

Will Kansas opt out of No Child Left Behind

An item of real significance to our state and all of our schools is that last week the Deputy Commissioner of Education, Dr. Diane DeBacker, filed a waiver with the Federal Department of Education for Kansas to opt-out of the No Child Left Behind Act. It will remove the requirement for 100 percent of all tested students to meet proficiency by 2014, and let Kansas set new attainable measures. I will discuss some of those measures in future articles when the waiver is attained. It is not certain we will receive the waiver, but I believe we have an excellent chance of receiving one.

News from your legislator
Ward Cassidy



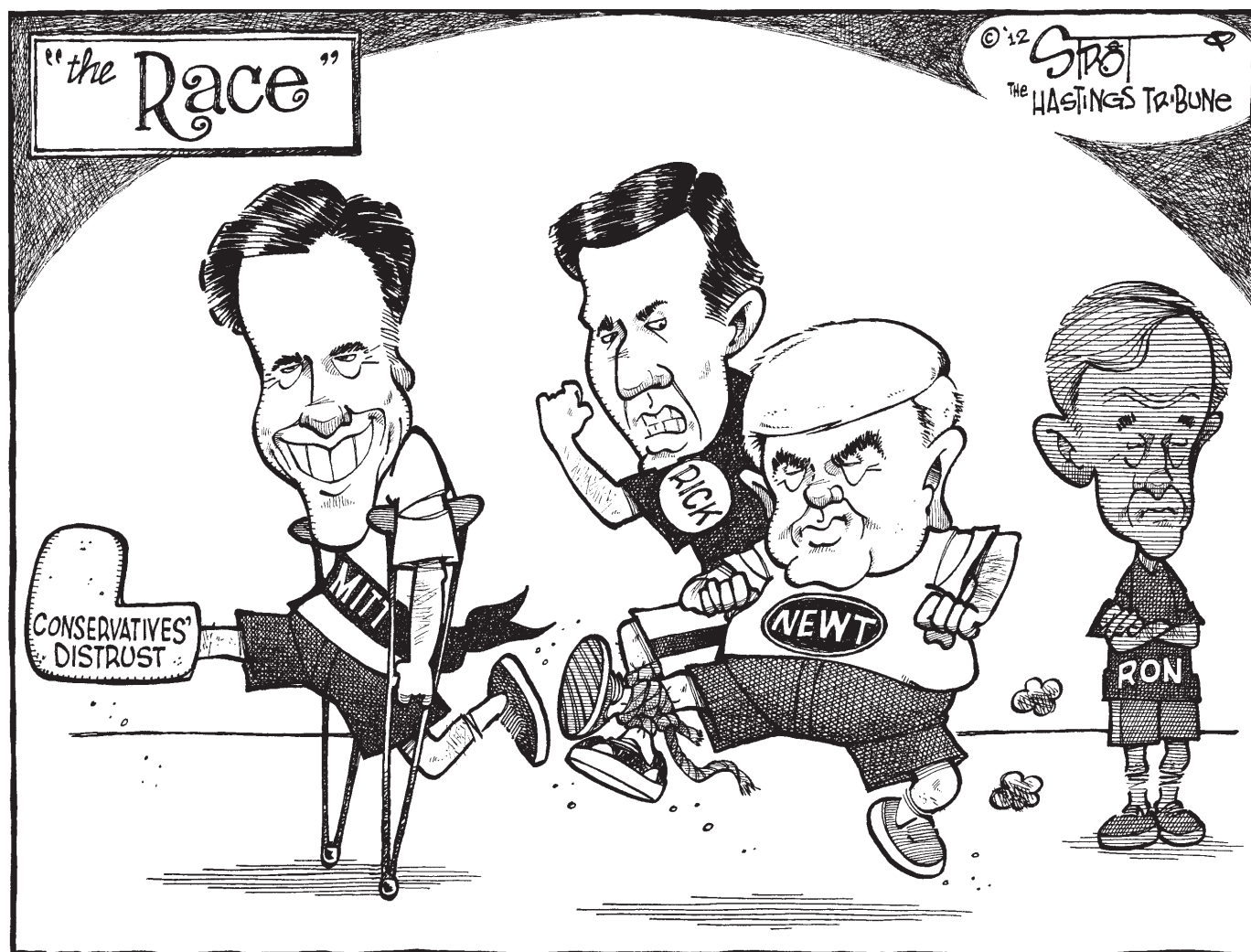
An issue I was concerned about, before coming to Topeka, was our state's ability to export our products. I discussed this with our Commerce Director, Pat George (he is from Dodge City and served many years in the State Legislature), and feel that he is working hard in that direction. The federal government has been pushed to open-up new markets for our Kansas products.

In 2011, exports increased by more than 16 percent over 2010. We are currently at the second highest level on record, rising to \$11.57 billion of exported products. Our largest gains were in cereals (101 percent), pharmaceutical products (54 percent), and meats (36 percent). Our top five export markets are, in order, Canada, Mexico, Japan, China, and Nigeria. I am confident Secretary George is making good progress opening-up new markets for our products.

Another bit of good news is that the Department of Revenue Secretary, Nick Jordan, reported that Kansas collected \$29 million more in taxes in February than expected. He reported that it is a sign the Kansas economy is recovering and more people are getting jobs. Since the beginning of this fiscal year, in July, tax collections have been \$3.7 billion – about \$32 million more than expected.

There is little in the way of new information regarding KanCare, as much of the details cannot be released by the Brownback Administration because of the nature of the contract negotiations they are involved in. It prevents them from divulging any details of the proposals made by the health care companies until the contracts are signed and finalized. The process is expected to take until mid to late summer to have the list of the three companies the administration has chosen. I have heard many concerns about the KanCare plan and have continued to express our concerns with this administration. It is very important as to how this will affect our providers and clients in our communities.

A reminder – all of the articles I have written this year and my contact information are on my website www.wardcassidy.com. On this website, I will also have an update on what is happening to KPERS and will change the information as the process develops.



The need to conserve the Ogallala Aquifer

Speaking in the heart of irrigation country and the Ogallala Aquifer region, Gov. Sam Brownback signed two bills in southwestern Kansas that are intended to lengthen the life of this region's water resources. Brownback signed the bills March 5 at Garden City High School while students, community leaders, farm organization members and legislators watched.

The bills were historic because they mark a change in how water-rights holders will use their water in the future, particularly in the Ogallala Aquifer. This aquifer located in western Kansas is a vast underground pool of water. It is one of the world's largest aquifers and covers an area that includes portions of eight states: Kansas, Colorado, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, South Dakota and Wyoming.

The High Plains region relies on the Ogallala for water; however, this finite resource is being depleted due to years of extensive irrigation.

One bill that will now apply to only closed appropriation areas of the state repeals a 1945 law that required use of a certain amount of water each year under a so-called use-it-or-lose-it doctrine. The other bill gives rights holders more flexibility in how they use their water each year.

Brownback believes it will allow for

Insight
John Schlageck



more water usage in dry years, with an eye toward conservation in wet years. Both measures were part of the agenda he outlined in January for the 2012 legislative session.

"I believe we should feel good about these measures that will help extend the life of our state's water resources," the Kansas governor said. "The people who use water in this region of Kansas are passionate about water and they understand we don't have a future without it."

Stanton County producer Jim Sipes attended the signing ceremony and says these two bills are the culmination of something farmers/irrigators have been trying to get in western Kansas for a long time.

"For those of us who do not use our water through irrigation anymore, it gives us the flexibility to continue to conserve the water without having to figure out ways to keep this water right viable now that use-it-or-lose-it for our closed appropriation areas

has been repealed," Sipes said. "The combination of these two bills will give producers who want to irrigate the ability to do so while getting the most use of that water and benefiting the state and our crop producers."

Joining the governor for the bill signing was Ogallala Aquifer Advisory Committee chair Gary Harshberger, who also farms in southwestern Kansas. Harshberger believes these measures will help move "the culture from one of consumption to one of water conservation."

Additional water-related measures continue to march through the process. Farm organizations including Kansas Farm Bureau testified recently in support of separate House-passed measures allowing neighboring farmers to devise their own groundwater management, the dividing of water rights, water banking and an irrigation transition assistance plan.

Anticipation is high for the passage of LEMAs or Local Enhancement Management Area plans. LEMAs would promote local control for irrigators. LEMAs also call for reductions of water use if supported by the Groundwater Management District, have corrective measures that address conservation needs and are approved by the Chief Engineer.

The use of good old imagination and ingenuity

They say "necessity is the mother of invention." I wish "they" would have been in my kitchen a few nights ago to invent something.

A special young couple in our small group Bible study is moving away. The rest of the group wanted to honor them. So, secretly, we decided to have a surprise party for them after our late Sunday afternoon study.

I volunteered to make lasagna. The original plan was to make two pans: one for the adults and one for the kids. While shopping last week I spotted a very large, disposable aluminum pan, made especially for lasagna. "Perfect," I thought. It will be big enough for everyone. I won't have to make two batches.

That's where I should have stopped and re-thought my strategy. I should have also taken some measurements. You see, my refrigerator/freezer is a side-by-side and the refrigerator compartment is not nearly as wide as a combo unit with the freezer on the top or bottom.

It was very late Friday night when I finally finished assembling the lasagna. I soon realized that no matter which

Out Back
Carolyn Plotts



way I turned the pan, it was not going to fit in the refrigerator. What to do? I didn't have a cooler big enough to hold it and I didn't think a box on the front porch would be safe from pillaging neighborhood cats and dogs. Here's where Yankee ingenuity came in.

I took the largest trash bag I had and dumped the ice cube canister in it. Then I set it in the bathtub, spread the ice out flat and set the pan of lasagna on top of the ice, pulling the bag up around the pan and tying a knot in the bag. Then, just like when you wrap an ice cream freezer with a blanket for insulation, I wrapped the pan, ice, bag and all with towels. Guess what. It still had ice the next day. I just kept adding ice until it was time to bake. And no one was the wiser. Until now, I guess.

-ob-
This was the weekend for the state-wide Republican Caucus. Jim was speaking on behalf of our favored candidate, sharing his personal opinions. I was going to summarize with a re-cap of his political platform. The caucus forum only allows 10 minutes per candidate and Jim has been a preacher far too long to get any point across in less than 10 minutes.

As it turned out "our guy" didn't need any help from us. He won the county and the state very handily. Here's my one bit of political commentary. I don't care who you vote for, just vote. Because if you don't cast a ballot, you are voting for the opposition.

-ob-
My next column will be written in Texas before we cross the border into Mexico. Used to be when we traveled I had to find a fax machine to send my column in. Now, every motel in America has a computer in the lobby. I sit and drum my fingers on the keyboard there, just like I do at home. The only difference: at a motel I can't write in my pajamas.

Letter to the Editor:

I am a member of several social, religious and government clubs and as a member I believe that I have a responsibility as a member.

Are you an active member? When someone calls you to help with a project do you make excuses or try to do what you can? Do you attend any meetings? Do you even know or care what your membership means?

If you are NOT an active member, why do you join? I totally understand that sometimes your job, children or family takes precedence over attending meetings or helping with an activity, but the excuse that I just don't have time or your schedule is so jammed packed, maybe you need to take the time and rethink priorities or if you really want to belong to an organization or club. Many organizations depend on their members to get a project done. What is sad is that several organizations/clubs will not be able to do a community project or even have an organization because of lack of help or active members.

As a member, I believe that you need to say okay, I will help with this project and will make a better effort to be a member that believes in the organization or a club's mission. And maybe I can attend a majority of the meetings in a year's time.

The next time someone calls from an organization or club that you belong to and asks for your help, I hope you say yes and help with a project or attend a meeting. That is what being a member is all about and the rewards will be abundant.

Thanks for listening.

Sincerely,
Denise A Schmitz



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