

State's debt should be of concern

Apparently, no one has noticed — or much cares — that Kansas' per capita state debt has quadrupled in just a dozen years. The tab hit \$4 billion in 2004, or \$1,400 for every man, woman and child in the state. In 1992, the figure was just \$363. In 12 years, a Wichita State University study says, Kansas went from 43rd in state debt per person to 17th. Most of the money went into concrete, asphalt and steel for new roads, as the Legislature turned to bond issues to finance new construction. It's faster, and sometimes even cheaper, to build big projects right now with bonds. You borrow the money and pay for construction at today's prices, not an inflated future price. To a degree, that makes sense, but the more you borrow, the less money there is left in future years.

As payments on that debt come due, it'll be harder to pay for highways in the future. Already, the Legislature has stripped the road fund of sales tax money promised for coming years.

State Budget Director Duane Goossen was quoted as saying he's "not worried" about the debt. Kansas has a strong credit rating and plenty of capacity for more borrowing, he said.

That's good to know, but there remains the fact that someone has to pay this debt off.

Worse yet, the Legislature has been using more expensive revenue bonds for state borrowing. That's mostly because they can be issued without a public vote.

General obligation bonds, backed by the "full faith and credit" of the state, would be cheaper, but anything over \$1 million would require a statewide vote.

It's easy to see why the Legislature went with revenue bonds. The state borrowed \$500 million in one bond issue just to stabilize the employees' pension fund.

It's unlikely voters would have approved that loan, let alone the several issues for road building. With revenue bonds, once the governor signs the bill, the state can just go ahead and sign for the debt.

Now, though, there's a move afoot to refinance the bonds, or at least part of them. Lowering the interest rate just one point could save \$4 million a year.

The state could issue general obligation bonds, at a lower rate, and call an election to approve the issue. Some legislators think people would vote for that.

"It's like refinancing your house," said Sen. Phil Journey, a Wichita Republican. "You're crazy if you don't do it."

What's crazy is spiraling, ever-more-expensive debt. It remains to be seen whether voters will buy that logic.

— Steve Haynes

LETTER TO THE EDITOR:

School superintendent responds to Telegram tetanus booster story

To the Editor,
It was with great interest that I read the story by Veronica Monier in the March 17 edition of *The Norton Telegram* about the tetanus booster clinic recently held at Northern Valley High School. It is true that the Norton Schools were given the opportunity to take part in the Rotary program and declined, but it is important to understand why.

The Norton Schools took part in this program last year and were very, very appreciative that the Norton Rotary Club made it possible that all of our students who needed the vaccine received it free of charge. We had anticipated taking part again this year. However, we were informed in early February by the Norton County Health Department that the cost

of the DpT vaccine had doubled and that the Rotary grant would cover only about 50 percent of the anticipated cost. The Norton County Health Department informed us that the balance would be billed to the school district. We did not believe that the school district should be made financially responsible for required immunizations of any kind. Therefore, we regretfully declined to participate.

After the decision was made to not participate, the opportunity to participate with full payment was not made available to us, as it must have been to the Northern Valley Schools.

Sincerely,

Greg Mann
Norton School District
Superintendent of Schools

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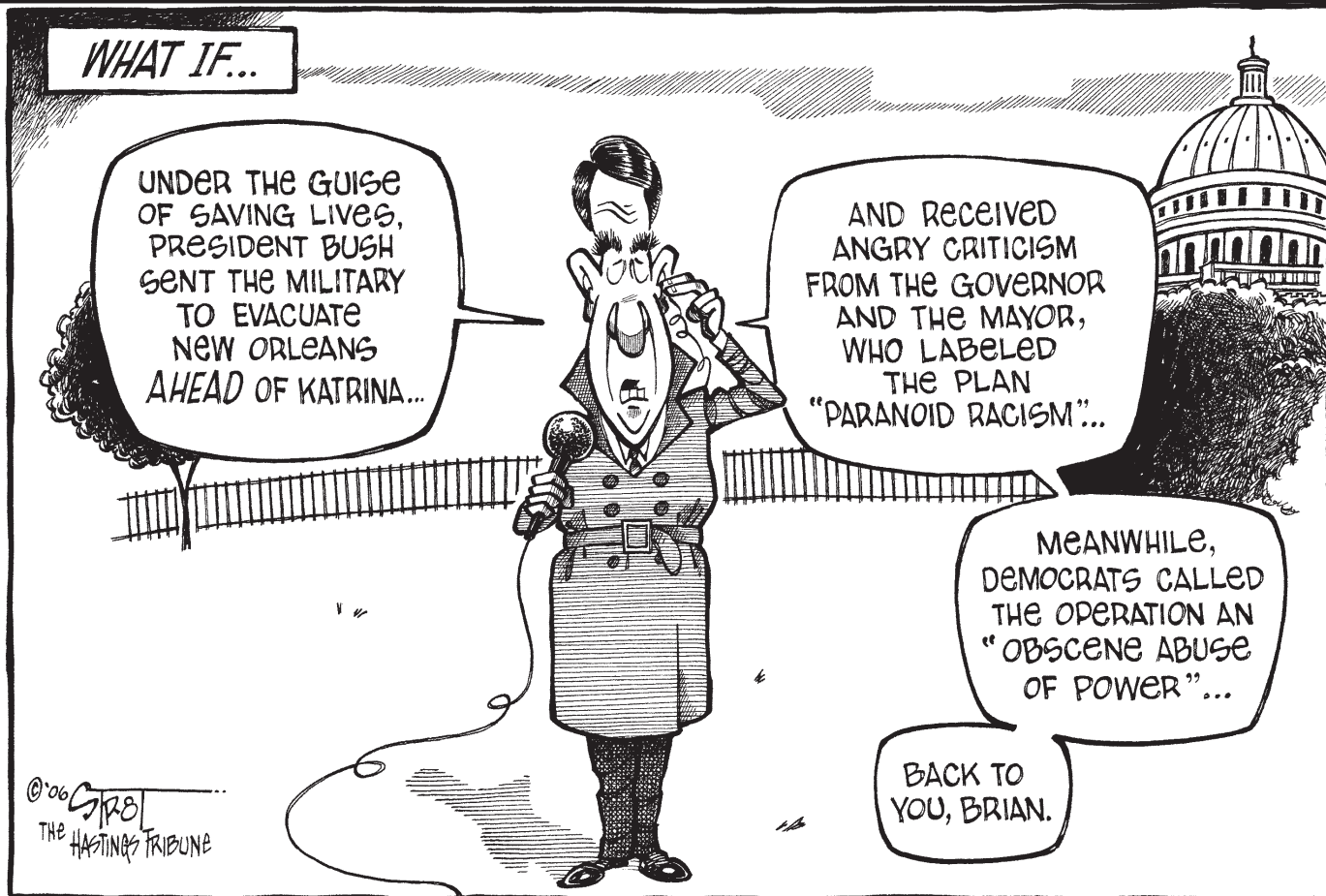
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Number 15 makes the record books

Mission accomplished. House No. 15 is in the record books. Another Mexican family now has decent shelter.

I guess we look at mission work like the little boy who was throwing starfish back into the ocean after a storm had washed thousands of the little creatures ashore. Someone said to him, "Why bother? There are thousands and thousands of them. What difference will it make?"

As the little boy threw one more starfish back into the water, he said, "Well, it made a difference to that one."

You can go through life not knowing for sure if you made a difference.

Or, you can do something for someone who can't do it for themselves and know you made a difference in their life. Which, in turn, makes a difference in your life.

I don't care what you do. Just do some-

Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



thing.

—ob—

Sure glad we got home when we did. With this snowstorm, I wouldn't want to be out on the roads today. Jim just came inside and said he heard the highways were about to be closed.

That settles it — we're not going anywhere.

Except maybe to the cafe. We just read in the town newsletter that they're serving liver and onions for lunch. Maybe I'll

put on my boots and we'll slog our way over to Main Street. Boy, do we love liver and onions.

—ob—

Our daughter Jennifer's timing was good. She went to San Antonio for Alexandria's spring break and they left Friday. How perfect is that? Leave before the weather gets bad and return when it's all over.

The snow will probably be gone before they come home.

—ob—

This is the kind of day I should get some long-postponed project finished. Like that scrapbook page I've been working on; the pair of pajamas I've had cut out for our granddaughter, Taylor; or this year's income taxes.

Lots of things I should do, but a nice, long nap still sounds like my best option.

A busy, but memorable birthday

Daughter Elizabeth's birthday was in February. This year it was on a Saturday. It made me laugh because she said she hoped that no one would figure it out because "my kids really like to sing and last year every class had to sing Happy Birthday."

She's a music teacher so I thought she ought to be pleased her classes really like to sing. Isn't that the point?

Anyway, this year she spent the day in Norton judging the forensics tournament.

She teaches at Smith Center and she jumped at the chance when a memo was sent to the teachers asking for a judge for the Norton event. Between the forensics tournament and the Norton/S.C. game the end of January, she got to talk to lots of former teachers and friends.

Back Home

Nancy Hagman



She did not attend the earlier game between the S.C. and Norton girls in the first round game of the MCL tournament. But one of her piano students who did, told her how fabulous the Norton cheerleaders were and how cool it was they had a guy on the squad.

Then she started in on the band. "Their

band is so good. They played before the game and at half-time. They never played the same song twice. There are so many kids in their band." Elizabeth let her go on for awhile, then nodded and said, "I know, I went to school there."

It's a fine line to walk between being proud and being arrogant. There are probably some things Norton Community High School could do better but there are a lot of things they do very, very well. I'm so glad my kids can say, "I went to school there!"

Elizabeth wore a red shirt to the basketball game but when asked by Mr. Will, happily sat with the band and played the piccolo. I can only hope that some day Elizabeth's students think as fondly of her as my kids do of Mr. Will.

A timely message from up North

You never know what e-mail will bring when you crank up your computer each morning. Last week I found this contribution from a faithful reader. I thought it contained a message that, more times than not, falls through the cracks. It was written after a big winter storm stomped on North Dakota. I've held it for no specific reason. I just thought it would come in handy at a later time. Then on Monday, we had our own snow storm and that jogged my memory.

So, here it is, in part:

Up here in the Northern Plains we just recovered from a Historic event — may I even say a "Weather Event" of "Biblical Proportions" — with a historic blizzard of up to 44 inches of snow and winds to 90 miles per hour that broke trees in half, knocked down utility poles, stranded hundreds of motorists in lethal snow banks, closed all roads, isolated scores of communities and cut power to tens of thousands.

George Bush did not come
FEMA did nothing
No one howled for the government
No one blamed the government
No one even uttered an expletive on TV
Jesse Jackson or Al Sharpton did not visit

Our Mayors did not blame Bush or anyone else

Our Governor did not blame Bush or anyone else either

Good Evening Norton

Tom Dreiling



CNN, ABC, CBS, FOX, or NBC did not visit — or report on this category snow storm

Nobody demanded \$2,000 debit cards
No one asked for a FEMA trailer house
No one looted

Nobody expected the government to do anything either

No Larry King, no Bill O'Rielly, no Oprah, no Chris Matthews and no Geraldo Rivera

Sent out caravans of SUV's to pluck people out of snow engulfed cars.

The truck drivers pulled people out of snow banks and didn't ask for a penny.

Local restaurants made food and the police and fire departments delivered it to the snow bound families.

Even though a Category "5" blizzard of this scale has never fallen this early...we know it can happen and how to deal with it ourselves.

Maybe some people will get the message, "The world does not owe you a living..."

-td-

An elderly couple visits McDonald's.

He orders one hamburger, one order of french fries and one drink. The old man unwraps the plain hamburger and carefully cuts it in half. He places one half in front of his wife. He then carefully counts out the french fries, dividing them into two piles and neatly placing one pile in front of his wife. He takes a sip of the drink, his wife takes a sip and then sets the cup down between them. As he begins to eat his few bites of hamburger, the people around them keep looking over and whispering. You could tell they were thinking, "That poor old couple — all they can afford is one meal for the two of them." As the man begins to eat his fries, a young man comes to the table. He offers to buy another meal for the couple. The old man says they are just fine, they are used to sharing.

The surrounding people notice the little old lady hasn't eaten a bite. She sits there watching her husband eat and occasionally takes turns sipping the drink. Again the young man begs them to let him buy another meal for them. The old woman says "No, thank you, we are used to sharing everything." As the old man finishes and is wiping his face neatly with the napkin, the young man again comes over to the little old lady who has yet to eat a single bite of food and asks, "Aren't you hungry?"

"What is it you are waiting for?"

She answers, "I am waiting for him to finish with the teeth."

-td-

Have a good evening!