

OUR THOUGHTS

No grace for grace period

Legislature made the right move to eliminate extended grace period for accepting advanced ballots

It was intended to be a noble gesture, but the three-day grace period for accepting advanced mail-in ballots after any election in Kansas has become a real pain in the neck.

Last week, Kansas legislators voted to override Gov. Laura Kelly's veto of the legislature's bill that eliminates that three-day grace period.

Politics aside, the legislature's action was needed.

The intent for allowing a three-day grace period for the U.S. Postal Service's delivery of advanced ballots was based on reality: the good ol' USPS had reduced its delivery time, especially in rural areas that are far from regional sorting and mail centers.

And, Americans are more mobile than ever. So, a contract worker who is on the road or away from their home on Election Day should be given a chance to cast a ballot.

Advanced voting achieves that goal. There should be no excuse to not vote.

The bigger reality is the three-day grace period is clumsy. In Kansas, advanced ballots that are postmarked on a Tuesday Election Day can be delivered to county clerk's office via the U.S. Postal Service no later than the following Friday.

That means the final tabulation of the Election Day races won't be known until three or more days later. And, then those tabulations get bogged down not just in the listed candidates but also in write-in candidates.

What we have personally experienced is that the build-up toward any Tuesday election is a letdown . . . because the results aren't known until the following week. By extending the dates of advanced, mail-in ballot delivery — which forces the delay in tabulation — a citizen's desire to participate in a cherished democratic process can be lessened.

People want to know who won the election races on Tuesday nights or early Wednesday morning, no later.

That can only be done with a uniform tabulation timeframe. That means advanced ballots should be in the election offices on Election Day. The legislature's decision last week affirms that goal.

As for those voters (and this writer is one of them) who uses advanced voting, we simply have to mail those ballots a few days earlier than usual . . . and pray that the U.S. Postal Service delivery truck doesn't have a flat tire.

— Andy Taylor, editor

Silence, everyone

With Trump's tariffs, the ice is gathering around the Titanic, but the band is playing on

Worrying has lost its allure, thanks to the way politicians are running things in Washington.

We simply don't know what to stew about. What makes us stare at the ceiling at night is old news by the time the sun rises and another clunker hits us broadside.

In the case of this Kansas newspaper, we worry about tariffs --- the Canadian variety, because printing presses consume lots of newsprint and aluminum plates which come from Canada.

So, we worry about printing expenses that predictably will skyrocket. Only time will tell how many of us can stay in business.

Then we hear the morning news as President Don Trump announces the shuttering of Voice of America, which he labels as "radical" and "leftist."

He is wrong. VOA has been the international voice of freedom and democracy since World War II when it was started to blast truth into Hitler-held nations.

Voice of America is heard — or was heard — by 360 million listeners in 49 languages and hundreds of countries.

It runs alongside Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty which give hope to people living in countries where governments ramrod the media, and tell only the "official" line on everything from politics to economic facts to information on free elections.

We have many friends and family who have served as missionaries in Africa, where VOA, RFE and the BBC are their only contacts with the outside world.

Since 1942, Voice of America has been praised by every President of the United



Kansas farms have become the new battleground for trade wars.

States — except one. And, it is doubtful that President Trump has ever heard it.

Few Americans have ever heard VOA because is not broadcast here. Unbridled media and free speech are already pebbles of freedom in this country, so listening to a short-wave radio broadcast while soldiers and government spies walk the streets is not a problem in the U.S.A.

It's called soft power, our nation's balance to the military might that we possess from one presidential administration to the next.

Not coincidentally, it's the same soft power that has embodied USAID for the past 70 years — food, medical care and humanitarian assistance to the millions around the world. They are people who had the bad fortune to be born in a poor country where sanitation, vaccines against disease and plenty of food and water simply do not exist.

And, of course, USAID has also been ceased.

In both case, VOA and USAID are being tossed back and forth in U.S. courts as attempts to save them are made — and opposed — by our two political parties.

So, staring at a spot on the nighttime ceiling is an answer — but certainly not a good one.

There are so many rotten elements of stink that hit us every day that being overwhelmed is America's most common malady.

All we can do, as a community newspaper, is gently print our words with hope that there are still readers who care. We see you every day, wherever we go, and we mingle so well together.

It makes no difference who holds Republican or Democratic views, or who thinks tariffs will save us or sink our ship.

You name a subject, and it becomes a contested issue on the cable TV channels and on social media. So, being silent has become the method of operation.

And, like calling newspapers "the enemy of the people," as Donald Trump, Adolph Hitler and Viktor Urban have avowed — the silence across America is starting to bang like a distant drum.

Let's pray that better minds will lead us out of the numb quietness that allows us to sleep as the Titanic brass band plays a confident version of "Nearer My God to Thee."

Attention all passengers, there is a large icy structure off your starboard bow.

— Rudy Taylor, publisher

USD 436 bond issue

USD 436 taxpayers must decide for themselves whether to support a \$32.3 million project

USD 436 voters rarely confront a bond question.

In fact, in the past 60 years, there have only been two bond elections: a 1971 bond question concerning the construction of the present-day Caney Valley Jr.-Sr. High School (at a then-cost of \$990,000), and a 2017 bond question that created energy efficiency systems in school buildings (at about \$4.7 million).

So, when a \$32.3 million bond question is proposed in the Caney Valley school district, it obviously arrives like Moses: a foreigner in a strange land.

We will bring you our thoughts about this rare moment in local history. For more information, see the story on page A1.

The good

• USD 436 administrators and board of education members have created a proposal that is all-encompassing of school campus needs and wants.

Valued at \$32.3 million, it addresses many things that have been ignored or deferred for years, including (but not limited to) con-

struction of a modified, secure entrance at Lincoln Memorial Elementary School, construction of storm shelters at both the grade school and jr.-sr. high school, construction of a new grade school cafeteria, construction of a multi-purpose wrestling/sports facility as well as addressing the condition of existing locker rooms at the jr.-sr high school, most of which date back to the school's original construction.

There are a host of interior remodeling projects at both campuses, as well as construction of auxiliary areas at CV West to further grow the school's agriculture education program.

Parking lot improvements and expansion, improved concrete sidewalks, improved signage are also on target to all campuses.

Then, there is the issue of new sports facilities. This bond question will ask citizens to foot the bill for the relocation of the CVHS Stadium to the existing school track and football practice field, plus relocation of the softball and baseball fields to a now-vacant area on the Caney Valley Jr.-Sr. High property.

When everything is built and ready, USD 436 students will enter Lincoln Memorial Elementary School through one entrance area that will be secured from intruders. The students will eat in a spacious cafeteria, take cover from severe weather in a storm shelter, attend classes in updated classrooms, and play on improved playgrounds.

A preschool classroom that is now housed in a former music room will be expanded to encompass not just its present room but also the adjacent school cafeteria, guaranteeing more space to grow and learn.

And, at Caney Valley Jr.-Sr. High School, the band and choir classes will have direct access to the school auditorium stage. The weight room (a very popular place) will be relocated and expanded to ensure safety of lifters and athletes.

A now-vacant space that was the agricultural education room and shop will be transformed into a school library and academic success center.

Locker rooms will be gutted of their half-century of mold and mildew and replaced with newer facilities. Among the added features to the locker room will be a new locker area that will double as a storm shelter.

And, adjacent to the new locker room/storm shelter will be a multi-purpose sports/wrestling facility.

Our thoughts: Kudos to USD 436 for bringing everything to the forefront. If something is missing from the list, we would be hard pressed to think of it.

• USD 436 has done a great job bringing the visual depictions of the bond question to local voters. Via its website at www.caney.com, the district has worked with its architectural firm, Architect One, to bring full-color, real-life renderings of the school campuses with final improvements. Blueprints also highlight the areas at each campus where interior and exterior upgrades are projected.

With each of those renderings is an estimated dollar figure for each aspect of the total project.

The website also has charts showing the estimated taxes to be owed (based on the appraised value of residential, commercial and agricultural land).

Superintendent Blake Vargas himself has opened his doors to the public to hear their questions and concerns.

Our thoughts: the process of informing the public has been first rate. The only reason an information void would exist is if a voter did not invest the time to read and understand the bond question and the abundant information that has been provided and reported in this newspaper over the past year.

The not-so good

• The bond question encompasses a vast list of needs and wants.

Therefore, it obviously carries a big price tag . . . and a long-term loan for repayment. The estimated cost for all projects is \$32,385,000. This amount will be repaid by local taxpayers over the course of 30 years at an interest rate of 4.75 percent.

Because the bond repayment is stretched out over the course of three decades, the amount of interest to be owed is hefty. According to a bond election notice printed in the Montgomery County Chronicle throughout March, the estimated amount of interest to be paid to maturity will be \$37,964,308, which means the interest payments alone will exceed the principal.

The amount of interest and principal to be paid by USD 436 per year averages out to \$2,344,976, according to the bond election notice.

Our thoughts: Undoubtedly, this project is extremely costly. Our concern is on the long-term burden that will be applied to local taxpayers. Thirty years is an extremely long term in which to service any loan. A 30-year note on a construction project would be akin to taking out a 10-year loan to purchase a car.

Citizens will need to be very cautious and clear headed when they decide whether to adopt this bond project. If a project of this size and scope is what Mr. and Mrs. Taxpayer thinks is best for Caney Valley schools, then be prepared to make the investment . . . over the span of 30 years.

• Through no fault of its own, USD 436 administrators and board of education members have crafted this proposal amid tumultuous times. Over a year ago, no one could have predicted that the U.S. economy was tinkering on an uncertain roller-coaster ride, or that two local community colleges were considering merging, or that state and federal administrations were looking to change the course of school funding and taxation, or that Caney's water issues would, much like the school project itself, carry a hefty price tag.

But, here we are, swimming in a speeding current amid driftwood and logjams.

It's too bad that so many other issues also are on the taxpayers' minds while they also are asked to invest considerable money in a school project.

For Caney residents (which we realize is not encompassing of the entirety of USD 436), the future of water is of chief concern. And, it should also be for USD 436 itself, as it is the largest consumer of water in Caney.

While we aren't trying to confuse the issue of Caney's water access with the USD 436 bond issue, there is correlation in this sense: the pocketbook speaks. And, if any Caney resident were presented with the option of having to pay long term for improved water access and distribution or having to pay for long term school improvements, we feel we know where the gavel would fall.

Our thoughts: Water is paramount. Without it, nothing can happen.

As for the myriad of other political issues (i.e. community college merger, Trump tariffs, state funding for public schools), we'll all have to tread water in a swiftly moving stream. Just hold hands with your neighbor . . . and don't forget your life preserver.

• This project is laden with athletic facilities. No offense against local sports fans, but this is a jock-heavy project for the Caney Valley Jr.-Sr. High School campus — with new stadiums, locker rooms improvements, a locker room that will double as a storm shelter, an expanded weight room, and a multi-purpose sports practice facility that will also double as a wrestling practice room.

So, even though there are plans to relocate the band room to a larger area with direct access to the school auditorium (which will also see some cosmetic changes), there is little else to address the fine arts.

A now-vacant agricultural shop area will be converted into a school library and "student success center."

Our thoughts: we are still believers in brain power over muscle power. Nothing against athletics, as this newspaper amplifies school sports in a mighty way, but graduates of local schools will be judged in their young adult years if they can get a job and cope in society. Period.

We believe this project has vaulted athletics to a high-priority status.

After all, this project does not carry as much "new" for the humanities and sciences as it does "new" for athletics. It's a matter of priorities.

The overall challenge

Caney Valley taxpayers must take a good look at its educational facilities and realize that investments need to be made. The longer taxpayers wait to make those investments, the more expensive they will be — especially in an era when tariffs could yield changes to price structures and tax burdens.

The bigger question: are USD 436 taxpayers ready to make that investment in their schools?

Should next Tuesday's bond election not receive a simple majority, then USD 436 administrators and board members should not consider it a failed mission. After all, this project has brought all the delayed and deferred issues to the forefront.

But a "no" decision by taxpayers next Tuesday should be greeted by the board and administration as a pathway to a more palatable and less costly option.

But, leave no doubt in your mind: an investment needs to be made in the long-term interests of USD 436 facilities.

The only question is: how much?

— Andy Taylor, editor