

## View from the Hill A video screen slight of hand

By Scott Hill

Senate District #24

We each have seen an illusionist who seems to make people and objects appear and then disappear.

The fascination with “magic” is that the impression of the impossible that we see before our eyes draws us into the illusion.

Our rational side knows that what we are seeing isn’t true. However, the visual deception is strong enough to, at least temporarily, make us question what we know.

At one time I strongly embraced an idea that over time has been shown to be an illusion. Near the end of the last millennium the rapid changes in technology gave many of us great optimism for the future of electronic-based learning systems.

Baby boomers often struggled to adapt to emerging technology. However, in contrast, the promise that the next generation would be fully computer “literate” gave great hope.

Our children and subsequent generations would learn faster, more completely, and with less effort. The combination of entertainment and education had an allure that pulled us into dedicating significant resources to technology.

School districts have spent billions on technology connectivity. Additional billions have been spent on a myriad of electronic devices, including but not limited to desktops, cameras, laptops, video screens, whiteboards, and projectors.

Teachers are rigorously trained in the use of technology and coveted districts have one laptop for every child. Young children are taught keyboarding, and most children are immersed in electronic device manipulation. The additive effect of technology should be readily apparent in our educational



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outcomes.

Unfortunately, it appears that just the opposite of what we expected has happened. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is designed to give a summative snapshot of educational progress based on a statistically significant sampling.

The reading scores at both 4th and 8th grade are at an historical low with only approximately 25% of students being proficient at reading. In mathematics fourth graders are doing better (40% proficient), however 8th grade math is also historically low. It may be simplistic to attribute poor longitudinal performance to the immersion of technology; however, the inverse relationship is certainly evident.

Recent brain research has shown that retention of information is less when the information comes from a digital screen vs an old-fashioned book.

Furthermore, the manipulation of a pen or pencil to write words provides a more connected approach to language than utilizing a keyboard to record thoughts. Solid research conducted on learning strategies has shown that laptops can help with tutoring, but the correlation with learning nearly triples when a competent teacher develops empathy with students. Illusions are entertaining.

We all enjoy exploring what-if in our brains. Learning in the formative years is too important to trust methods that indicators illustrate are ineffective. It takes time for our brains to process the fact that images we have seen indicating potential success are simply not working.

The facts are, though, that the idea of entertainment-education has not been a panacea to revolutionize education. It is essential for our future generations to take a step back and rely on proven educational methods that may lack the glitz of technological promises but provide solid results.

Our children, our teens, and our society need the reality of solid education, not mirages that tantalize.

## Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

The tax burden is a game of hot potato, and our local property owners are consistently left holding the burning spud at the end of the game.

As our legislature continues to woefully underfund education, specifically special education, the only place left for local governments to find coins under the cushions is through property tax levies.

At this week’s school board meeting, I seconded the motion to potentially do just that. Nobody wants to pay higher property taxes, but the reality is that local governments still have bills to pay even when the state and federal government offer little to no support.

The Kansas House of Representative’s version of the budget has been horrendous with the House adding ZERO dollars to special education funding.

The Senate threw us a bone with \$6 million, but that still falls abysmally short of the needs across Kansas. Their continued votes to provide the wealthiest Kansans with income and corporate tax relief have shifted even more burden to local property owners.

97.5% of your property tax stays local. If our representatives are promising to lower your taxes, they can do it by using state dollars to help fund our schools, cities, and county.

A budget is a reflection of your priorities, and right now, their priorities aren’t us.

But -- there’s good news. The budget is still in discussion and not yet approved by both chambers, which means we can still advocate for change.

I urge constituents to continue to speak up to their legislators to FULLY fund special education to provide local relief.

Thank you,  
Kylie Kilmer, Abilene

## Insight

### Letters from Grandma

By Kim Baldwin

McPherson County farmer and rancher

My family recently celebrated the life of my husband’s grandmother. We were incredibly lucky to have Grandma Irene in our lives for so many years.

I don’t know a lot of people who knew a great-grandparent, but our son and daughter are old enough to remember her. While she lived three hours from us, she was very much aware of what we were all doing between our visits by keeping up with us on Facebook or through reading this column in her local paper.

She kept us up-to-date by writing letters that she’d put into cards and send to arrive just in time for birthdays and holidays. You always knew to be on the lookout for an envelope in the mailbox from her a few days before those special days.

Sometimes Grandma Irene would send a handwritten letter just because and include a news clipping or pages from her daily devotionals that reminded her of us.

She had raised her family on a farm as well and knew what living in the country and raising crops and kids entailed. She loved seeing pictures of her great-grandkids holding lambs, working cattle, riding in a tractor or enjoying a meal in the field during harvest.

A handful of years ago, she moved into an assisted living facility in her small town in Southeast Kansas. She’d write us letters telling us about her days.

She stayed busy with her sewing and piano playing and eating out with family on Sundays. She’d write about the games she and the other residents would play and would mention on occasion that she’d outlived another one of her friends.

Regardless of the topic of her letters, we always knew she was staying active within her church and social circle. We also knew she was always praying for us and loved us immensely.

Her funeral was well attended for a woman who had outlived so many of her friends. Aside from family, the seats were filled with those who knew her from church or the community.

At one point during her funeral, those in attendance were encouraged to share their memories of her. It took quite a while for the microphone to be passed around.

It was evident that Grandma Irene loved a lot of people. Whether it was memories of her helping with 4-H projects, sewing quilts or gifting dish scrubs, writing letters, serving in her church or keeping a stash of cinnamon flavored candy and oatmeal cream pies in the pantry for her grandkids, the shared memories truly celebrated her and the work she did.

This is the time of the year when I’d normally find a blue, yellow or purple envelope in our mailbox containing a card and personalized handwritten letter inside letting us know she was thinking of us as we prepared for all of the spring work required on the farm.

I’ll miss those letters from Grandma Irene. They were simple, yet intentional, acts that let her loved ones know that she was thinking of them from afar. Those simple, intentional acts are what will remind me of Grandma Irene and the life she lived loving others.

*“Insight” is a weekly column published by Kansas Farm Bureau, the state’s largest farm organization whose mission is to strengthen agriculture and the lives of Kansans through advocacy, education and service.*

## Prairie Doc Perspective

### Pathways to productive aging

By Whitney Lucas Molitor

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& Allison Naber

Ph.D., OTD, OTR/L

Living in rural communities offers unique opportunities to promote successful aging. Incorporating a purposeful lifestyle, developing social connections and engaging in daily physical activity is essential to achieving positive health outcomes and quality of life.

Finding purpose includes exploring the activities you already engage in and being open to new possibilities. Engaging in motivating activities provides a framework for a purposeful life. The selected activities can promote health, foster a sense of identity and give a sense of purpose in life while aligning with personal values and interests. While some daily activities are performed without much thought, identifying others may require careful exploration.

In rural communities, consideration of the physical context is also essential. The American Occupational Therapy Association provides a framework that incorporates reflection on personal values, interests and prior life experiences.

This approach, along with establishing priorities and goals, can be a valuable way to explore daily activities and create new opportunities for engagement that enhance purpose in daily life. To align life purpose with a rural context, it is essential to incorporate outdoor activities, find creative ways to connect with family and friends and explore opportunities with local groups. Activities can be modified to support evolving interests, abilities and desires.

Establishing and maintaining strong social connections is critical to promoting healthy aging in rural communities. Older adults in rural areas may experience social isolation due to limited opportunities for interaction.

This can be due to changes in overall health, technology barriers (limited internet access or limited computer or smartphone skills) or physical barriers (limited community mobility

or driving restrictions). Social isolation can pose physical, psychological and behavioral health risks. Engaging in meaningful activities with others can help build relationships, find purpose or fulfillment and develop new hobbies or skills.

Educational programs or groups are an excellent way to explore new leisure activities or learn strategies to improve health and well-being. Reaching out to family or friends, visiting your local senior center, attending community events, or joining a club can all provide a sense of connection, purpose and well-being.

In addition to staying socially connected, developing a regular physical activity routine is essential for older rural adults. Adults over 65 should set goals to strengthen their muscles and improve their balance by engaging in at least 150 minutes of moderate physical activity per week. Moderate physical activity increases breathing and heart rate, but you should still be able to talk while active.

Beneficial activities include brisk walking, dancing, riding a stationary bike or NuStep, using weights or resistive exercise bands, gardening or participating in water aerobics. Consider setting a goal to move your body for 30 minutes each day to reduce sedentary time.

Sedentary activities include watching TV, reading, sitting or lying down. Prolonged sedentary behavior increases the risk of poorer health outcomes among older adults. Intentionally participating in meaningful activities throughout the day will reduce time spent sedentary.

Reduce sedentary behavior by standing during commercial breaks, walking around your home after a meal or stretching after reading the paper or playing cards. Incorporating the strategies mentioned in this article can promote well-being and enhance quality of life.

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## More movies than ever

By Ned Seaton

The Manhattan Mercury • Tribune News Service

The Oscars are this coming weekend, which means the buzz is starting to build. Who’s favored, who should win instead, what sort of silliness they’ll say in their speeches, who’ll wear what.

One aspect of the discussion that completely baffles me is the notion that the movies are in decline. You hear this all the time, how streaming is killing the movie theaters, how the digital platforms cater to short attention spans, how the whole enterprise is being dumbed down and sold out.

I don’t claim to study the income statements of the studios, so I’m no expert.

But from the viewpoint of a consumer? That’s easy: There are more movies than ever. There are far, far more really good television series than ever. I watch more of both than ever before in my life, by far.

Part of that is surely particular to me — the kids are finally all up and out, so I don’t have to make the soccer-practice pickup run at dinnertime, or fall asleep exhausted at 8:30 while reading “Moo Baa La La La” for the 74th time.

I might work more than ever, but downtime often involves Angie and me flipping on a rom-com. The pandemic also probably had an effect, strengthening that habit.

But, whereas we used to be limited to what the television networks were running or, later, what we could find at Blockbuster or Dillons Video, we can now find anything, anytime, anywhere.

I can watch “Caddyshack” for the 487th time; Angie can dial up “Pride and Prejudice” whenever she feels the need to see Mr. Darcy proclaim his love “most ardently.” Gets her every time,

We also go for the new stuff, by the way. Serious flicks, new series. TV has improved most dramatically, and I suppose you could argue that it has eaten into the classic movie form, and maybe the money and effort going into “Stranger Things” somehow forestalled the next “Godfather II.” I guess.

I hate to sound naive or Pollyanna, but...so what? Whether it’s a movie or a series, whether it’s on TV or in the theater, we’re talking about the same medium, the same art form. Actors acting, writers writing, directors directing, music alongside. In fact, with Amazon, Netflix and Apple pumping tidal waves of cash into the medium, alongside 20th Century Fox, there’s more of it than ever. And a lot of it is really, really good.

A lot of it is also more niche than before. No way in the world “Somebody Somewhere” gets made in 1975, and that’s not a knock on that great show. It was just a far more limited universe before the explosion of content. Think of it this way: You think NBC would green-light the diarrhea scene, or even the whole platonic love theme between Bridget’s character and the gay guy?

We caught “One Battle After Another” on Netflix. Does that invalidate it as an Oscar contender, because it went straight to streaming? I think we all know the answer. So this whole “the movies are dying” thing strikes me as, at best, narrow thinking and misplaced anxiety.

## Letters to the Editor policy

Letters to the editor may be submitted via email to editor@abilene-rc.com or via the U.S. Postal Service to Abilene Reflector-Chronicle, 305 N. Cedar St., Abilene, KS 67410.

Letter writers may not submit more than one letter every 30 days. Letters should not be longer than 500 - 600 words.

The Reflector-Chronicle

reserves the right to edit letters for typographical formatting and to correct grammatical errors. Letters deemed offensive, inappropriate or libelous will not be published.

All letters must include the author’s first and last name, a phone number to contact the author and the author’s city of residence.