

How best to handle consolidation talk?

What can people in rural Kansas do to fend off the uncaring bean counters back east who would have us drive 50 to 90 miles to get a set of tags for the pickup, confer with the tax assessor or protest to the commissioners?

How can we keep them from forcing our kids to ride a bus for an hour or more to get to an "efficient" school in a town big enough to have a McDonalds and a Wal-Mart?

This is a scary prospect if you live off the Interstate, where distance is measured in time, not miles. Proposals for massive consolidations for both counties and school districts may make sense in the urban east, but not out here where we and our kids would suffer.

Most state officials and even most legislators today have never lived in a small town. They have no idea how life is west of Salina, which they view as the edge of civilization. If it costs more to run a school out here, they say, consolidate. If counties are small or inefficient, put a few together.

Even if they stopped to consider the realities, it's doubtful most would understand.

In Johnson County, with nearly half a million people, they get by with one courthouse in Olathe. All the counties in this corner of the state don't have a tenth of the people — in nine counties, we have about 37,000 — but maintain nine courthouses with nine sets of elected and appointed officials. And city government of nine county-seat towns.

So, consolidation proponents maintain, just merge a bunch of counties — one proposal calls for 36 in place of 105 — and save nearly \$1 billion a year.

First of all, the savings are dubious. No one really knows how much the state might save by consolidating counties. Many of the "savings" would be paid for by people who would have to drive 50 to 90 miles out of their way to get to the courthouse instead of just going downtown.

Branch offices in the old courthouses? Ah, there go the "savings." Besides, they'd never last past the first budget crunch.

And schools? With one high school serving up to nine counties, some kids are going to be on a bus for nearly two hours each way. With activity routes, their bus might not get them home until 9-10 p.m., after practice.

We're supposed to cheer this? So what do we do?

Consolidate. Do it ourselves, but do it our way.

We all need to keep a close eye on Greeley County, where voters agreed to merge the county and the city of Tribune — named for 19th century editor Horace Greeley and his newspaper — into one unified government to serve 1,500 people.

That's one route we might take, combining city and county government to keep decisions close to home while still saving some money. Some counties might like this idea, others might not.

The Legislature should let the people decide. School districts are already doing that.

As it has with school districts, the state should make it easy to consolidate any government units. Today, it's next to impossible because each merger takes an act of the Legislature.

And while the state should not finance gross inefficiency, it should not force every county and school district into a one-size-fits-all mold. It should trust people to make their own decisions about what they can afford and are willing to pay for.

We think most rural Kansans are willing to pay for good local schools and local government within an easy drive.

We must answer the call and look for ways to cut our own costs, but the state must give us the freedom to do that. It's us, not those back east, who will be driving all over if they do not.

— Steve Haynes



To... Kendra Boteler, for the letter on cheerleading. (called in)

To... the Norton High School Band and the Northern Valley High School

Band, for getting I's at State Music Contest in Colby last week. (e-mail)

To... the wonderful performance by the dancers of Chanda's Dance last Friday and Saturday evenings — especially Ward Hayes. (e-mail)

(To render a salute, simply e-mail tom.d@nwkansas.com, call 877-6908 or 877-3361, fax 877-3732, mail to 215 S. Kansas Ave. 67654 or drop by the office. Thanks for your continuing participation. -td)

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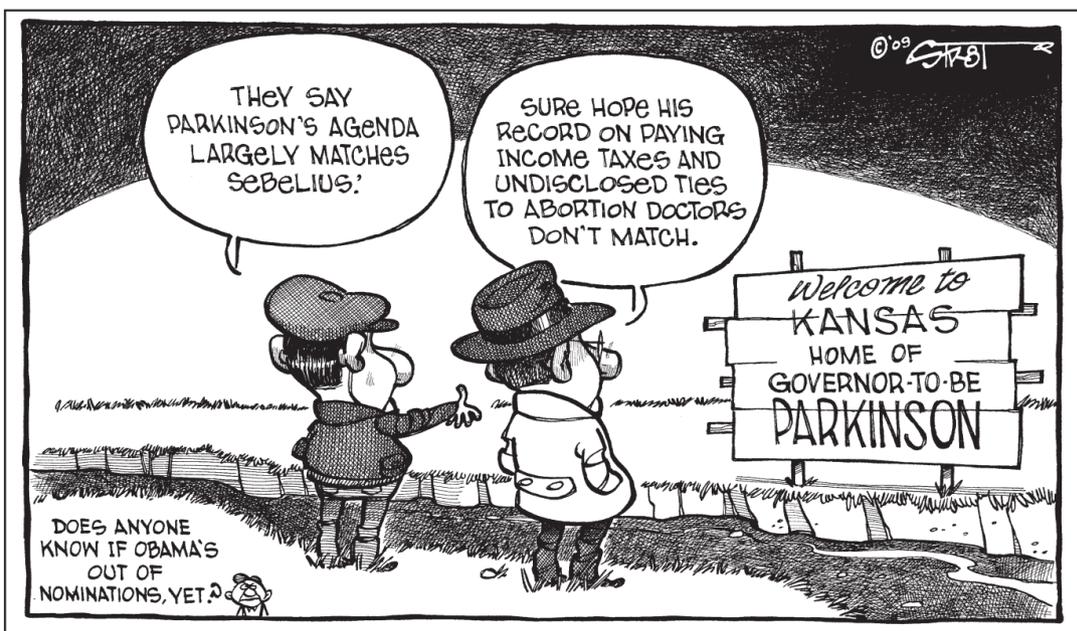
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What seems to be our problem?

I, too, must weigh in on the cheerleading 'debate'. Is the school board's decision to cancel cheerleading a symptom of a greater problem? The reason given for disbanding the program was not enough youth indicated an interest. A recent lack of interest in city government has resulted in the need for a mayoral appointment for the Ward II councilperson position. There were very few actual contests in most of the positions. Does this reflect a dying community or an apathetic one?

When schools half the size of Norton can generate interest in a cheerleading program what is wrong with us? A former cheerleading sponsor said her greatest concern regarding the loss of a cheerleading program is the message it sends to surrounding districts. Whether cheering actually helps a team win may be debatable but it certainly does increase enthusiasm.

There are those who do not see cheerleading as a sport. I believe one Snippet

Phase II Mary Kay Woodyard



called it a beauty contest. I would challenge that person to work out with a current day cheerleading team and see if that changes his/her views. The fact remains today's cheerleaders receive college scholarships, many are in better condition throughout the school year than some athletes involved in only one sport, and it is one of the few sports where males and females compete side by side.

As for council issues, when I was young, businessmen were actively involved in the local government. Now few business owners are willing to become involved. Why? Because certain religious groups will call for a boycott of a business

if they believe the business owner's political views are in opposition to their own. This attitude not only kills a business, but it breeds contempt. As individuals we are not just one belief, we are a collage of thoughts which combine to make the whole picture. Boycotting a business because of the owner's view on one issue is like throwing out your teenager because he dyed his hair purple. Underneath the hair is the same good person.

The attitudes which created a dying interest in cheerleading are probably the same as for city government, the main difference is age. Those who did run for office or sign up for cheerleading illustrate an important point and are to be commended; this is not a numbers game.

No matter the age, each person, through their involvement, contributes to a desire to promote a sport, a community, or a way of life.

Perhaps both issues need reexamining.
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Cheerleading is a complex sport

I've been following the cheerleading controversy in the paper recently. As usual it seems that those who tend to make the most negative comments are those who know the least about the subject at hand. For that reason, I would like to share some information.

Norton has not always had 12 cheerleaders. When I was in school we had 6 cheerleaders and approximately 400 students in school. As the squads have added new skills, including stunting and tumbling, the increase in squad size allows them to include these skills in their routines.

For the readers who think cheerleading is a beauty contest and they are cute little girls prancing around in front of the crowd in short skirts, you should know that the judges for tryouts are usually former college cheerleaders, currently on a college squad, or a college cheer coach. They are judged on their flexibility, coordination, and skills in jumping, dancing, and cheer routines individually as well as with a group. They are also evaluated by their teachers for their academic and social skills in the classroom which accounts for 30 percent of their total score. Members of the squad are accountable for their grades and school attendance as well as attending practice. If their grades are not passing they are sitting on the bench.

Their season starts shortly after tryouts with a fund raiser. They practice and go to cheer camp in the summer so they are ready as soon as school starts. During the winter sports season they may be gone 4 days a week to cheer at wrestling matches, basketball games and tournaments. This means they have to be organized and focused in order to keep up with their academic work. Their season does not end until state basketball is over in March. This makes their season nearly 11 months long compared to the other sports which may last 3 to 4 months. This takes a lot of dedication to stay with a sport this long.



The tumbling and gymnastics training that many of these youth do is better than weightlifting, according to some physical therapists. It not only builds muscle by lifting their own body weight, but teaches them how to use their muscles. This not only improves their flexibility, coordination and ability to focus on the task at hand, but helps prevent injuries. The short skirts are also a safety issue when stunting and tumbling.

For those who don't consider cheerleading a sport, I would encourage you to check out the website varsity.com. They have the results of the recent national college cheer competition. Watch some of the 416 videos of various teams competing. There are 24 categories of competition. Both Barton County Community College and Hutchinson Community College are included. These young athletes could not compete at this level without being both physically and mentally sharp. If you look at any of the college websites you will find both the cheer squads and dance squads under athletics. They are regulated by the same eligibility requirements as any other athlete, including maintaining a 2.0 GPA with a minimum of 12 hours a semester. They have access to the same training centers, team doctors, trainers and therapists as any other athlete at the school. There are scholarships available which range from \$400 a semester to waiving out of state tuition to full tuition scholarships depending on the school. Do your other

sports offer any better opportunities?

As far as educational value, squad members learn teamwork, and trust and the ability to focus while learning their routines and stunts. They gain self confidence while standing in front of a crowd. They learn to deal with frustration when they are working hard to involve the crowd but the crowd continues to chat with their friends or act like sideline coaches. These youth not only lead cheers, stimulate school spirit, and entertain the crowd, but encourage good sportsmanship and most importantly they are ambassadors for their school. They are talented, dedicated, focused, self-motivated, and goal oriented athletes. Aren't these qualities for becoming responsible adults? Aren't these some of the same qualities you would look for in a future employee?

In regards to the drama, if you look up child development, you would find that over reacting and dramatization is a very common reaction with teenagers, especially teenage girls. As parents and educators isn't it our responsibility to guide and teach these youth better ways to handle these situations? Aren't we supposed to educate them not only academically for individual achievements but with the tools and social skills to become better citizens in our community? Considering this, does dropping the cheer squad eliminate the problems they've had with the students or is it teaching them that it's easier to quit rather than face their problems head on?

What ever happens with the cheer program, as a fan sitting in the bleachers, the next time you see cheerleaders trying to involve the crowd in school spirit, why don't you quit talking to your friends and give these young people the respect they deserve by joining them cheering the team on to victory.

Carol Griffith
Norton

It's rare when Tom's column doesn't appear. And today is one of those rare days. "The unexpected circumstances involved just didn't allow for the column to make it onto this page," he said. He assured readers that it will return next Friday, the first day of the month of May.

Let's
Chat
Tom Dreiling

