

OPINION

THE HUTCHINSON NEWS

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EDITORIAL

Answering voters' call

The Lorraine school board made the right call when it decided to put consolidation with the Claflin school district to a public vote.

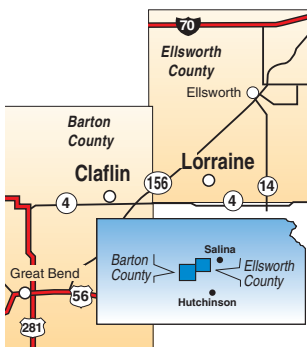
Lorraine officials had initially said they didn't want to pay for a special election. But at a public forum recently in Wilson, a petition with nearly 300 signatures seeking a public vote on consolidation was presented, persuading them to reverse their decision.

It's wise to be fiscally conservative, as Lorraine intended when it initially rejected a special election. But it's even more important to serve the constituents' wishes — and Lorraine school board members showed their integrity in changing course.

The two school districts now plan to meet today to iron out the details of a consolidation agreement to go to the state Board of Education for approval. Residents of both districts would probably cast their ballots in the late spring.

A combined district would cover 582 square miles in parts of Barton, Rice, Ellsworth and Russell counties.

Consolidation is being pursued mainly because of shrinking student population, especially in Claflin, and cuts in state aid.



The Lorraine district has an unaudited full-time equivalency enrollment of 424.6 this school year; down from 447 a year ago and 557.7 in 1998-99. The Claflin district has an FTE of 211 this school year, down about nine students from a year ago and down from 324.7 in 1998-99.

But if the two districts merge, they would continue to receive at least as much state aid as they would have separately for five years.

Consolidating school districts can save on everything from administrative staffing to building upkeep, depending on how fully the schools merge. But whether a merger is the answer for Lorraine and Claflin is in voters' hands now — exactly where it belongs.

COLUMNIST

They still don't get it

How loud do the alarms have to get? There is an economic emergency in the country with millions upon millions of Americans riddled with fear and anxiety as they struggle with long-term joblessness, home foreclosures, personal bankruptcies and dwindling opportunities for themselves and their children.

The door is being slammed on the American dream and the politicians, including the president and his Democratic allies on Capitol Hill, seem not just helpless to deal with the crisis, but completely out of touch with the hardships that have fallen on so many.

While the nation was suffering through the worst economy since the Depression, the Democrats wasted a year squabbling like unruly toddlers over health insurance legislation.

No one in his or her right mind could have believed that a workable, efficient, cost-effective system could come out of the monstrously ugly plan that finally emerged from the Senate after long months of shady alliances, disgraceful back-room deals, outlandish payoffs and abject capitulation to the insurance companies and giant pharmaceutical outfits.

The public interest? Forget about it.

With the power elite consumed with its incessant, discordant fiddling over health care, the economic plight of ordinary Americans, from the middle class to the very poor, got pathetically short shrift. And there is no evidence even now that leaders of either party fully grasp the depth of the crisis, which began long before the official start of the Great Recession in December 2007.

A new study from the Brookings Institution tells us that the largest and fastest-growing population of poor people in the United States is in the suburbs. You don't hear about this from the politicians who are always so anxious to tell you, in between fundraisers and photo-ops, what a great job they're doing. From 2000 to 2008, the number of poor people in America grew by 5.2 million, reaching nearly 40 million. That represented an increase of 15.4 percent in the poor population, which was more than twice the increase in the population as a whole during that period.

The study does not include data from 2009, when so many millions of families were just hammered by the recession. So the reality is worse than the Brookings figures would indicate.

Job losses, stagnant or reduced wages over the past decade, and the loss of home equity when the housing bubble burst have combined to take a horrendous toll on families who thought they had done all the right things and were living the dream.



Bob Herbert

A great deal of that bleeding is in the suburbs.

The study, compiled by the Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program, said, "Suburbs gained more than 2.5 million poor individuals, accounting for almost half of the total increase in the nation's poor population since 2000."

Democrats in search of clues as to why voters are unhappy may want to take a look at the report.

In 2008, a startling 91.6 million people — more than 30 percent of the entire U.S. population — fell below 200 percent of the federal poverty line, which is a meager \$21,834 for a family of four.

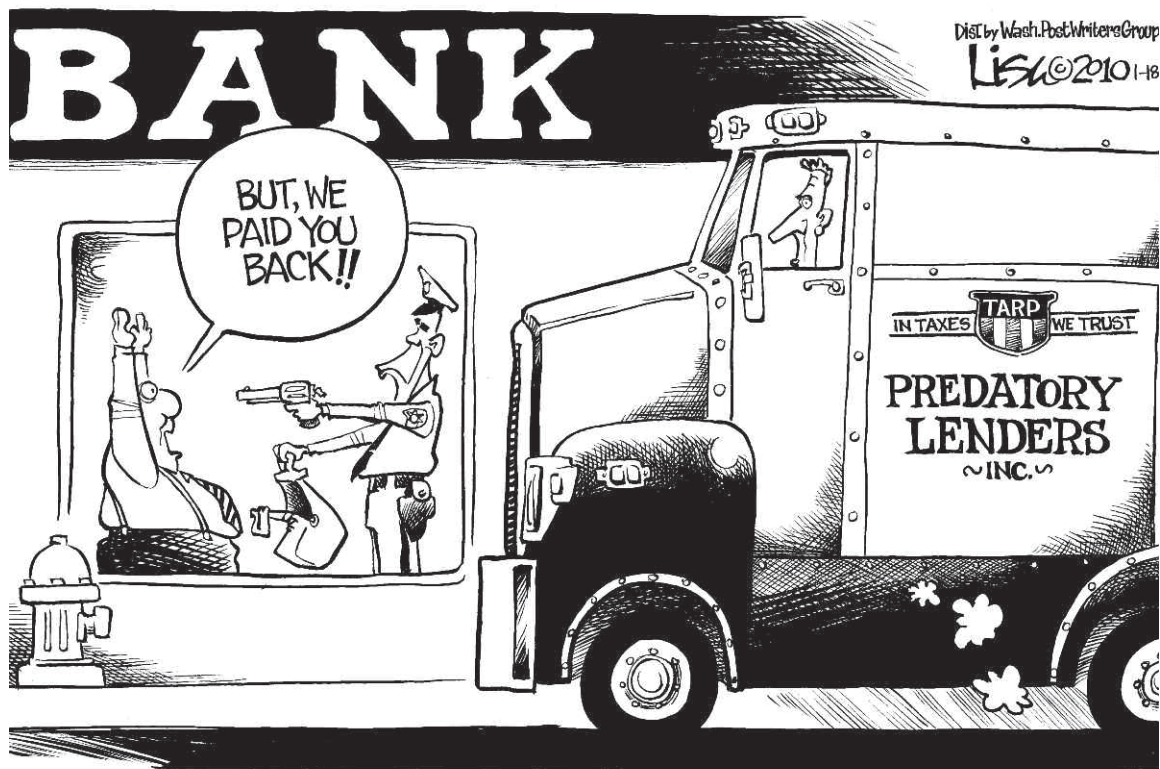
The question for Democrats is whether there is anything that will wake them up to their obligation to extend a powerful hand to ordinary Americans and help them take the government, including the Supreme Court, back from the big banks, the giant corporations and the myriad other predatory interests that put the value of a dollar high above the value of human beings.

The Democrats still hold the presidency and large majorities in both houses of Congress. The idea that they are not spending every waking hour trying to fix the broken economic system and put suffering Americans back to work is beyond pathetic. Deficit reduction is now the mantra in Washington, which means that new large-scale investments in infrastructure and other measures to ease the employment crisis and jumpstart the most promising industries of the 21st century are highly unlikely.

What we'll get instead is rhetoric. It's cheap, so we can expect a lot of it.

Those at the bottom of the economic heap seem all but doomed in this environment. The Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University in Boston put the matter in stark perspective after analyzing the employment challenges facing young people in Chicago: "Labor market conditions for 16-19 and 20-24-year-olds in the city of Chicago in 2009 are the equivalent of a Great Depression-era, especially for young black men."

The Republican Party has abandoned any serious approach to the nation's biggest problems, economic or otherwise. It may be resurgent, but it's not a serious party. That leaves only the Democrats, a party that once championed working people and the poor but has long since lost its way.



COLUMNIST

Withering abortion politics in Kansas

Kansas politics may have been forever changed with the cold-blooded killing of abortion provider Dr. George Tiller in his church on May 31, 2009. What's different? Abortion is a sidebar issue in Topeka this session, not even garnering one headline as a major issue that the state Legislature will address. This shift in emphasis has occurred in spite of the headline-grabbing trial of Tiller's assailant and Phill Kline's appearance before the Kansas Board for Discipline of Attorneys for allegedly lying to the Kansas Supreme Court regarding his investigations of abortion providers. This may be a first time in more than 20 years, through good economic times and bad, that abortion is not a front-burner issue in the Statehouse.

Some may argue that this is the calm before the storm. Pro-life forces in the Legislature know that Gov. Mark Parkinson will veto any legislation and thus are waiting for U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback to win the governorship in November before pushing legislation to substantially curtail abortions in Kansas. Perhaps. But the presence of a Democratic governor has never stopped their efforts in previous years.

A more likely explanation is that a confluence of political forces has inadvertently moved abortion off the front burner of Kansas politics. First, there is Tiller's murder coupled with the decision by his family to permanently shut down his clinic in Wichita, thus removing the epicenter of abortion politics in Kansas. Second, leaders on both sides of this debate have moved out of state. Sebelius resigned as governor to become the U.S. secretary of health, and Kline moved out of state after losing elections for attorney general and Johnson County prosecutor. Third, the Leg-



Joe Aistrup

islature is rightfully preoccupied with budgetary matters in this recession year. Thus taken together, Kansas is experiencing a respite in abortion politics. The question is whether this is temporary or permanent?

The answer depends on Republican U.S. Sen. Brownback, a Saul to Paul cultural warrior and leader of the pro-life Republicans, who is retiring from the U.S. Senate in 2010 to run for governor. Let's be clear: Unless Democratic Gov. Parkinson changes his mind and decides to run for governor, Brownback appears to be a shoe-in. As Brownback moves to the forefront of Kansas politics, he has a choice. He can use political rhetoric that will once again inflame abortion politics in Kansas, or he can use rhetoric and policies that keep the issue of abortion in the background.

At this point, Brownback has made some symbolic moves toward the latter. He supported John McCain for the Republican nomination for president in 2008, despite McCain's reputation as an antagonist of cultural warriors everywhere. He also voted in favor of confirming former Gov. Sebelius for U.S. secretary of health, despite strong opposition from his pro-life supporters. With no meaningful opposition for governor within the GOP or Democratic Party, Brownback has the latitude to follow these symbolic actions with substantive acts designed to assure those who are not in the pro-life Republican camp that the

abortion issue is no longer a litmus test issue; that it no longer defines friend from foe.

On the other hand, many political observers suspect that Brownback seeks the governorship to pad his political resume for an eventual run for president in 2012 or 2016. If this is the case, Brownback's political calculus regarding abortion politics is complicated. Brownback may choose to gravitate toward GOP "tea party" movement, which has sought to decouple itself from social issues to focus in free market economic principles. Falling in line with the tea party movement could lead Brownback away from inflaming the abortion debate in Kansas. However, given the weight of social conservatives in the GOP primary constituency in most states, moving toward the middle of the abortion debate might decouple Brownback from his natural base of support among social conservatives, perhaps dooming his presidential aspirations. Thus, far from de-emphasizing abortion, Brownback will choose to make abortion a front-burner issue once again.

In 1912, the Bull Moose progressive rebellion within the Republican Party almost tore it asunder. Two years later, another Kansas Republican gubernatorial candidate, Arthur Capper, chose party unity over the strong wishes of his progressive coalition partners, making peace with the "standpat" old guard, machine Republicans. His choice ushered in a period of almost 100 years of GOP dominance of Kansas politics. History has a strange way of repeating itself. I wonder if Brownback is a student of Kansas history?

Dr. Joe Aistrup is a professor of political science at Kansas State University.

WESTERN FRONT

Tale of 2 men

Late last month, while preparing a post to my pro-life blog about the Feast of the Holy Innocents, I came across the image of an ancient stone carving of Herod the Great. I was struck by how closely it resembles Barack Obama! Indeed, the similarity between these two leaders might be amusing if it ended there. Unfortunately, it doesn't.

During his violent rise to power, Herod enjoyed the backing of the Roman Empire, returning favor for favor; as an aspiring state legislator, Obama enjoyed the backing of the abortion industry, voting repeatedly to legalize infanticide. The Roman army brought Herod to Jerusalem, where they installed him as client king; left-wing interests brought Obama to Washington, first as senator, then president. Fearing loss of his throne, King Herod ordered his soldiers to slaughter Bethlehem's children; fearing loss of his base, President Obama has ordered his legislators to mandate and fund an expanded slaughter of America's children.

And it grows still darker ... Herod put family members, in-

cluding his ambitious sons, to death; Barack Obama, referring to his daughters, said that "if they make a mistake, I don't want them punished with a baby." Obama was speaking openly and emphatically of putting his grandchildren to death. Like Herod, Obama considers family disposable. But even Herod allowed his sons the semblance of a trial. Obama condemns his grandchildren before they're conceived, on grounds that they'll be unwanted. With law school graduates like this, is it any wonder we're handed decisions like Roe v. Wade?

Perhaps most sobering of all is that, unlike the people of ancient Israel, we Americans did not have our Herod foisted upon us; we, as an electorate, chose him and his anti-life Congress. We knew exactly what we were getting. With government-mandated, taxpayer-funded abortion, euthanasia, contraception and other anti-life legislation in the works, we have no one but ourselves to blame for what happens next.

JOHN FRANCIS BORRA
Hays

Ineffective leader

Other than collecting \$30,000 and warming a seat for three months in Topeka, what has Sen. Terry Bruce done for Reno County? After looking at his legislative record, one is hard-pressed to find a single accomplishment, unless you consider extending the retirement age for District Court Judge Richard Rome to be an achievement.

Sen. Bruce is part of the established political elite of Reno County, a "good old boy" whose ilk has run this town and state far too long. He has attained membership in the most exclusive club in Kansas, our Senate, and will likely remain there because of the apathy of voters who are content to elect party operators who spend more time looking out for their political homeboys than the citizens who elected them.

With the likely ascendance of Sam Brownback to the governorship, I'm sure Bruce will make a lovely addition to the new governor's rubber stamp collection.

GREGORY H. BONTRAGER
Hutchinson

