

Power struggle getting out of control in state capital

Things are out of control in Topeka. The courts clearly are running things, not the Legislature or the governor. Maybe it's time to reassess. Sure, the courts are supposed to interpret the laws. They can strike down a law they claim is unconstitutional. That's their role in our three-part democracy. But the Kansas Supreme Court has gone way beyond that. The court ruled Friday that the Legislature is required to put up all the money specified in a 2001 consultants' report to pay for a "suitable" education for all Kansas children. In effect, the court says it and the consultants will decide how much the state spends on education, not the Legislature. To us, that's a direct affront to the authority of the Legislature to appropriate money and the governor to run the state. In a supposedly balanced three-branch government, one branch has seized power. But you have to view the decision as part of a decades-long struggle over the school budget. Mid-sized schools, led by Salina and Dodge City, claimed they were not getting a big enough share of the state budget. These schools lost their battle in the Legislature, so they sued the state. To date, they've spent more than \$2 million in state money on the case. (And that alone is an affront to our democracy.) Taxpayers in the last two elections have put more and more conservatives in the Legislature, and these members have blocked nearly every chance for a tax increase. That, they claim, is what voters want. The voters' will is of little consequence to the judges, however. They're appointed from lists gathered by committees, with the final choice made by the governor. Theoretically, they stand for re-election, but no one can run against them and there is little debate and less understanding of what they do. School officials, naturally, want more money. They're willing to spend our money to sue us to get it. Is that how you want the state to run? Maybe it is time to rein in the courts. One way to do that would be to return them to the political arena, where judges would once again run for office. Where those with differing views could run against them in November campaigns. Where the will of the people would count. Another, less drastic, suggestion would be to give the Senate the power to approve judicial appointments. Either might make courts consider the balance of power and back off the stance that they alone know what is good for Kansas. The present situation is crazy. — Steve Haynes



The funeral was the perfect send-off

Have you noticed how some preachers "do" great weddings and others "do" great funerals? The preacher who did the funeral for my sister-in-law, Liz, must have been a "funeral man." Of course, it helped that he knew her as a member of his congregation. He told stories that made you laugh, then he would switch to a poignant memory that made you cry. And, he had the knack for observing common, everyday things and making a spiritual connection between them and his message. Another sister-in-law wrote and delivered a eulogy that was absolutely perfect. The weather was perfect. Friends and neighbors brought food, just like they do here. The family was all together. The children, Pam and Tim, who Liz was so proud of, were there for their dad. It was a fitting farewell. —ob— Life has been a whirlwind since our return, due in part to a certain little 6-year-old named Taylor. She is non-stop energy, and because of it, I've had to pick up the pace. My life is pretty busy, but it's a different kind of busy. "G'ma! Come look at these ants!" takes on the same kind of urgency as the deadline for a story.

Out Back Carolyn Plotts



I love the way children make friends. Taylor met Peyton at vacation Bible school her first week here. Sunday afternoon, I called to see if Taylor could play at Peyton's house while I went to the prison for chapel services. In that hour and a half, the girls became best friends. Long story short, after their playtime, Peyton came home with us. The girls played at the park, in the playhouse and on the swing, fed the calves, had a wiener roast, then had a sleep-over at our house. I have to wake them in a few minutes so they can go to the one-day vacation Bible school in our little town. They are talking about exchanging phone numbers and e-mail addresses so they can keep in touch when Taylor returns to Texas. She even suggested that Peyton could come see her in Texas some time.

Grown-ups could take a few lessons on friendship from children: Play fair, accept each other as you are, and give your friend the big half. —ob— It's true. The Kelley "auction gene" has been transferred to another generation. I took Taylor to her first auction Saturday. I spotted some antique (OK, they were just old) suitcases that I thought would be cute stacked in the corner of our new television room to hold games, puzzles and toys for the grandkids. Taylor only needed one lesson on bidding and she was off and running. "Now, G'ma?" she would ask, waiting to see if I wanted to go higher. I think I can safely say we cornered the market on old suitcases. "Pa-Pa, we bought eight suitcases!" Taylor announced as soon as she hit the door. We won't say anything about the toilet I bought. It was brand new (still in the box) and we didn't need it, but for \$2, I couldn't pass it up. Bargain hunters, unite! Follow Taylor and me to the next auction. One quick lesson and you, too, can be bidding pros like us.

ELECTED OFFICIALS:

- ★ Governor Kathleen Sebelius, 300 SW 10th Ave., Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785) 296-3232
- ★ U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774; fax (202) 224-3514
- ★ U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-6521
- ★ U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 2443 Rayburn HOB, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715; fax (202) 225-5124
- ★ State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol Building, Room 128-S, Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785) 296-7399
- ★ State Rep. John Faber, 181 W. Capitol Building, Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785) 296-7500

Graduations, sports occupy time

I spent a lot of time in May with my family. I had a joyous time on trips to watch grandchildren in track, soccer and baseball tournaments and graduations. In Kansas City I attended a track meet with seven teams where granddaughter, Devin ran several events. She likes the mile and especially the two mile. She is a freshman and this is her first year participating in track, competing against others who have had years of experience. However, she ran well, placing 4th in the two mile. The next morning I went with my daughter Fonda and her two sons, Hunter and Andrew to Indianapolis, Ind. The boys are good travelers and we heard only a few "are we there yet" questions from Andrew, 4. My van has a DVD screen, so that helps create a happy trip. How did we ever travel with children prior to that? Oh, yes, now I remember, we watched for items that started with each letter of the alphabet, starting with "A" and you had to stay in order of the alphabet. Then there was the license plate game. I think it was to find a state license that we had not seen prior on the trip. Most of our trips back then were not so long. While in Indianapolis, we drove around the famous race track complex just to say we had been there. People were running the mini marathon (13 miles) that day. They run from downtown, around the track and back downtown. The complex we found, from the Internet, is on 320 acres. There are residents across the street. I wondered if those people attend the races or just listen to the noise.

Memories Sonya Montgomery



We were in Indianapolis to attend the hooding ceremony and luncheon for granddaughter Jessica who received a masters degree in science, medical and molecular genetics from University of Indiana-Purdue University. Jessica will begin work June 11 with the Medical Genetics Department at Indiana University. She will be a genetic counselor and will work with children and cancer patients of all age. After a day of visiting we drove back to Kansas City, where Fonda's husband Tom surprised her with a grand piano for Mothers Day. The next morning, I went to Wichita where granddaughter Lauren, also a freshman in high school, played goalie for Campus High School varsity soccer team. I always think I might as well go through Wichita on the way home, then when it's time to head home I find I'm nearly as far away as I was in Kansas City. I also watched a double header ball game where grandson Matthew played first base. He was ranked quite high in batting for his league, it changed from week to week, but one week he was ranked 8th. He hopes to continue playing baseball in college.

I was home for a few days and then off to Fort Hays State University where daughter-in-law Staci received a masters degree from the college of arts and sciences with a major in English. The next weekend, it was back to Wichita, for Matthew's graduation from Campus High School. In a class of more than 200, there were six students who had a 4.0 grade point average and ten who wore red cords for grade point average of 3.75-3.99. Matthew was one of 13 who wore a gray cord for grade point average of 3.5-3.74. He also received the Woody Herman Jazz Award and was voted Mr. Personality by his class. Also attending Matthew's graduation from out of town were his uncle Dr. Michael Peil, Brimfield, Ill., Aunt Fonda and Uncle Tom and children, Devin, Hunter, Patricia and Andrew, Kansas City. I have visited with others in the area who were headed to graduations. Let the newspaper know when you attend those events, so we can write about your attendance to those special events. What a joy to see the younger generation doing well. It seems some of the news media would rather talk about the wrong doings of people. By the way, don't tell my boss that I was gone so much, she may not have noticed. Memorial Day weekend has been a time of reflection of those who have died and yet we look forward to the future, which I believe will be in good hands. Again, a big thank you to those who have served and are serving in the armed forces so we all can remain in a country with so much promise of the future.

THE NORTON TELEGRAM

Office hours:
8 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Mon.-Fri.
Phone: (785) 877-3361
Fax: (785) 877-3732
E-mail: telegram@nwkansas.com

STAFF

- Cynthia Haynes editor and publisher
- Veronica Monier staff reporter
- Dick Boyd Blue Jay sports
- Carolyn Plotts society editor
- Sherry Hickman circulation
- Rich Meyers advertising representative
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