

Everyone wants it, but where will the money come from

It seems certain the Kansas Legislature is going to put another \$400 million to half a billion a year into public schools over the next few years.

No one seems to know how the state will pay for this, beyond the first year. Revenue projections don't show the state bringing in enough to make ends meet, but then a few years ago, the projections showed the state having a lot more money than it actually got.

And while there certainly is a lot of support for increasing the school budget, it's the Legislature — not the courts — that needs to decide how much and where it comes from.

There certainly is no ground swell of support among voters or business people for a tax increase, no matter what the reason. The results of the last election ought to convince people of that.

Relying on gambling expansion to finance schools is a bad idea, bad because gambling is destructive, and bad because it's not a reliable source of money.

There's just something repulsive about paying for kids' education with sin taxes, any way you slice it.

So the Legislature, faced with a Supreme Court order to come up with more money before it goes home, needs to shift around existing dollars and new income from a rising economy to find the money for schools. It's not going to be easy.

The members will have to keep in mind, as Chancellor Robert Hemmenway at the University of Kansas says, that it makes little sense to educate kids through high school and not provide higher education opportunities for them.

Kansas colleges and universities have been starving the last few years as public schools and welfare soaks up every available dollar from the state budget.

Nor can the Legislature expect to take much out of the highway budget, lest the state default on its promises under the 10-year transportation plan.

The devil in the works, it seems, includes social programs, including public assistance, help for the disabled, Medicaid and welfare. These programs have grown uncontrollably during the recession. Even today, they show little sign of slacking off, and many are considered "entitlements," which the state has to pay for whether it has the money or not.

Special-interest groups keep pushing for more money for these programs, and at even a hint of cuts, they organize demonstrations in front of the State house. It's hard to be firm with people in wheelchairs. It looks mean.

The Legislators will have to balance all that out and do the best they can. That may not be good enough for the courts, but then, the courts have no power to raise taxes. At least, we hope they don't.

The best anyone can hope for is that the economy will keep improving and there'll be money to cover all the bases. If not, there is nothing writ in stone that says the state government has to grow every year. — *Steve Haynes*

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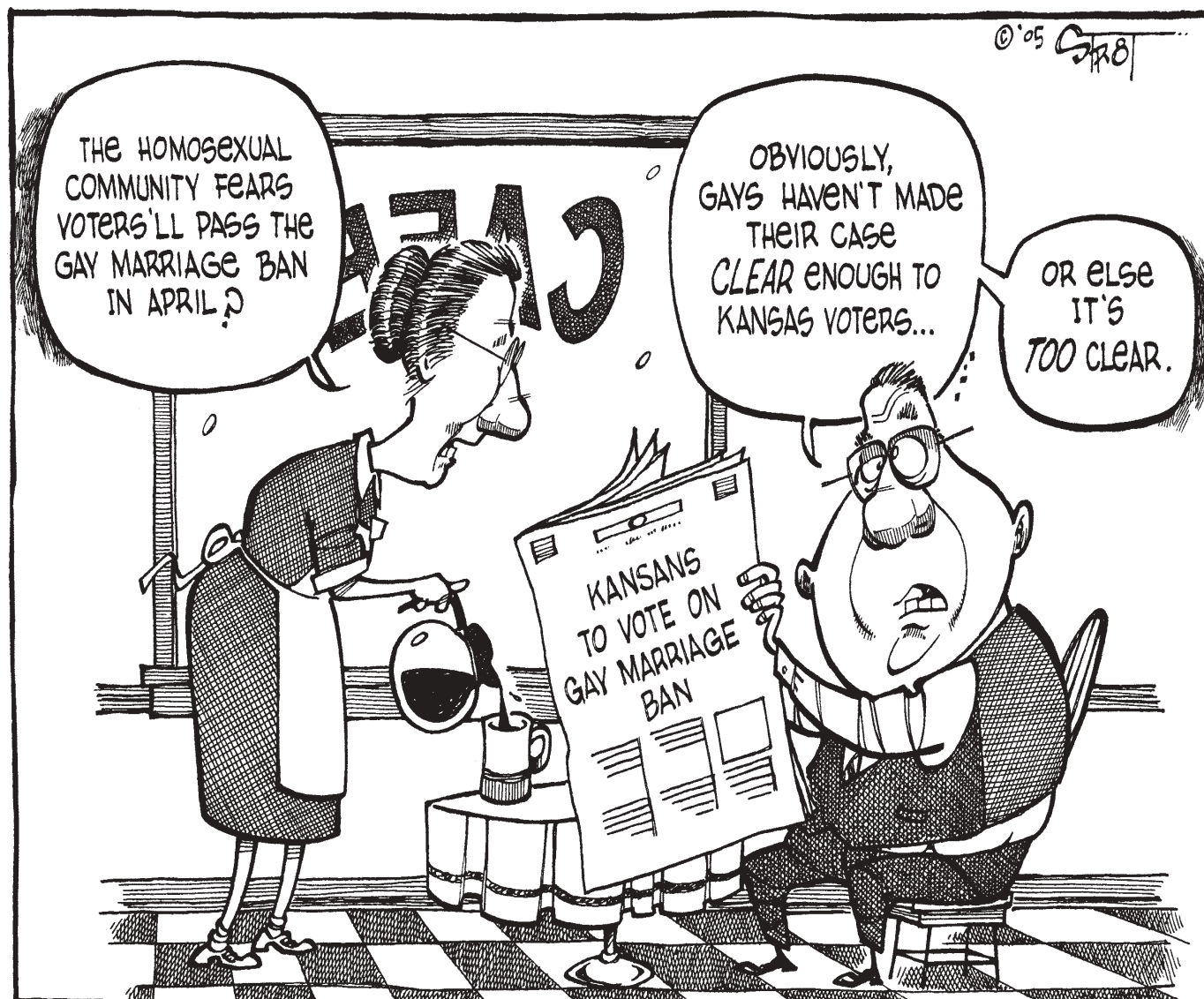
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New home gets built in record time

We're home, we're home, we're home! Just like Herman Munster says, "We're home." After kind of a rocky start getting on the road, what with forgetting our money, etc., the rest of the trip went quite well. In fact, we finished building our house in Mexico in almost record time and returned a day early.

We weren't trying to set any records; it's just that we had an exceptionally good work crew and were building a small house.

It took about 14 hours to finish, complete with windows, wiring, insulation, roofing, stucco, a door, sheet rock, front step, taping and paint.

If any of you get to see pictures of our trip, I need to explain about the paint. It's what might be called "Barbie Doll Pink." But, it was free, so we're not complaining.

For the last two years, I have gone to our local home store and asked if they had any "oopsy" paint. You know, paint that has been mixed, then the buyer decided it was not the right color and rejected it. Luck-

Out Back Carolyn Plotts



ily for us, they did have some and offered it to us with no strings attached.

Last year, I think the paint was blue. This year it was bright pink (which we lightened a little with some white).

Still, the two rooms of the new house we built for a lady named Sylvia and her husband (who we were told was away working), their two children, a son Luis, who was born with a disability and is unable to walk, and their daughter America, a precious little 2-year-old, are bright, cheery, safe and secure.

This was the 12th house we have worked on, and I cried at this dedication just like I did at the first. Sylvia shed big tears of joy and gratitude and told us,

through an interpreter, she would never forget us.

We won't forget her, nor will we forget the new friends we made from Lamar, Colo. Lee and Corina are a Hispanic couple who have built a successful construction business through sheer hard work and determination.

Like a lot of us, they felt a need to "give back a portion of the abundance with which we have been blessed." Both bilingual, they were terrific translators as well as teammates.

As a special treat for one of our evening meals, Cori prepared "real" burritos with her special homemade tortillas, filling and salsa. It was wonderful. Jim poured the salsa on thick. As he ate with delight, Lee said, "You're the first white man I've seen able to eat it like that."

—ob—

Did you hear what the little boy said when the power went out at his school and the cafeteria staff couldn't prepare a hot meal, so had to serve peanut butter and jelly sandwiches instead?

"Finally! A home-cooked meal."

Truth really is stranger than fiction

A syndicated columnist I read recently talked about using family members in columns.

She is widowed and planning to remarry. Her fiancé wants a pre-nuptial agreement limiting the number of times he can be mentioned in the column.

Too bad for my hubby — we don't have a pre-nuptial of any kind and if we had I'm sure he never would have thought of having such a clause.

When he opens the paper and sees my column he groans and says, "I see it's time to find out what I have been up to."

He can protest all he wants but I am not creative enough to make these things up. Anyway truth is always stranger than fiction.

Not that he is strange — well only in the best possible way.

However, I have decided that I had best limit reporting the "stranger" aspects of our lives.

Recently my mother-in-law's sister (from Concordia with no ties at all to Norton County) told me she had read a column I had written.

Her friend who subscribes to the paper sent it to her. There go the mother-in-law stories.

I will say this about my mother-in-law. Several years ago we moved her and later she could not find some old marbles. Then she had bats invade the house. So I can truthfully say my mother-in-law has lost her marbles and is batty besides.

My sister-in-law Gail thinks I misquoted her last fall and now every time she talks to me she makes a comment about how she hopes it doesn't end up in the paper.

I do feel bad that when I wrote about everyone turning 50 I neglected to mention her. But she is so much younger I just forgot about her.

She was 29 until her son Brent turned

Back Home Nancy Hagman



25. At that point he promoted her to 39. I guess in about 10 years she may get to be 49.

My cousin Joyce was thrilled to learn she is my favorite cousin. Every time she sends me e-mail she now signs it "your favorite cousin." Of course, she made sure her sister Linda found out she had been thus designated.

Oh, the trouble I get myself into.

My bestest friend told me she didn't want to be mentioned in the column so I have thus far respected her wishes.

That is partly due to the fact that I believe I have the right to not incriminate myself.

For some reason we have been nicknamed "Thelma and Louise." I'm not sure which one I am supposed to be.

Another good friend and I took off on a recent shopping excursion. She lamented having left her phone at home but then decided it was okay cuz her hubby wouldn't be calling and asking her to run any errands for him.

Guess what — he left a message for us at the quilt shop.

Geez, I hate being predictable.

Strange is one thing, but predictable — never.

Last year Elizabeth sent me a belated birthday card.

"So, you think this card is late? Well, let me tell you something — I don't follow schedules anymore. I celebrate when I want, where I want. I've changed my name to 'Coyote.' I am wild. I am free. I am Coyote."

Neither Thelma or Louise appeals to me but I am considering changing my name to Coyote.

And that's the truth.

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