

Weak bridges a bad sign for highway users, towns

Having two bridges east of Oberlin on U.S. 36 posted for lower maximum weight limits is just a sign of bad news for Kansas, for the economy, for truckers, for farmers and elevator operators and consumers in general.

Around the state, more than 30 bridges have been posted with restrictions, depending on the condition of each bridge. Some, as the two near Oberlin, allow all trucks other than "superloads" operating with an overweight permit. Others restrict fully loaded semitrailer rigs hauling ordinary commodities.

Thirty weak bridges might not seem like much, but it's more than the state usually has. Bridge inspections have been tightened since the collapse of a Mississippi River bridge in Minnesota a couple of years ago. Engineers are paying more attention to weak spans that might give way.

That's good for public safety, of course, but it can be bad for the economy. Grain haulers might be the first people affected, since grain rigs often need the overload permits. Between Norton and Oberlin, a detour through Jennings nearly doubles the time and mileage for a truck.

That would be bad enough if the grain just has to get to Oberlin, increasing expense and time for the hauler. Grain doesn't have to go to any one place, though. If it makes sense, because of a detour, the same load might go to Colby or to Salina, once it gets rolling.

So bad bridges can disrupt the economy of a town, or the whole state, in ways that might be hard to predict. Certainly, the two on U.S. 36 could be bad news for towns west of Oberlin

on the highway, because loads that get as far south as Selden might just keep on going to I-70, rather than double back toward Atwood and St. Francis.

This is not a local, or even a regional, problem, however. With bad bridges scattered across the state, it soon will affect nearly every Kansan. It could drive up prices for everything from food to fuel, and slow down an already ailing economy.

These bridges could be fixed, of course, but that's not likely to happen until the state passes a new transportation plan, and that likely won't happen while the recession has state revenues in the tank.

The state has no money for these bridges today, officials admit, and it probably won't have any for the next few years. In the meantime, there's not much that can be done to shore these bridges up. They were built as long as 70 years ago. Their expected 50-year lifespan is long gone, even though they were widened and modernized 30 to 40 years ago.

The state will have to find a ton of money to cure this problem, and that kind of money isn't easy to come by in bad times. It'll be hard enough to find in good times, which will come along in a few years.

The load limits meantime underscore the need for a new transportation program to replace the one that expires this year, and for a renewed commitment on the state's part to maintaining its highway system. In the state's priorities, only education could be more important. — *Steve Haynes*

She's unemployed again

I'm back in the ranks of the unemployed again. My stint as the fill-in society editor came to an end when the regular editor came back to work after successful knee-replacement surgery. It was fun while it lasted and I hope they keep me in mind whenever she decides to have the other knee done.

I wish I could really say I was unemployed, but Jim won't let me stay home long enough to get anything done. He is really pushing to finish the house he's been working on, and I'm trying to help with the details.

I let him take care of big things like pouring concrete and building porches while I address the little things like putting nail holes and paint touch-up. When I was painting the trim, I was convinced there was five miles of it. Now that it's installed, I know there must be five nail holes per foot. It's slow, tedious work, but if it's not done right, you can sure see it. It's all in the details.

— ob —

It won't be long now before I will be able to set up an egg route. Not only are the young roosters crowing like grown-ups, but the pullets are doing their thing, too. It started with one itty-bitsy egg in the nest with the three-extra large eggs laid by our mature hens. Then it was two, then three and four.

If eggs can be cute, then that's what these are. They look more like pigeon eggs than chicken eggs. Every day, more are starting to lay, and with each day, they will get bigger and bigger, too.



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
quality-pro@webtv.net

I don't even know what the price of eggs is in the store, but if I'm going to establish an egg dealership, I'll have to find out. It's for sure they will be able to produce more than we can eat. There's just so many times you can serve deviled eggs before everyone would tire of them.

I do have a plan in mind for the little ones, though. We will save a dozen of them to take to Texas with us. Little 3-year old Ani will think they are just her size.

— ob —

Last week, Jim and I were invited to sing at one of the old folks homes by the women's group at the country church where Jim preaches. It was an invitation we gladly accepted. We don't mind singing where the audience isn't too critical.

However, when we showed up at the appointed time, no one seemed to be prepared for us. Not to worry, though. A microphone was quickly plugged in and a bench was pulled up for us to sit on. And even though the women's group wasn't there yet, we introduced ourselves and began to sing.

After about half an hour and the group still hadn't shown up, I began

to wonder if we were at the right place. A phone call revealed we were, indeed, at the wrong locale. Again, no problem. We sang a couple more songs, then bade our farewell.

After a quick trip across town, we finally arrived at the correct location. Since we were already "tuned up," we jumped right in and did an instant replay. No one minded; we even got a laugh out of our mix-up.

One resident said, "And, they think WE'RE confused."

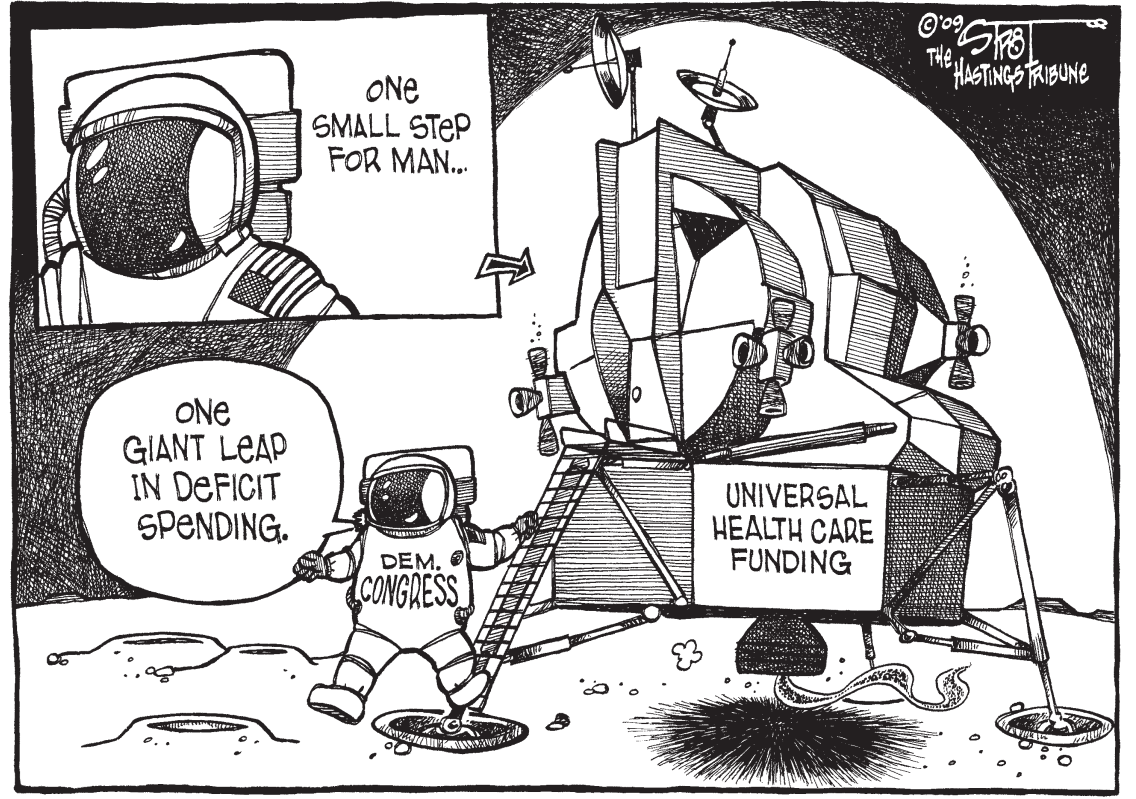
From the Bible

Behold, God is mighty, and despiseth not any: he is mighty in strength and wisdom.

He preserveth not the life of the wicked: but giveth right to the poor.

He withdraweth not his eyes from the righteous: but with kings are they on the throne; yea, he doth establish them forever, and they are exalted.

Job 36:5-7



Bugs are nibbling her beans

The bugs are starting to nibble on my bean leaves and the nasturtiums, which I planted to protect against this, haven't even thought about blooming yet.

It's been a good year for the garden, with plenty of sun and rain. And that means it's been a great year for the weeds, and they are taking full advantage of my spotty gardening efforts.

Last year, I was so good. I went out for a little while every morning and pulled weeds. This year, if I get a half hour in on Sunday afternoon, I feel accomplished.

As a result, the foxtails are taller than the corn and the bindweed is spreading faster than I can pull.

On Sunday, Steve took the clippers to the elm and mulberry trees, which seem to think that they need to grow in every flower bed and bush on the place. It's bad enough trying to cut them out of the cracks in the sidewalk, but getting them in the middle of the rose bushes is really a pain — literally. He had to go put a bandage on his arm, which had a nasty scratch.



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
c.haynes@nwkansan.com

I get the job of cleanup when he's done. I drag all the clipped off tree-lets to the back yard and attempt to push them into a trash bag without getting too many holes in the bag from all the sharp stems.

Then it's back to the garden to pull pigweed and whatever else is not supposed to be there. If I'd just spend a little more time covering that area up with grass clippings after Steve cut the lawn, I might not have to pull so many weeds.

I took the last of the pea plants out last week, and by Sunday the area they had occupied was covered with weeds. It still is, since I was more worried about the corn than the empty areas.

I also pulled about half my carrot

crop. I didn't know if they were ready or not, but the zucchini was taking over and I figured it was pull the carrots or lose them forever.

The zucchini wasn't even supposed to be there. That was supposed to be yellow squash. Some days you can't believe a thing you read on those seed packages. Which reminds me, how did that cabbage get in amongst my spinach plants?

Steve picked his first ripe tomato, and I found two monster cucumbers hanging on their vines — oops.

Yes, it's a good year for the garden and a good year for bugs, and if those nasturtiums don't bloom pretty soon, its going to be a good year for insecticide makers.

Turkey buzzards invade city

They gather every evening, or nearly every evening, on the city water tower at the north end of our street, flocks of big, black birds.

Some nights there are two dozen, some nights there are three dozen or more. They roost on the railings, on the cross members and trusses, on the uprights and the water column.

These are not, as some people claim, hawks. These are zopolate, buzzards, vultures. Turkey buzzards, to be exact.

Most towns have them. In Goodland, they used to roost in an old, dead tree. Someone cut it down, so they moved to the elevator. They go south in the winter and return each spring, just like swallows to San Juan Capistrano, though not nearly as cute.

Where the Oberlin flock roosted before, I know not. I never noticed them until this spring. But they are big and black and kinda scary looking, and hard to miss if you look up.

At first, they stayed all night on the water tower, but lately they seem to drift off in pairs as the evening wanes. Maybe they treat the tower as some kind of bird pickup bar, and go off to do whatever birds do. Maybe not.

The Fourth of July was tough on them. The vultures made themselves scarce for a few days after that, but eventually they showed



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
s.haynes@nwkansan.com

back up.

To me, they look like a bunch of old-fashioned gangsters hanging around, loitering, leaning up against the tank of the tower. Like tough hoods, smoking cigarettes and looking for trouble.

Cynthia says she thinks of them not as a mixed colony, but as good ol' boys. She says it's like a men's club, where they get together and smoke and drink and tell jokes, then go home to the missus.

Maybe that's it. Whatever you think, though, you've got to admit they're kinda creepy hanging out up there.

Vultures consider it their duty to cruise the wind currents, soaring aloft for hours, looking for something that just died. It's said their eyesight is keener than an eagle's.

And when they spot something, they clean up.

It's not a pretty job, but in nature, somebody's got to do it.

So the tower is free of birds most of the day. It's only along about sunset when the buzzards flock back

to the railing and gather for their little chat, or whatever it is they do up there.

And other than watching and observing them, there's not a lot I know about buzzard behavior. A friend says he has a pair nesting in an old shed on his farm. One of them laid an egg on the floor.

When he goes back there, they employ the classic buzzard defense on him — they throw up. And considering what vultures eat, you can imagine what that's like.

Maybe when they scatter for the night, they all go someplace like that barn to watch their eggs or feed their little buzzards. I don't know.

One thing I do know, though. With all those birds up there, there's got to be droppings. There could be defensive vomit. And these guys are always on the lookout for a meal — anything that's not moving.

All things considered, I'm not going to be taking any naps on the grass under the water tower, inviting as it might be. Not this year, anyway.

THE OBERLIN HERALD

Serving Oberlin and Decatur County since 1879

USPS 401-600

Phone: (785) 475-2206 Fax (785) 475-2800

170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749-2243

E-mail: oberlin.herald@nwkansan.com

Published each Wednesday by Haynes Publishing Co., 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749. Periodicals postage paid at Oberlin, Kan. 67749.

Steve and Cynthia Haynes, publishers
Official newspaper of Oberlin, Jennings, Norcatur, Dresden and Decatur County. Member of the Kansas Press Association, National Newspaper Association, Colorado Press Association, Nebraska Press Association and Inland Press Association.

Subscriptions: One year, \$38 (tax included) in Decatur, Norton, Rawlins, Sheridan, Thomas and Red Willow counties; \$42 (tax included) elsewhere in Kansas; \$48 elsewhere in the U.S. Foreign subscriptions, \$50-\$250 (in U.S. dollars only) extra per year (except APO/FPO). POSTMASTER: Send change of address to 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749-2243.

Office hours: 8:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. Mon.-Fri.

Nor'West Newspapers

STAFF

Steve Haynes editor
Kimberly Davis managing editor
Mary Lou Olson society editor
Leslie Nolette proofreader/copy editor
Carolyn Kelley-Plotts columnist
Cynthia Haynes business manager
Pat Cozad want ads/circulation
Joan Betts historian



Honor Roll

Welcome and thanks to these recent subscribers of *The Oberlin Herald*.

Flora Edwards, Clarkston, Wash.; Dorothy Potts, Amarillo, Texas; Ann Williams, Gold Canyon, Ariz.; Norman Tally, Ventura, Calif.; Annette Lambert, Celina, Texas; Alvin Billodeaux, Oberlin, La.; Amy Loftus, Bloomington, Ill.; Alfred Wahlmeier, Acworth, Ga.; Harold Foster, Kansas City, Mo.; Grace Van Sichel, Osceola, Mo.; Donald Feely, Hemet, Calif.; Alice Marshall, Manchaca, Texas; Clayton Jording, Medford, Ore.;

Colorado: Nancy Baumfalk, Sue Baird, Aurora; Ricky King, Glendale; Todd Vaughn, Brighton; Lester Williams, Northglenn; Gary Vaughn, Henderson.

Kansas: Donald Arnold, Hoxie; Elby Adamson, Marian Ahlberg, Clay Center; Nancy Larson, Hiawatha; Chris Gardner, Elsie Hayes, Hutchinson; Gary Fisher, Atwood; Mike Pomeroy, Enterprise; John Wright, Oakley; Donna Reist, Olathe; Farm Credit Western

Kansas, Colby; Mike and Mary Stephenson, Leavenworth; Gene Overmiller, Goodland; Clyde Vernon, Frontenac; Shanna Richards, Greeley; Midwest Energy, Hays; Leanna Roberts, Abilene.

Nebraska: Doyle Richardson, Violet Myers, McCook; Gail Rippe, Indianola.

Clayton: William LaSalle, Darren Wentz.

Herndon: Julie Hafner, Don Grafel.

Dresden: Phyllis May, Ron Jacobs, Dean Gawith, Gerald Meitl.

Jennings: Harold Tacha.

Norcatur: Larry Sumner, Mary Johnson.

Norton: Doris Mizell, Pat Pomeroy, Trudy Stockham, Aden Schilling, Prairie Land Electric.

Selden: Scott Anderson, R. Jean Skubal.

Oberlin: Ralph LaSalle, Ray Kircher, Florine Vernon, Cheryl Votapka, Randy Olson, Faye Meitl, David and Carla Depperschmidt, Julie Schiessler, Terri Brown, Floyd Lotker and Fred Counter.

Write

The Oberlin Herald encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of public interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

Mail letters to 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan., 67749, or by e-mail to oberlinherald@nwkansan.com.

We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise.

We do not publish form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area. Thank-yous from this area should be submitted to the Want Ad desk.

Letters will not be censored, but will be read and edited for form and style, clarity, length and legality. We will not publish attacks on private individuals or businesses which do not pertain to a public issue.

