

County consolidation could kill rural Kansas

With the opening of the Legislature on us, the drumbeat is starting for a push to consolidate Kansas counties. One writer urges retaining the 35 counties with populations over 14,000 and combining the rest into just 13 rural counties. In the northwest, he postulates nine counties combining around Colby and maybe another six or seven around, say, Phillipsburg. No local choice or "peacemeal" approach allowed; just get it done and quit whining. That's democracy for you. The writer claims the usual benefits: fewer county jobs, lower taxes, better services, less burden on business. Sure. I can't remember when a consolidation ever saved taxpayers money. They're often sold that way, but the truth is, government is loath to give up revenue. Save money here, and someone will spend it there. Taxes never go down — unless taxpayers demand it.

There's always someone with a "need" to spend money. There's no thought here to what happens to people in the nearly 60 former county seats, towns like Goodland and Oberlin, St. Francis and Atwood, Norton and Hill City, Sharon Springs and Gove, where the jobs will be eliminated "by attrition only." If you want a forecast, though, drive through Russell Springs, where the dusty old Logan County courthouse stands in mute testimony to the loss of a county seat.

There are more issues here than meets the eye. Efficiency is just one of them.

Sure, a nine-county sheriff's department would be bigger than the two- and three-man departments most counties field. But is that a better thing?

Dispatchers in a central office could handle the load, but would they know the roads, or where the Jones farm is? Would their even be a deputy on duty in the former Rawlins County on the day something happened? Or would he be having coffee in the office at Colby?

It might make more sense to combine city and county services, or even cities and counties, and eliminate some duplication right at home.

It's only realistic to assume that no actual money would be saved in any consolidation. Jobs would be lost, offices closed, towns destroyed, but the money likely would keep flowing to the new county seat.

What happens then is an acceleration of the past century's trend: More people in the bigger towns, fewer in the smaller.

That's not, or shouldn't be, the goal of state policy. Kansas ought to be defending and building its small towns, not destroying them.

To this point, there is no groundswell for consolidation anyway, just a few know-it-alls who think they know what is good for us.

Voters will have to sort out what of this makes sense and give public officials some direction. Until that is clear, nothing will happen.

Our guess is there will be some local consolidations. A few counties, a few schools, some cities will give up the ghost — when it makes sense to them.

But spare us from bigtime consolidators in Topeka who think they know the way.
— Steve Haynes

WRITE:

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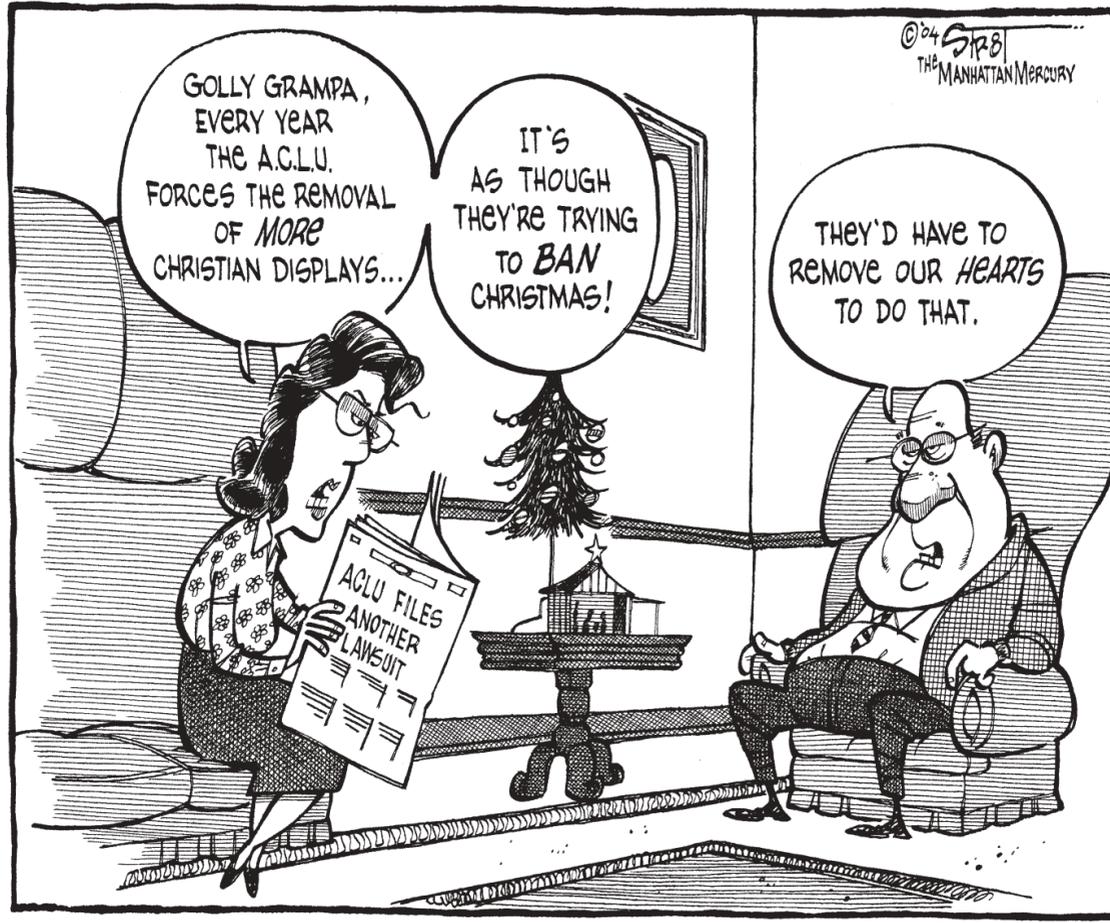
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With age comes wisdom, patience

Age has never really been very important to me. My parents were in their early 40s when I was born.

My father's parents lived into their 90s, as did most of my aunts and uncles.

So, age was just a number, not a clock ticking away.

I'm often reminded of "Fiddler on the Roof" when Tevye, at his daughter's wedding says, "I don't remember growing older when did they?"

But maybe the important part of that statement is the "growing older".

We grow up, we grow tall, we grow fast. All action descriptions signifying getting better.

I used to tell my younger children that the older ones had the benefit of my youth and energy, the younger ones received my patience and wisdom.

Phase II Mary Kay Woodyard



I'm not sure I ever convinced any of them of this, but it really is true.

One of my good friends was a young lobbyist many years ago.

She said she remembers feeling very smug as she "slaved" away in the office while the others "played" out on the golf course.

Her attitude fluctuated between anger, because she was doing all the "work", and superiority, because she was doing all the

"work".

She said it wasn't until she was much older she realized the real work was being done out on that golf course, she was simply manning the office.

I'm glad I've grown and changed as I've gotten older.

Wouldn't it be tragic to be almost 60 and still think like I did when I was 17?

I grew up seeing age as a badge. With that badge came an assortment of skills (manual typewriters to computers), friends of all ages, backgrounds and beliefs, and a heightened awareness of just how special each life is, regardless of age.

And so I can look fondly back on the past and with great excitement toward the future because I stand by the motto "old age and treachery will always win out over youth and enthusiasm".

Representative tours several plants

Celebrating the Holiday Season

The holiday season is a time for reflection and for spending time with friends and family.

This year we have much to be thankful for as Americans and as Kansans. However, as we gather with family around our dinner tables, join friends in our houses of worship and ponder the start of a new year, it is important that we remember those who are defending our country half a world away.

Please join my family and me this holiday season in thanking our veterans for their sacrifice. Say a prayer for the safe return of those brave men and women who cannot be with their families this year because they are defending our freedom.

Let us also not forget those who are less fortunate during this time of giving. Last week I joined the Salvation Army for their annual bell ringing campaign.

The proceeds from this annual fundraising drive go to help those less fortunate within our communities.

On behalf of my family, I hope you have a Merry Christmas and that your holidays are safe and full of joy.

Sunflowers and Weather

On Tuesday, I traveled to Goodland for a tour of Sigco Sun Products sunflower processing plant, as well as the National Weather Service.

While at Sigco, I joined Michael Bretz, crop production manager, for the tour and explanation of the sunflower processing operation. At the National Weather Service, I met with Meteorologist In Charge Scott Mentzer.

In a state like ours, with constantly changing weather, the work of these folks helps to save lives.

We are fortunate to have them as a resource that Kansas and our surrounding region can count on for accurate and timely weather reports.

Ethanol Plant

On Wednesday, I joined Michael Erhart, chief executive and general manager of Western Plains Energy for a tour of the state's newest ethanol plant in Gove County. Western Plains Energy consumes ap-

Capitol Views

Rep. Jerry Moran



proximately 30,000 bushels of corn a day and employs over 30 people. While at Western Plains Energy, I observed the ethanol production line and met with employees of the facility.

This was an excellent opportunity to see how this renewable fuel is combining the agriculture and energy communities into a leading industry in Kansas.

Currently, Kansas has six dry-mill ethanol plants in operation, producing 130 million gallons annually.

Plans are under way to break ground on a seventh plant, in Garnett, that will increase production capacity up to 35 million gallons, for a total output in Kansas of 165 million gallons by 2005.

Speaking with Kansans on Public Access Television

On Thursday night, I appeared on Smoky Hills Public Television for another live installment of "Mid-America Life: A Conversation with Jerry Moran"

series.

This program allowed me to provide a post-congressional session summary and was carried on public access stations across the state.

The format of the show allows me to discuss congressional activities and then field calls. The topics ranged from agriculture to the war in Iraq.

The diversity of these issues reflect the challenges that remain ahead of us, as a country, and as Congress reconvenes next month. I will continue to work on your behalf to ensure that the voices of all Kansans are heard as these complex issues are handled.

It is an honor to serve you in Washington. Please let me know how I can be of service. You can e-mail me through my web page at: www.house.gov/morank01/hearingfromyou.htm.

You can also contact me through one of my offices: Hays District Office, 1200 Main Street, Suite 402, P.O. Box 249, Hays, Kan. 67601-0249, Phone: (785) 628-6401, Fax: (785) 628-3791; Hutchinson District Office, 1 N Main, Suite 525, Box 1128, Hutchinson, Kan. 67504, Phone: (620) 665-6138, Fax: (620) 665-6360; Washington office, 1519 Longworth H.O.B., Washington, DC 20515, (202) 225-2715, FAX (202) 225-5124.

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