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From the archives of Liberal's hometown newspaper since 1886. Researched and compiled by A.J. Coleman, L&T Reporter

1963 **Wheat farmers worry, Pope John dies**

In Kansas in 2013, the largest crop is wheat, which makes up 12 percent of the state's total agriculture production. Kansas is also the top wheat-producing state in the nation. Unfortunately, that doesn't mean wheat farmers are getting rich. Wheat is not in as high demand as corn, so while wheat now sells for \$7.30 a bushel, which is a reasonably lucrative price for wheat, and corn is less than \$7, more corn moves through the market than wheat.

Things looked bleak in 1963, when the price of wheat began to drop from \$2 a bushel.

"May have \$1 wheat, they say," read the front page headline in the Southwest Daily Times. Two Kansas farm spokesmen, disappointed by the defeat of the national wheat referendum, predicted that its failure would cause less profit for farmers. They even predicted the nation might have \$1 wheat by the next year.

Even though the value of the dollar was higher back then, the possibility was still a huge problem: if the price of wheat fell by a whole dollar, what would the economy of Kansas look like? More importantly, what would the economy of America look like?

"G.W. Egbert of Ingalls, state chairman of agriculture stabilization and conservation committee, and Muchin K. Byrne, president of the Kansas Farmers Union, both predicted a severe price drop for the 1964 crop," the Times reported. "Under the current program which will expire after the 1963 crop, wheat is supported at \$2 a bushel. By the next year if no new legislature is passed by Congress the support would be about 50 percent of parity, about \$1.25 a bushel for those who comply." In May 1963, U.S. wheat farmers voted down a government-sponsored wheat program.

According to the American Journal of Agriculture, "the results generally suggest that part-time farmers and Farm Bureau members voted against the program while small wheat producers, tobacco growers and supporters of John F. Kennedy voted for its passage."

In Seward County, many people were mad at the government for making things more complicated. Byrne later stated, "I don't think that anybody likes the government in their business." In general, the attitude in Southwest Kansas was negative towards the government.

Fifty years later, the arguments about the wheat referendum sound familiar. Kansas is still a wheat-producing state, and farmers still struggle to make a profit, fulfill government regulations

and hold onto their land.

Just recently, Pope Benedict stepped down and resigned from the post of Pope due to his belief that he was getting too old to properly uphold the position. He was one of very Popes (less than 10, depending on which history of the church is keeping count) to resign instead of living out his life as the Pope.

Pope Francis I, the new Pope, took office in March after serving as the Cardinal of Argentina, his home country. He is not only the first Pope with the name "Francis," he is also the first Jesuit to become Pope, and the first man from North or South America and from a country south of the equator to be the leader of the Catholic church.

In 1963, there was much disruption in the Catholic church. Many Catholic parishioners and their leadership were boycotting the public educational system in America. They said that the teachers and the principles discriminated against the Catholic school kids and promoted values that went against church teaching. On top of this upheaval the Pope was near death.

"Death nearer for Pope John," read the headline in the pages of the Southwest Daily Times. The grim article said that the 23rd pope bearing the name John "regained consciousness briefly today for a second time then sank back into a coma under the darkening shadow of death."

Another article said the Pope showed dedication to the end and "prayed hour after hour while pain tormented him."

The Pope died on June 3, and the conclave to elect his successor began June 19, 1963. It was the largest in history, with 83 cardinals invited. After two days and six ballots, the cardinals chose the Archbishop of Milan, who became known as Paul VI.

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