

from our viewpoint...

Commission erred in rejecting audit

The Goodland City Commission erred in voting down a proposed audit of the city water system at their meeting on Sept. 3.

The proposal was this: Johnson Controls would examine the city's billing, perform leak detection and test and replace water meters. This would have cost \$135,000, or \$163,000 with a rate study. After the audit is done, the company comes up with a project to fix whatever problems they found. At that point, the city could pick and choose parts of the project to do, or do none of it at all.

Where the hangup seemed to be fore several commissioners was money. Johnson Controls had representatives at three or four city commission meetings, but it still seemed as though there were some misunderstandings among commission members as to how the audit would work.

The city would not have paid that \$135,000 or \$163,000 right away. If it chose to pursue the project after the audit, then that cost would have been rolled into the project. If the city chose not to do the project, then it would be responsible for that cost.

But the whole idea behind how Johnson Controls does their audit and eventual project, is that it will find enough savings to pay for the project.

The city is losing around \$81,000 a year in the utility departments. This was initial estimate by Johnson Controls, who said it could be more or less. While the city would never be able to get to zero water loss, fixing leaks, getting more accurate meters and fixing billing problems would save a lot of money, money which could have been used to pay for the project over whatever length of time the city negotiated. After the project was paid for, the city could have kept the savings.

The commissioners were understandably concerned about a rate increase since the city had just raised rates, never a popular decision. But, if Johnson Controls did what they said they would, the savings generated by the project would have been enough to pay for it without a rate increase.

While every project is different, the commission was told that Colby — who is undertaking a similar project with Johnson Controls — had not needed to implement a rate increase. The city also would not have been obligated to do the project at all.

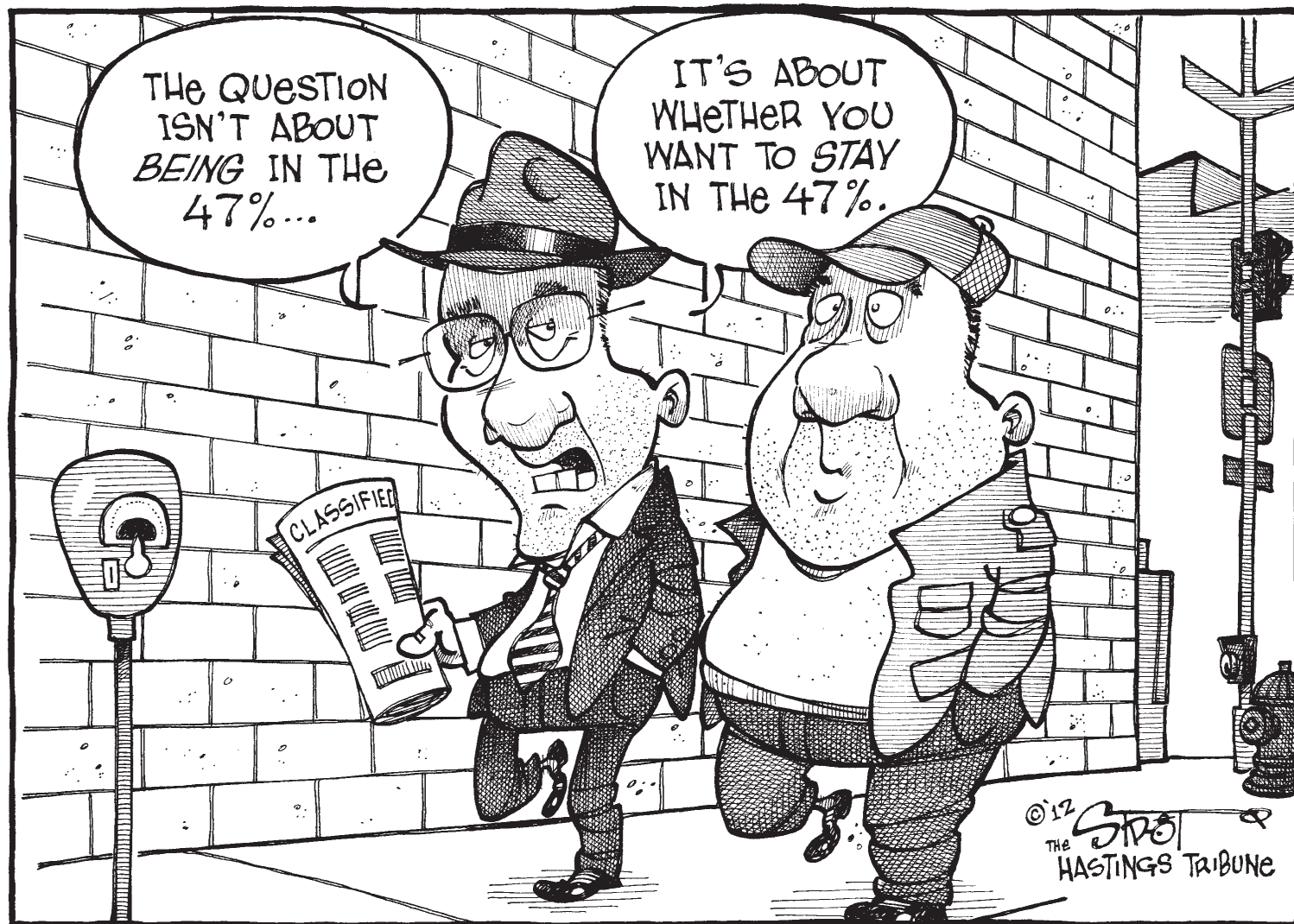
But the commissioners voted it down 3-2.

Whether or not the city should do a large water project is certainly debatable. We are not a rich community, and we must think long and hard before undertaking anything with that kind of expense. However, we need the information necessary to make those plans.

Long-term planning is what keeps a city alive through the years. Even if the city would have chosen not to pursue whatever utility project Johnson Controls came up with, it would still have the better or fixed water meters, it would still have known exactly where leaks are and it would still have a more accurate water meter system. How can you plan for the future without knowing exactly what needs fixed?

The city commission should reconsider the audit. Our own city water department says they do not have the time or the expertise to do the kind of thorough audit that Johnson Controls can. There may be other companies the city can go with as well.

All cities in northwest Kansas face the problem of aging infrastructure and the lost revenue that goes with it. Replacing that infrastructure can be done a little at a time, or all at once, but at the very least we need to know where the problems are. —Kevin Bottrell



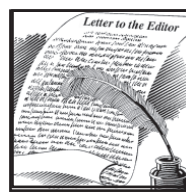
Final damage estimate and thanks

To the Editor:

I would like to clarify what happened the evening of Aug. 15 regarding what is being called the T-Bar fire. The T-Bar fire burned approximately 4,500 acres in Wallace and Sherman Counties. Besides this fire, there was an entirely different fire a few miles east of that one, mostly in Logan County, which affected about 600 acres.

The fires, though not as large and damaging as reported, were very serious, and we are thankful to the firefighters and others who worked to put them out.

Carol G. Sweat
Wallace



from our readers

• to the editor

Citizen proud of Northwest Tech

To the Editor:

I just wanted to write about a proud moment that should be shared. I had a visit with a young

man working at a local business and I asked him if he was going to school here. He told me he had driven 15 hours to attend Northwest Kansas Technical College here in Goodland.

I have always been very proud of our tech college, and talking with this young man about coming that far to attend made me feel privileged to have this school here in my city. Goodland is the city of promise. Keep up the good work and thank you for being our college.

Roger Collins
Goodland

Look ahead, not back

Proponents of organic, labor-intensive farming contend we should go back to the days when every family owned 40 acres, farmed with hay burners (horses) and applied no chemicals.

You remember the good ol' days when people were self-sufficient, owned a couple milk cows, tilled a garden and butchered 40 or 50 fryers each spring.

Some of these zealots propose each nation should also strive for self sufficiency. No imports. No exports.

Should such events occur, you may want to prepare yourself for milking each morning instead of that piping hot mug of coffee. Forget about sliced bananas on your bowl of corn flakes. These goodies we import into this country, and a lot more, won't be on the kitchen table any more. Count on it.

God forbid we adopt these policies. If we cave in to those who spread hysteria about unsafe food and giant farms, be prepared to do without the services of all the non-agricultural types. This includes carpenters, painters, nurses, doctors, teachers, writers and musicians.

In case you haven't heard, labor-intensive farming doesn't permit time for many other pursuits. Neither does production agriculture.

Farmers run non-stop, from early morning



Insight this week

• john schlageck

to late at night, planting and harvesting crops, tilling the soil, feeding and caring for livestock. Their work seldom ends. It's foolish to assume everyone would want to leave his or her job in the city to move to the farm. It ain't all "Green Acres" out there folks.

And who's to say all these people from other professions would become productive farmers?

A friend of mine who lives in Denver remarked to me when we were visiting last weekend that he does not want to be a farmer. He says he couldn't feed himself, much less the rest of the country or world.

"I'd starve to death and so would the rest of us," he told me. "If you want to till the soil, go for it. But that doesn't mean the rest of us want to, thank you."

If we return to a system where everyone farms, brace yourself for even more uncertain economic times. Manual labor and animal power could spell the return of food shortages and famine. A nation of farmers translates to

a nation even more vulnerable to depressions and hunger. A drought, plague of insects or disease could trigger such tragedies because we'd have no chemicals to fight them with.

Today's mechanized farmer provides us with the safest, most abundant food in the world. He works closely with crop consultants when applying herbicides, insecticides and fertilizers. He has cut his uses significantly in recent years — up to 50 percent in some cases.

Farmers work years to leave a legacy of beneficial soil practices. Most of the farmers I know would give up farming rather than ruin their land. They are proud of the crops they grow and the land they work.

Farmers continue to work to conserve water, plug abandoned wells, watch their grassland grazing and continue to adopt sound techniques that will ensure preservation of the land.

There's an old saying that rings true today: "You can never go home." Yes, we can never return to the good ol' days. Besides, were they really all that good?

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.

So many tourist trains to choose from

There must be half a dozen tourist trains in Colorado, and at least three of them are in or near the San Luis Valley, where we go to relax and rejuvenate each summer.

The biggest and fanciest is the Durango and Silverton line, which runs from, amazingly, Durango to Silverton. You can ride in private cars, parlor cars, Pullman cars or by plain old coach. They all take you the same place, through the gorgeous Rocky Mountains. The big difference is the price. You can pay \$189 for a seat in the fancy cars or you can enjoy a regular coach seat or stand in the open gondola car for \$81 a person.

Either way you go from the college town of Durango up to the mountain mining town of Silverton for lunch and then back by train or by bus, your choice. The train is cooler, but the bus is a whole lot faster.

We love the Durango and Silverton, but it's about half a day's drive over the mountains to get there. We either have to spend a couple of nights in Durango, or leave and return from our place in Creede at unholy hours of the morning and night.

I wasn't up for either this year, but I really wanted to ride on a train. More than that, I wanted to try the parlor car. I wanted to sit in a car with a couple of dozen chairs lined up looking out the windows on both sides and an attendant to bring my hot chocolate, sodas or a snack. I wanted to see how the other half lived, or at least traveled, in the 1900s.



cynthia haynes

• open season

The closest was the Rio Grande Scenic Railroad, which had trains departing from Alamosa, about an hour and a half away, each morning and had both regular and parlor-car seats. This trip looked ideal. It was closer and cheaper than the Silverton train, and we could get to Alamosa and back on the same day with ease. The trip wasn't quite as long or spectacular, but it's always fun and interesting, and ends at the little mountain town of LaVeta.

However, they didn't have any seats left in their parlor car. Must be popular.

Well, with my heart set on the parlor car, I started checking again.

My next choice was the Cumbres and Toltec

Scenic Railroad, which runs from Antonito, Colo., to Chama, N.M., with a stop in the middle at Osier, Colo., about halfway, for lunch. Actually, to do this involves two trains, one coming from each direction. If you take the trip all the way from Antonito to Chama, you have to return on a bus. Or, you can take the train from either end to Osier and return to your destination on that same train.

This time, I lucked out. Two seats were available in the parlor car. I booked them, and we were off.

Our train almost got out of the station at Antonito before it broke down. We were soon transferred to a bus and driven to the other end to meet the train coming up from Chama. Most of us got to sit in the half-empty parlor car, but a few folks lost their fancy seats.

Steve and I lucked out, however, and got parlor seats.

I think that has probably used up my allotment of luck with trains, so I'll just take a coach seat next time, or just take the ding-dang bus.

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