

People still struggle to understand

Mr. Doug Sebelius recently represented the people of Norton County by allowing a defendant, initially charged with two counts of rape, to enter into a diversion agreement. According to our County Attorney, as reported in various newspapers: if at the end of two years Ryan Zwegardt has attended his anger and aggression therapy, remained in the state of Kansas and has not attempted to regain employment as a law enforcement officer, the charges of aggravated battery and battery (presumably the former rape charges?) will be dropped and he will be free to walk among us as if nothing happened. He wasn't even given "unsupervised probation!"



According to Kansas State Code 22-2908, there are 10 factors the County Attorney should have taken into consideration prior to making this agreement with Zwegardt:

- 1-The nature of the crime charged and the circumstances surrounding it
- 2-Any special characteristics or circumstances of the defendant
- 3-Whether the defendant is a first-time offender
- 4-Whether there is a probability the defendant will cooperate with and benefit from diversion
- 5-Whether the available diversion program is appropriate to the needs of the defendant.
- 6-The impact of the diversion of the defendant upon the community
- 7-Recommendations, if any, of the involved law enforcement agency
- 8-Recommendations, if any, of the victim (s)
- 9-Provisions for restitution
- 10-Any mitigating circumstances

While it is probably unethical for Mr. Sebelius to discuss in more detail a case that is technically still open, obviously there is plenty of room for improvement when it comes to his ability to explain why this agreement served the interests of justice.

On the other hand, Zwegardt's attorney, Dan Walter, was more than generous in offering me the opportunity to meet with him so I could look at the evidence of Zwegardt's preliminary hearing. I received a call from Mr. Walter on the evening of Sept. 6, in which he expressed his concern that I did not know all the facts and offered to meet with me the following day to show me the evidence in this case. I left a message at his office declining his invitation and told him he should show the evidence to everyone, not just me. Whether the evidence is for or against Zwegardt, please help us all make an informed opinion. Maybe it could ease our minds and restore at least a small bit of confidence in our county justice system.

I certainly hope the people of Norton County do not know all the facts of this case. Given what we do know and what has been done on "our behalf," I do not believe I am the only one who is outraged at how this case was handled. At the very least, the explanation we have been given by the County Attorney's office fails to reassure us that he has our best interest in mind when he enters a courtroom.

Pat Ambrosier
Almena



Recovering from the weekend

A phone call this morning caused me to have one of those "huh?" moments. An old friend called to ask if I had called and left her a message about a cream can that had belonged to her grandfather. That was when I said, "Huh?"

When I asked Jim if he had called Mary about a cream can, he echoed my response with his own, "Huh?" That was Mary's clue that we knew absolutely nothing about her cream can. With a little sleuthing, however, she found out it was my sister-in-law who had left the cryptic message. Mary's husband had taken the message off the answering machine. When he heard "Kelley", by association, he thought it was me.

Moral of this story: I not only have to worry about being blamed for my own misdeeds, now, I have to worry about what my sister-in-law, Donna, might do and pin on me.

-ob-

You'll have to cut me a little slack. I'm not up to full operating speed. The weekend past was the annual women's retreat I attend and I'm still prying my eyes open. I hate to concede anything to my age but I sure don't bounce back like I used to.

The retreat is held at a campground that would be considered "rustic" by

Out Back Carolyn Plotts



some; "primitive" by others. Hey, it has showers and toilets! People from third-world countries would call it "luxurious".

Women from our church like to leave early so we have a chance to stop and shop in a relatively large city close to camp. Shopping wears me out. I've always contended that God gave me catalogs so I wouldn't have to go shopping. But this trip, shop I did. Found some good buys too. Now, to convince Jim of how much money I saved him.

This is an "all-girls" weekend. I don't want to miss a thing.

Consequently, I stay up late snacking, playing board games or just talking. We try to attend every one of the workshops; and most importantly, we try to absorb everything from the guest speaker. This year our speaker was a missionary who, along with her husband, had spent 15 years in Papua New Guinea promoting literacy and translating the Bible into their language.

The lesson on "Faith" had the most impact on me. She told of how important being able to go swimming was to her family when they visited a larger town, quite a distance from the village where they lived. I forget what happened but, they had lost their swimming suits.

The family arrived in the larger town and on their first night there, as their children were saying their evening prayers, the youngest child prayed that God would send them all swimming suits. Our speaker said she and her husband tried to gently explain that God wasn't like Santa Claus and that praying didn't work like that. The next day they received word that a package awaited them at the church. When the package was opened inside were, you guessed it, new swimming suits for every member of the family. The mother said when she commented to her child about the swimming suits, the child looked at her like, duh, "That's what I prayed for."

Remember, that package had been sent to them months before. Long before they even knew they would have the need. Oh, to have the faith of a little child.

Drought may cause beef prices to go up next

Insight

John Schlageck

The U.S. beef industry is in the throes of a severe drought that is burning up the southern High Plains - particularly Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas and New Mexico. Beginning next year, supplies of processed cattle should tighten. This will more than likely mean higher prices for beef.

This same drought that is burning up the middle of the country means consumers will probably pay more for their hamburgers and strip steaks.

Ranchers across these states are liquidating their herds at historically high rates as grazing land, feed and water supplies dry up. Texas alone is expected to lose 600,000 head of beef cattle.

Those livestock producers who have been forced to shrink their herds will be left with fewer cattle to sell. Because they've been forced to sell off large numbers of heifers, many will have smaller breeding herds to rebuild supplies.

Kansas Farm Bureau economist Mark Nelson predicts that as 2012 and 2013 arrive, there will be tighter and tighter supplies of cattle to produce beef in this country.

"We've continued to reduce inventory and we haven't been rebuilding herds," Nelson says.

Early summer estimates suggested the number of beef cows in the United States could decrease 2 percent. This figure may easily reach 5 percent, Nelson predicts.

"If liquidation continues into the fall,

the breeding herd on Jan. 1, 2012 could fall as much as 7 percent," the KFB economist says. "This would be a loss of 2 million head of beef cows. This is huge and could mean a reduction in cow herd numbers this country hasn't seen since the early '60s."

Still, livestock producers continue to liquidate herds like crazy. There's no grass and the price of hay to feed cattle has skyrocketed. This means cattlemen can't afford to pay for the hay so liquidation continues because there's nothing to feed their herds.

"We're still seeing slaughter cow prices in the \$60-65 range," Nelson says. "That's a good \$15 a hundred-weight higher than we normally see."

To compound matters the hay supply is dwindling. That means far less cattle feed next year. Figures place the amount of hay at 151 million tons in the United States for 2011. This is the smallest supply since 1988, according to Nelson.

By May 2012 projections place hay stocks at 10-12 million tons.

"That would be one of the smallest beginning hay stock levels we've seen during the last 30 years," Nelson says. "This will drastically hurt the ability to rebuild cattle numbers in 2012 and

2013." Those cattle producers in Kansas who have feed and plan to keep their cattle will also hold onto this feed supply. These cattlemen are those primarily north of I-70 in the Sunflower State and into Nebraska.

Some of these producers who still have grass and hay may be asking themselves is this a time to expand?

This is especially true with cattle prices remaining profitable, Nelson says.

Cattlemen who have the fuel to feed their herds may want to consider adding numbers now," the KFB economist adds. "Beef production will remain low as we head into 2012 and '13."

There could be a secondary spike in prices during this time period because once the rains begin to fall again, and they will at some point in time, producers will pull their heifers off the market and keep them to rebuild their herds.

Those producers who can hold onto a few more heifers this year will be sitting pretty to sell calves in 2013 and '14. Rebuilding this nation's cattle herd will not happen overnight and may be painfully slow.

To date the present drought continues. Who knows when it will end.

One thing is certain, cattle prices are going to get wild next year. Beef prices are sure to follow. If you don't have a freezer, you may want to buy one and stock it with beef before the price goes through the roof.

THUMBS UP! Thumbs up to the Northern Valley Huskies on their Homecoming victory over the Logan Trojans. You displayed great athleticism and sportsmanship. Called in.

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 ★ **U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran**, Russell Senate Office Building Room C-4, Washington, D.C. 20002. moran.senate.gov/public/ (202) 224-6521
 ★ **State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer**, State Capitol Building, Room 300 SW 10th St., Room 262-E A., Topeka, Kan. 66612. ralph.ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us (785) 296-7399
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THE NORTON TELEGRAM
 E-mail: nortontelegram@nwkansas.com
 ISSN 1063-701X
 215 S. Kansas Ave., Norton, KS 67654
 Published each Tuesday and Friday by Haynes Publishing Co., 215 S. Kansas Ave., Norton, Kan. 67654. Periodicals mail postage paid at Norton, Kan. 67654.
 Postmaster: Send address changes to Norton Telegram, 215 S. Kansas, Norton, Kan. 67654
 Official newspaper of Norton and Norton County. Member of the Kansas Press Association, National Newspaper Association, and the Nebraska Press Association

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Nor'West Newspapers
 Dick and Mary Beth Boyd
 Publishers, 1970-2002

Kansas Press Association

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