

from our viewpoint...

Rural opportunity comes from within

The Sherman County Commission meeting on Wednesday included a long and somewhat impromptu discussion of the state's Rural Opportunity Zone program.

For those unfamiliar with the program, it has two provisions. One is to waive the state income tax for people moving into about 40 low-population counties, including Sherman County.

The other is a program to help repay student loans for some of those same people who move into the county. To get in on that part, a person must apply and be chosen by the state. Applicants are chosen by the date on which they filed the application and whether or not they meet the state's criteria.

On the face of it, the programs seem like a good thing, but there are some problems. One problem is the state is only covering half the expense, and requires each county to opt into the program and decide how many of these scholarships to fund. The state will match however much the county decides to spend. Counties do not have unlimited money. Sherman County, like many others, opted to fund one scholarship, which means there are about a dozen on the waiting list.

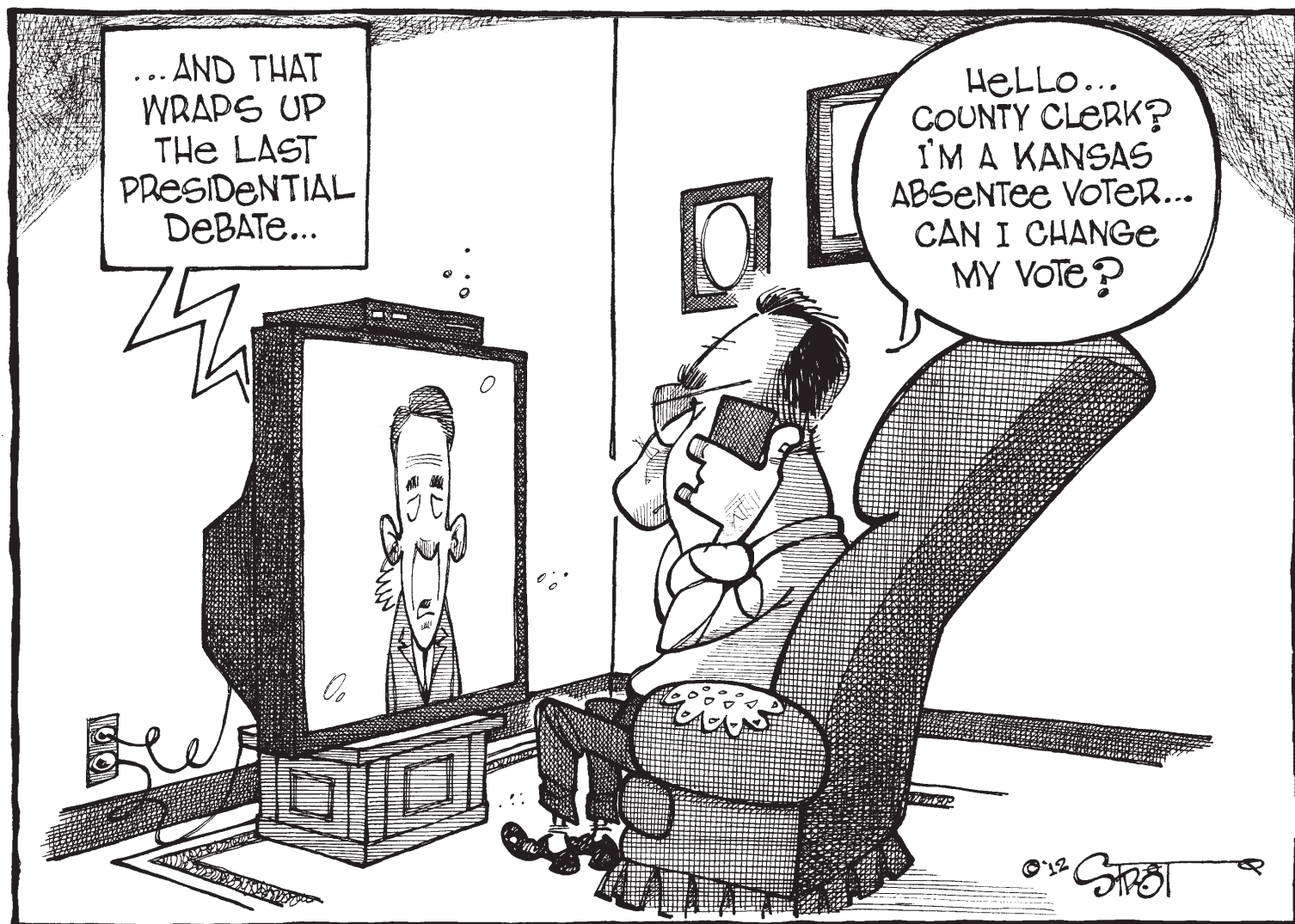
The other, larger problem, is that the Rural Opportunity Zones were billed as a way to stem the population loss in rural Kansas, but with a program this small, it seems like only a token effort from big-city Kansas.

Every county in northwest Kansas except Ellis County declined in population over the last 10 years, some by 10 percent or more. The Rural Opportunity Zone programs might make Kansas a slightly more attractive place as opposed to, say, Nebraska, but not enough to bring in the hundreds of people that each of these rural counties need to arrest the population decline. And what happens when someone who has thousands in student loan debt gets here and finds out they're at the bottom of a waiting list in a county that could only afford one scholarship, which is locked in for five years. They aren't likely to have a good opinion of Kansas after that.

Having at least some measure of local control is good, but the fact is that local control only extends to how much money a county is willing to put in. There is no local control over taxes and no local control over applicant selection. There is also a provision that says the state can simply cut off the program if it doesn't have the money.

Simply put, if there is going to be a solution to our population problems, rural Kansas will have to provide it. A top-down approach will never work on the scale we need it to.

Each community has to decide how best to attract new residents, whether with incentives for business to hire new workers, wage appropriate housing projects, self-marketing, etc. There will never be a magic bullet that will make rural areas back into what they were 50 years ago, but there are ways to bring in new people, and those are best handled at the local level. —Kevin Bottrell



Support for local, regional candidates

To the Editor:

We would just like to share why we are supporting two candidates in our local election:

Larry Witt—County Commissioner: We've known Larry and Anita for some time. They are a lovely, caring couple. They reach out, help out and solve the issue at hand. Larry's background is extensive in not only business, but he is also one of "us" living the rural life we love so much and wants to see it sustained and grow without increasing the tax burden. And that can be done. He is a strong believer in listening to and being open to the thoughts and suggestions from his friends and neighbors, which is unusual in some in this position now with their condescending attitude of "we know best" therefore we're not interested in your input. People will find Larry a competent addition to our local government.

Kevin Butts—County Sheriff: Be sure to write in his name and darken the circle next to his name. We both feel Kevin deserves reelection based on his dedication to the people of Sherman County. I hope everyone has had a chance to read his recent flyer that just came through the mail highlighting his many accomplishments over the past eight years. Kevin has been Sheriff almost as long as we've lived here. And while we've been very fortunate in not having immediate need of the Sheriff's office except in the case of "at loose" horses and the recovery of a stray dog during a blizzard, nonetheless, we do keep up to speed with the many good things that Kevin has brought



from our readers

to the editor

about during his current tenure. And we do appreciate the fact that he kept his word and has more coverage out around the Kanorado area. So don't believe the hype, believe the actual accomplishments. After all, last we checked, no laptop has ever arrested a suspected drug dealer! The job of Sheriff is still a "hands on" working job!

Go Romney/Ryan 2012!
Dennis and Phyllis Hadley

To the Editor:

We will be voting for Ralph Ostmeyer for state senator in the November 6th election and encourage others to do so as well. The following observations are from a Hays constituent, who is quite familiar with Sen. Ostmeyer and his opponent.

"I have watched both campaigns with a great deal of interest. I have especially enjoyed the extreme makeover the Democratic candidate for state senate is attempting to complete. I guess he hopes that the public will believe that each of his positions is the complete opposite of the political party he freely chose. His own party, which only holds eight of forty seats in the Senate, drew multiple redistricting maps

eliminating his district, virtually assuring his defeat. Why should a candidate be returned to office when he cannot influence members of his own minority party to protect the voting power of his district and western Kansas as a whole?

"We need someone in Topeka who can get things done. With one less Senate district and several less in the House, it's more important than ever that we send people who can get things done for western Kansas. If the Democratic nominee should win, I fear our area would be consigned to political irrelevance, virtually powerless to influence state policies and protect vital interests. Mr. Schmidt is already powerless in Topeka. Why would this change with the new candidates likely to be elected in the rest of the state? Anyone can work across party lines, but it takes a truly talented leader to influence their peers to the benefit of their constituents. Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer is that leader. Sen. Ostmeyer has shown that he can work to get things done for the people who elected him."

James Meier, Hays
Eastern Kansas (by virtue of population) has acquired the power of the vote in our Topeka statehouse. Ralph has proven his ability to lead, to work for and protect the interests of western Kansas. We hope you will join us in voting for Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer—our conservative voice for western Kansas.
Patty Thompson, Roberta Bretz and Duane Coash

Estate taxes threaten family farms

Smart hard work combined with good planning increases the likelihood of a bright and prosperous future. This is considered the American way—the American dream.

Part of this same American dream is the expectation that future generations will experience a better life than that of their parents. It's always been that way—parents want their children to have more opportunities than they did.

The fondest wish of Kansas farmers, ranchers and small business owners is to pass these family ventures on to their children and grandchildren. They work years to leave a legacy of land or a business.

Unfortunately, that shared dream is threatened by the return of the estate tax. The estate tax is slated to return with a vengeance on Jan. 1, to a top rate of 55 percent and a \$1 million exemption. Estate taxes owed to the federal government by the farm or ranch owner's surviving family members can wallop them harder than other small business owners because 86 percent of farm and ranch assets are land based.

The projected higher rate and lower exemption could result in as many as 10 percent of farms and ranches owing estate taxes in 2013 and beyond, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service. Contrast this with three short years ago when approximately 1.6 percent of agricultural operations were subject to estate taxes and the exemption totaled \$3.5 million.

When Uncle Sam comes to pay his respects, surviving family members without enough



Insight this week

John Schlageck

cash may be forced to sell land, buildings or equipment they need to keep their operations running, just to pay the tax bill.

Rural communities and businesses suffer when farms and ranches are dismantled and farmland is sold. When this occurs near urban centers farmland is often lost forever to development.

The money farmers pay to the government in capital gains taxes is money that could be reinvested in the farm or ranch and indirectly into the rural community where the farm is located. Local machinery, fuel, herbicide, fertilizer and parts, dealers will suffer. Such businesses keep people employed and provide much-needed money to local governments in the form of county or city sales taxes.

Estate taxes also threaten the transfer of farmland between farmers and ranchers. The average age of a farmer today is 57 years old. As farmers consider retirement, they set

the selling price of land or other assets high enough to recover the cost of capital gains taxes. This increases the likelihood farmland will be developed for other uses because few young farmers can afford to buy from these retiring producers.

A higher exemption and a lower rate will give farmers and ranchers a better opportunity to transfer their family-owned businesses to the next generation. Farmers and ranchers believe Congress should provide an estate tax provision that would increase the exemption level to \$5 million and adjust it for inflation while reducing the maximum rate to 35 percent.

Taking such action is the right thing to do. It will be one way Congress can show it still believes in the American dream and it truly values small business, including families who farm and ranch. Congress can send a message that hard work is still rewarded in the United States.

Estate tax relief will give future generations hope they can maintain the family legacy and keep the farm. Most importantly, estate tax relief will keep alive the American dream—if you work hard and plan ahead, you can pass the fruits of your labor to your children and grandchildren.

where to write

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