

from our viewpoint...

Don't get too down on American politics

If we have any doubt that we live in one of the better political systems in the world, we have only to look at the situations in Greece and Egypt.

The problem of the transition of power is one that has plagued nations and empires throughout history. What happens when its time for the next leader to come along? Alexander the Great conquered a great swath of land from Macedonia to India and forged out of it what could have been a lasting empire, but it fell apart upon his death. Those vying to be his successor tore his empire apart with civil wars. Charlemagne had the same problem. He passed his power to his son when he died, but his other children and relatives immediately started fighting each other.

What we see today in Egypt is in some ways the modern equivalent – without the monarchies. The revolution that toppled President Hosni Mubarak last year left a power vacuum, which the military was only too happy to fill. However, now that it is entrenched, the military doesn't want to give up that power.

It came out in the press Monday that even with the run-off elections throwing power to Muslim Brotherhood candidate Mohamed Morsi, Egypt's first democratically elected president may not have much power. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces have pretty much stripped the position of any authority.

The country has no constitution, and the parliament was dissolved last week by the same military council. That council has all the power, and it looks to be only interested in remaining in charge.

If a civilian-run government had been put in charge for the interim, would Egypt be on the verge of a dictatorship right now? It's hard to say. Civilians can try to grab power just as easily as militaries.

Greece has different problems, but is no better off. Harsh economic times have made the political climate harsh as well. Two elections have essentially failed to produce a working government. In the elections on May 6, no single political party had a majority and talks of creating a coalition of parties came to nothing, so a second election was called for and held Sunday.

The results were fairly similar, and the New Democracy party, which got the most votes – 30 percent – will have to try and join with another party to get a majority and claim the prime minister position.

What remains to be seen is what this new election will mean for the country, but the fact remains that Greece hasn't had an elected government in place for 221 days.

Despite the divisiveness inherent in our two-party system – which only seems to get worse, not better – we're still far better off than these two countries in one very important way, we hand over power to the next person without any fuss. Our constitution puts that mechanism in place so we don't have to go through a struggle each time a president leaves office, and so far, most politicians have done their part to give up power to their successors.

Even presidents embroiled in questionable acts have given power over to the next guy. Many presidents have been accused of plotting to become tyrants, but so far every one has left office when they were supposed to – or before they were supposed to in some cases.

When you really think about it, it's a great thing that we get to peacefully overthrow the government every four years. We don't have to be embroiled in bloody civil wars every time power shifts. We had one civil war, and that was enough.

So don't get too down on American politics. It could be worse, after all. –Kevin Bottrell

The Goodland Star-News

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

Member: Kansas Press Association

Inland Press Association Colorado Press Association

National Newspaper Association

e-mail: star.news@nwkansas.com

Steve Haynes, President

Kevin Bottrell, Editor

Pat Schiefen, Society Editor

Advertising Department

Jessica Corbin, Jeff Dreiling and Kayla Bentley

Sheila Smith, Circulation Manager



Nor'west Press

Richard Westfahl, General Manager

Jim Bowker, James Jackson,

Lana Westfahl, Kris McCool, Stacy Brashear, Tracy Traxel,

Gary Meyer, Judy McKnight

nwkansas.com

N.T. Betz, Director of Internet Services

(nbetz49@nwkansas.com)

Evan Barnum, Systems Admin.(support@nwkansas.com)

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

The Goodland Star-News assumes no liability for mistakes or omissions in advertising or failure to publish beyond the actual cost of the ad.

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

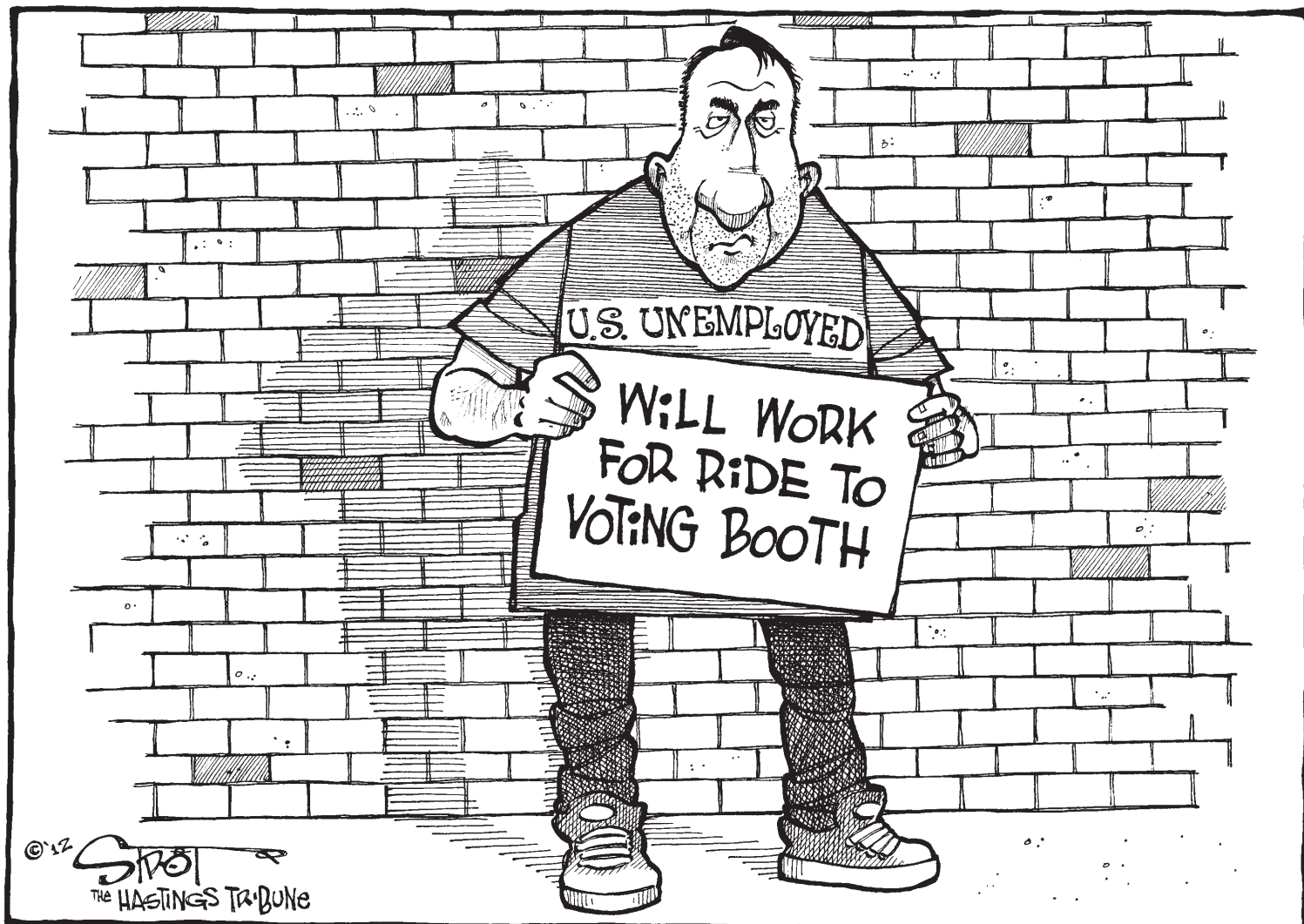
Founded by Eric and

Roxie Yonkey

1994-2001

Nor'West Newspapers

Haynes Publishing Company



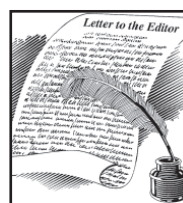
Sharon Springs gets open meetings lesson

If it looks like a skunk and smells like a skunk, it's a skunk, and the stink is covering the City of Sharon Springs, thanks to the mayor. The mayor was on the agenda of the regular monthly county commissioners meeting to talk about the Wallace County Recycling. Since both men operating the plant have resigned effective June 26th, the city is left scrambling to find someone to take their place. Not that they will ever be able to replace L. O. Samuelson. They have taken advantage of his passion for recycling for decades. After all he saved them a ton of money over the years by paying for recycling expenses out of his own pocket.

That being said, Mayor Dennis Sharp and councilman Milton Tokoi entered the commissioners meeting at around 10:00 a.m. The agenda said that they wanted to talk about recycling. The first thing out of the Mayor's mouth was to call for an executive session for personnel reasons. That was where it was left and both the county clerk and myself left the meeting, the door was closed and the shades were drawn. I assume so that no one in the hall could read lips. The session was called for ten minutes.

Naturally, I was starting to smell a definite odor by this time. The fact is, neither L.O. Samuelson nor Everett Langdon are employees of the city or the county. Samuelson is an independent contractor and Langdon works for him. Langdon gets paid from Samuelson's personal business account. There are no county or city signatures on anything. As a matter of fact, Samuelson's contract to operate the recycling center states specifically that Samuelson is "an independent contractor for all purposes and shall not be deemed as an employee of the City for any purpose hereunder."

Both men had already resigned their positions, and that was made public in last week's Western Times, so the bird had already left the nest, the jig was up, everyone involved was



from other pens

• julie samuelson
the western times

already identified, there was nothing to hide. Or was there?

I voiced my complaint to the county commissioners after the executive session was over. Commissioners Cowles and Buck couldn't see anything wrong with it, but commission chair Adam Smith listened and said that he would do some checking on his end. And he has, much to his credit.

The real truth of the matter is that the Open Meetings Act was not designed to keep people from being embarrassed. The rules are specifically spelled out and available to everyone. Every elected official should know them forwards and backwards. The longer you hold an office, the more you should know, which is scary in and of itself, since the Mayor doesn't seem to know them at all. If he does know the rules, then he just willingly broke the law.

It is corrupt to go behind closed doors for no reason at all. The Open Meetings Act and its rules are often overused by people who are trying to cover up wrongdoing.

After doing some research, on his own, Commissioner Smith found a form that should have been filled out by the entity calling the executive session. This should have been done before the meeting. Smith also said that he didn't understand why anything discussed had to be in executive session in the first place and that nothing discussed was what he considered to be confidential. "That was my mistake," said Smith. "I should have called them on it and asked for a better explanation. That's my fault too. I'll accept my responsibility." At least he

accepts his responsibility.

The Open Meetings Act specifically states that when going into executive session, justification for the session must be made, subject to be discussed must be given, and the time and the place for the body to reconvene must be given. In this case, there was no real justification, the subject was personnel, which was incorrect, and the duration of the session was ten minutes. I guess one out of three isn't bad.

There are seven subjects that can be legally discussed in executive sessions: 1) Personnel matters of non-elected personnel; 2) Attorney client privilege; 3) Employer/employee negotiations; 4) Confidential data pertaining to financial affairs or trade secrets of corporations, partnerships or individual proprietorships; 5) Matters adversely relating to a person as a student, patient or resident of a public institution; 6) Preliminary discussions relating to the acquisition of real property; 7) Security matters relating to a public body or agency.

Why the mayor did this is anyone's guess. I'm sure he thinks he had his reasons. I believe that he called the executive session simply because the newspaper was there and he didn't want what was said to be public knowledge. Did it save him or the council some embarrassment? Obviously not. It is action such as this that should remain on the minds of every voter come next city council election. We should not, ever, re-elect anyone with so little regard for the law. After all, how can anyone in good conscience pass laws governing the public, when they can't obey those that govern them? We should expect, and demand better behavior from our elected officials.

The city council and county commissioners will meet in special session on June 19th at 10:00 a.m. at the courthouse to discuss the matter of recycling further. Maybe then, things won't be such a secret.

Memories of summer harvest

For Kansans, the summer months are a period when some of us return to our roots and visit family in rural communities across the state. Some return home to help with wheat harvest, others go home to spend time visiting with friends they grew up with. For all, it's a time to reflect and remember.

Many of us are one or even two generations removed from the farm but we still remember fondly our early years. A friend once told me, remembering our early life on the farm is an important part of saying good-bye.

For me, summertime meant harvest. It still does.

I accompanied my dad and Uncle Bernie to the harvest fields when I was eight years old. I couldn't wait to see those monster machines chew through the golden waves of grain.

By the time I was a teenager, I was a regular member of the harvest crew. My responsibility was to level off the load in the back of one of our trucks. In between unloading, a big handful of wheat – thoroughly chewed without swallowing – made a pretty big wad of gum. Not much flavor but one heck'uva chew.

Mom brought meals to the field in the family car and we had the chance to eat her wonderful home cooking while sitting on the tailgate of our pick-up truck. What a treat.

The summer after I finished fifth grade, I started helping dad one-way plow our summer fallow ground. It took me another couple years before I could pull this heavy cultivating tool out of the ground. This was before hydraulic cylinders.

Other things I remember...looking down a badger's hole and seeing the critter looking back up at me...learning to hunt the wily ring-neck pheasant with our Irish setter, Red,



Insight this week

• john schlageck

something I still enjoy today...looking to the westward sky and watching the sun paint a masterpiece at the close of day...listening to the melodious meadowlark...darting through the summer grass during hot summer nights... and catching fireflies to make a lantern in one of Mom's empty Mason jars.

Dad always watched the weather from our picture window on the west side of our house. You could easily see the Menlo elevator nine miles to the west across the pancake flat, High Plains prairie. I'd help him watch, hope, rear and pray that parched land would receive rain and crop-crushing storms would somehow skip our land.

Without question, the greatest lesson we can learn from the land is hope. Crops and a bountiful harvest are never guaranteed. Drought always threatened my dad's crops. Too much rain meant harvest delays or crop-choking weeds.

Thunderstorms - the likes seen nowhere else in the world - often carried damaging winds and hail that could level a field of wheat in minutes.

The summer of my junior year at Hoxie High, such a storm wiped out our wheat crop. Dad rode in the cab with me as we entered one of our fields a few days later. One round later we both looked back in the bin and saw less than a fourth of it filled with wheat. It should have been full half way through the field.

After we completed the first round, Dad told me to let him off and he left the field. As he walked away, I saw him dry his eyes. He couldn't stand to see the crop he'd work so hard to grow hailed into the ground.

Two and a half months later on Sept. 15 – he always started wheat seeding then – we were out in our fields planting for the next year. He always had hope.

I learned at this age that hope is not wishful thinking of harvest success. Rather, hope is the action of planning and planting seeds. For some, harvest may not occur every year, but the seeds of hope must be planted if there is even the thought of a next year's harvest.

There are many other memories I have of growing up on a farm too numerous to mention in this column. As I continue to work with farmers, I am reminded that they continue to love and learn from their land. For those of us who could not stay on the land, we cherish the time we spent there. We have benefited from this experience - the lessons learned on the land will nourish us wherever we are planted.

John Schlageck is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. Born and raised on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

Letter Policy

The Goodland Star-News encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, and must include a telephone number and a signature. Unsigned letters will not be published. Form letters and letters deemed to be of no public interest or considered offensive will be rejected. We reserve the right to edit letters for length and good taste. We encourage letters, with address and phone numbers, by e-mail to: star.news@nwkansas.com.