne to Mankato in Jewell, near three-fourths of the distance across the state. And it'd be a six-hour drive.

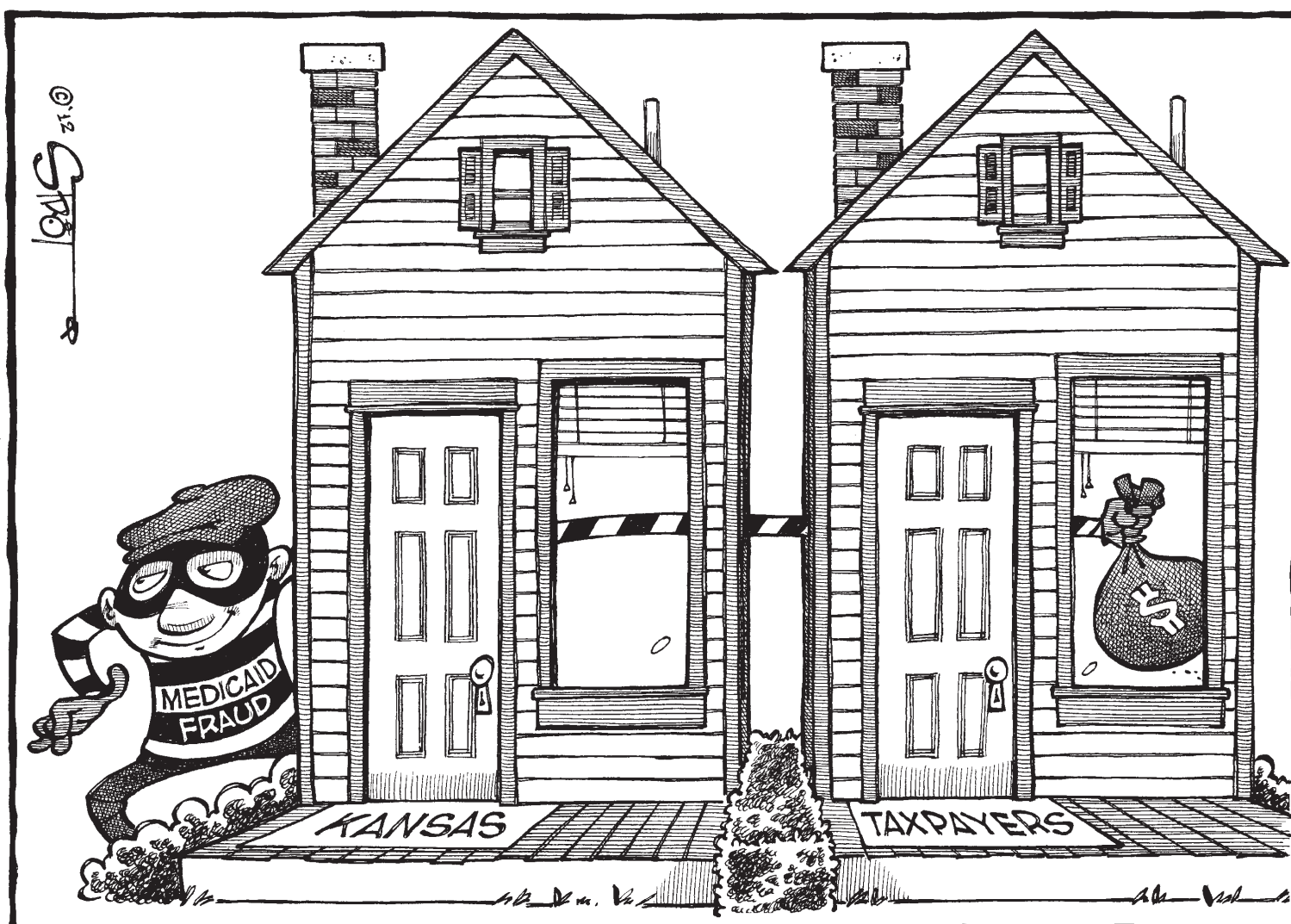
The district would be almost impossible to represent. It would be a burden for any candidate who wanted to run for the seat. In Johnson County, the "new" 37th District spans just a few miles.

The thing is, Sen. Ostmeyer said, all his district needs to meet the guidelines laid down by federal courts to add Phillips County. That would retain the basic square shape, he said, and keep the district as compact as it could be.

Our view: it's tough enough to represent the huge 40th District without making it impossible. The Senate leadership needs to take practical considerations into account.

This district already represents nearly all the northwest quadrant of the state, with a slice of the southwest thrown in. Stretching it into a gerrymander won't make things any better.

Anyone who votes for the district as it stands in the Ad Astra map ought to be made to come out here and drive it. — Steve Haynes



Gerrymandering a real concern

Bare-knuckled political battles over redistricting have set the stage for some high drama when the Kansas Legislature returns next week.

Gov. Sam Brownback has led by example, bringing Washington brand of take-no-prisoners partisanship back to the state Capitol. House Speaker Mike O'Neal has joined with the governor and dropped all pretense of statesmanship while moving aggressively to gerrymander districts to ensure conservative Republican dominance of Kansas politics during the next decade.

First, the legislative body will have to address the search for a formula to add 58,000 residents to the 1st Congressional District while protecting 2nd District Congresswoman Lynn Jenkins' seat. Initially, O'Neal wanted to split Wyandotte County away from 3rd District Rep. Kevin Yoder's territory in order to make that district more safely Republican. Enough Republicans apparently became convinced that putting Wyandotte into the agricultural 1st District wouldn't pass court muster that the idea was dropped. So the battle now boils down to Jenkins, arguably Kansas' most vulnerable member of Congress.

Jenkins was narrowly elected in 2008, defeating first-term congresswoman Nancy Boyda. Once in office, she quickly became the butt of jokes from late-night comedians with a comment about the search in Republican circles for a "great white hope" to challenge President Obama. Other incidents followed. In a normal year she would have been vulnerable, but she benefitted from the Tea Party tide



a voice of reason

• alan jilka

in 2010 and won a second term, albeit with the smallest margin of victory of any of the four Kansas Republican congressional candidates that year.

One look at a map suggests that the logical way to balance the 1st District's population loss would be to add Manhattan to Tim Huelskamp's district, the map passed by the State Senate. But Manhattan officials are united in a bipartisan desire to stay out of Huelskamp's district. Presumably, Democrats don't want to be represented by one of the most conservative members of Congress. Republicans don't feel Huelskamp has the commitment, or respect of his peers, to successfully push for continued funding for the proposed National Biodefense Lab at Kansas State University.

Gov. Brownback claims that Congresswoman Jenkins would be in the strongest position to advocate for such funding with her seat on the House Ways and Means Committee. His reasoning is suspect, since Ways and Means Committee deals with tax issues, not appropriations.

Brownback claims to want to protect communities of interest, such as Leavenworth County. But he didn't seem bothered by the prospect of cutting up the capitol city of Topeka. A huge outcry scotched that plan. Mean-

while, it comes as news to residents of western Kansas that they don't have common interests with the home of Kansas State University.

Then there will be the state legislative maps to finish. With Brownback's agenda going nowhere in the Legislature, look for him to pull out all the stops to force through a map that will give conservatives an advantage in their efforts oust moderate Republican from the Kansas Senate. After the governor's allies rolled out eight primary challengers to moderate Republican senators prior to the session, moderates responded with a proposed map cutting most of the challengers out of their districts. Now Speaker O'Neal is threatening to intervene in the other body's dispute, a move without recent precedent.

Brownback has stated publicly that he will stay out of Republican primaries this year. But word out of Topeka this past week suggests that his chief of staff is leaving his position to direct the conservatives' attempt to take over the Senate this fall. Brownback's disingenuous comments have further eroded his credibility in a state that elected him governor with 65 percent of the vote just eighteen months ago.

The stakes are indeed high for the governor. Without a Legislature controlled by his stripe of Republicans, his legislative agenda is dead, and he could wind up as a lame-duck in his final two years.

Alan Jilka, (785) 643-5389, is the vice-president of Jilka Furniture and former Mayor of Salina.

Favorite part of the sports calendar

I really enjoy baseball season. I've said it before: I've never been much of a sports fan, but the one sport I've always enjoyed since I was a kid was baseball.

Growing up in Colorado my family spent quite a few summer days going down to Mile High Stadium (the original) to watch the Denver Zephyrs, a minor league team. Looking through the list of players to come out of that team only one jumps out at me, Filipe Alou, who played in Denver when the team had been known as the Bears.

Once the Rockies came in the Zephyrs moved out, but we still went to games, first at Mile High and then at Coors Field. We spent a lot of time in the nosebleed sections, but sadly we never managed to get tickets in the row of purple seats that marks one mile above sea level. We also got to spend some time at spring training because my grandparents have a house in Phoenix.

One of the reasons I like baseball and softball season is that it is outside when the weather is (mostly) nice. That makes my job one heck of a lot easier.

For the past couple year's I've been on sports reporting duty during baseball and softball season, first over in Colby, filling in until a new sports reporter could be hired, and now over here where sports is a regular part of my job. I've quite enjoyed it, and I've even won an award for my photography (my first ever award in this business).

I'll never forget that play. One girl slid into home plate to score and the catcher missed the throw, she went back to get the ball and the runner from third took off home. She slid in just as the catcher got back to the plate. In the picture I caught her trying to tag the runner, who was half in a cloud of dust, and the umpire behind calling "safe."

I got second place in sports photography from the Kansas Press Association for that picture. It wouldn't have been near as good if it weren't outside in good light. As much fun as basketball and wrestling are to watch, indoor arenas aren't conducive to the best pictures.



kevin bottrell

• simple tricks and nonsense

Max Jones is better than most, but I still prefer outside. I like a good rodeo for that very reason. Not because I'm particularly into rodeo, but because it's very easy to get incredibly good pictures.

So it's good to be out on the ball diamonds this year. The Cowgirls are doing great. They have some pretty good pitching, but they have to remember not to be sloppy when they're ahead by double digits. Play with precision every time and it'll help you when you need to make those clutch plays when you're desperate.

The Cowboys have been struggling a bit. They do very well on offense, but they need to tighten things up on defense. I've noted a number of passed balls that could have made all the difference had they been caught. Luckily we have one of the best catchers in the league

in Ryder Kling, so we don't seem to have half the wild pitches other teams do.

Armchair coaching is, of course, a favorite pass time of sports fans and one that I've obviously taking a liking to. Win or lose it's great to see these young people putting in great effort and sportsmanship, and we continue to cheer for them.

And don't worry, we'll always make sure to feature track and golf as well.

The NCAA tournament is over and I continued my just-over-50-percent streak, accurately predicting about one game out of two in the Final Four. I did get the championship correct, however, much to the chagrin of some of the KU fans around here. I had them losing a long time ago, so their success came as a great surprise to me.

In any case, I had a lot of fun taking part in March Madness this year. I can see why people enjoy this so much, and I may try it again next year.

It's worth noting that with all the hoopla about March Madness, it's easy to forget that NCAA women's basketball had their tournament as well. Apparently, Baylor won, capping a record-setting 40-0 season.

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