

## Local control might be the answer

Much is being made of the fact that property taxes have gone up since Kansas changed the school finance formula in 1992. It's true, but it may not be such a bad thing. On one hand, property taxes are most unpopular with the voters. On the other hand, it brings control of spending back to a school district's voters, who can approve (or deny) a property tax increase.

Voters have little control over statewide tax increases, except for the legislators they elect.

Kansans have elected conservative members who have voted, over the last decade, to reduce state taxes and to give schools more control over their own fate.

People don't seem to mind. In fact, in elections last year, they voted in more conservatives, ousting some liberal members who had pushed for a tax increase.

It's hard to read that election as a cry for higher state taxes, no matter what the needs. From here, it looks like voters want the state to hold the line on spending.

There are some problems with that idea. For one thing, allowing local control means school spending will be less "equal" across the state. That may create an opening for those who decry difference in spending from one district to another, creating yet another excuse for a lawsuit.

The original school "equalization" plan was crafted to avoid just that problem. It took all taxing decisions out of local hands.

By opening up a route for "rich" districts to spend more on their students, the Legislature may be asking for another round of legal problems.

There is a good argument for letting voters decide on tax increases. All Kansans think schools are important. Most of us think they are the No. 1 job of government. That doesn't mean they have a blank check.

People in one town may think schools are a little more important than the next. Voters may approve a levy increase or bond issue in one district, but not the next. That kind of community decision making is the bedrock of our democracy, but it was missing from the state-run school system for a long time.

Election after election has shown that, if school officials make a compelling case, they'll get a yes vote. And that is as it should be.

None of this will mean much if the state Supreme Court takes over the schools, however. The court ordered the Legislature to make "suitable" provision for education, without defining suitable.

It could mean the \$173 million the Legislature scraped up this year, or the \$1 billion consultants suggested a couple of years ago. It's hard to imagine the court trying to order a \$1 billion tax increase, but it could happen.

As it is, the Legislature put what it could find into schools and left the rest to local board and local voters. You have to believe that they will do the right thing.

Is local control of schools and school budgets really such a bad thing? It worked for a couple of centuries, and it might just work again.

Why not try?

— Steve Haynes

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## Spring can be found in the animals

It is truly spring; we have the baby kittens to prove it. The first mama was so-o-o-o big, but she had only three. The kittens are big though, so maybe that is why.

Mama was very accommodating and had them in the doghouse where I can easily keep an eye on them. Two yellow ones and one black and white.

I thought (judging by the size) that the second mama had to be a ways off, but she had hers two days later. I couldn't find them. I watched her but she seemed content to sit in front of the patio door and look at me.

I figured she didn't know what she did with them or the Tom got them. Then I got to watching the dog. She kept sniffing around some tall grass.

Sure enough — five very tiny yellow kittens. Both the mamas are calicos — guess what the Tom looks like?

I hunted up a box and some bedding and threw the kittens and the mama in there. She actually was interested in them. I guess she knew she had not picked a very good place to give birth and was trying to tell me to help her out.

The dog was very disappointed I took them away — since she has been spayed

Back Home  
Nancy Hagman



I think she is a frustrated mother.

I could tell she was thinking, "If you all would have let me have some babies I would have better sense about the whole thing."

She chases Tom off whenever he comes around. It does indeed take a village to raise a child (of any species).

I'm happy because this will make it easy to move the cats. The mamas won't run off when they have babies to care for.

I am worried about the dog though. At night, when the things that go bump in the night are particularly bothering her, I go to the patio door and talk to her. It's a bond we have.

"You watch out for us and we will watch out for you," I tell her, and she seems to understand.

The lack of a patio door at the new house

is a cause of some concern. I fear the dog will not know what to do if she cannot look in and see us.

When we first started planning renovations it seemed very important to make a "doggy viewing hole". But we still haven't gotten that resolved.

I was always a cat person but this dog has turned me around.

Elizabeth and Kate were home over the weekend and they were picking on the dog. They think she needs to lose weight.

"Look at her, she doesn't even eat her food, but she sits by her dish and growls at the cats so they can't eat it".

Okay, she is a great dog but she is still a dog. She has to keep some dignity; after all she gave up her doghouse. You can't just let yourself get run over by a bunch of cats.

Unless you are the pet owner — then they all run over you. A bag of cat food every couple of weeks and you are set.

Spring is a great time to get a new pet. Check-out the local animal shelter if you need one. They will make sure you have a healthy animal that is suited to you.

You will get more out of it than you put in.

## Kansas products help feed world

Kansans can be proud of the fact that our state helps feed people all around the world.

One out of every two bushels of wheat produced by Kansas farmers is sold overseas. The new government of Iraq, for example, depends on us to help feed its citizens. Likewise, our economy benefits from our agriculture production, generating more than \$9 billion in revenue each year.

Seeking new international markets for our products has been a major priority during my service in Congress.

For several years, I've focused on easing highly restricted agricultural trade with Cuba. In 2000, I visited Cuba and met with Fidel Castro to discuss trade possibilities, believing the country must be viewed as a long-term trade partner, not a short-term market.

This has not been without controversy. Some policy makers strongly oppose any trade with Cuba. I disagree. I don't believe food should be used as a foreign policy weapon. Instead, agricultural trade can be seen as an inroad in building successful foreign relations. Easing trade restrictions with Cuba is a win-win situation — for our Kansas farmers, our economy and the Cuban people.

Earlier this year, I joined 16 of my Senate colleagues, in introducing bipartisan legislation to encourage the free trade of food with Cuba. The legislation builds on the Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act of 2000, which generally exempted agricultural exports for U.S. trade embargoes.

Since that law's enactment, farmers have found new and growing sales opportunities in Cuba. Here's a prime example — in February, a group in Garden City got together to sell 25,000 metric tons of Kan-

From the Capitol  
Sen. Pat Roberts



sas hard red winter wheat to Cuba. This was the first sole-source verified shipment from Kansas. The estimated value of this shipment is \$3.2 million. We need more of this trade — not less.

In 2000, Cuba was the nation's 226th largest agriculture export market, and today it is the 21st largest market with over \$1 billion in total sales. My legislation allows direct transactions between U.S. and Cuban banks, and eases travel restrictions for Americans traveling to Cuba to

market and sell their products.

As most Kansans involved in agriculture know, the U.S. agriculture sector is struggling to continue its impressive run as a net exporter of ag products. In fact, during June and August of 2004, the U.S. imported more agriculture goods than it exported.

This is a perfect time to take another look at our policies with Cuba.

If Cuba is not buying wheat and other agricultural products from Kansans in the U.S., they will go to other countries' markets. The Cuban market is one of the most promising agriculture markets to appear in years, especially with its geographic location and desire to purchase American products.

If Congress does not act, we face to lose this critical market to cheaper, subsidized products from Europe and South America. That should not be the answer.

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR: Man responds to letter with irony

Dear Editor:  
Imagine this: a man is driving along a back road when his car breaks down one million miles from nowhere.

The only person who will stop to help

him is an openly gay Mexican farmer who is on his way to the bank to deposit his crop subsidy check.

Arthur Loyd Shelton  
Oberlin

## WRITE:

The Norton Telegram encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of public interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

We do not publish anonymous letters. We do not publish form letters or letters

about topics which do not pertain to our area.

Letters will not be censored, but will be read and edited for form and style, clarity, length and legality. We will not publish attacks on private individuals or businesses which do not pertain to a public issue.