

Top highway worker fighting for roads

As you enter the room, a slender, dark-haired woman walks up to introduce herself. You've met her just once, years ago, but she remembers — or has aides and files to help her.

A confident grip, a friendly smile, a steely glance that says she knows who she is and where she's going. You'd think she was running for something, but Deb Miller already has the job she wants.

Ms. Miller is settling in as the state's secretary of transportation, taking the reins at a male-dominated agency that spawns a vast bureaucracy and spends more of the state's budget than anything but schools and colleges.

Getting a handle on the Department of Transportation is no small task, but Miller says it's fun. She's been touring the state, visiting each of the six districts, going around with each of the district engineers.

She's had her feet on the pavement — highways still take the bulk of the department's budget, though it has small programs for airports, railroads and recreational trails — and meeting with as many of the department's 3,000 employees as she can.

More than that, she's building up a network of friends and supporters that she'll need to keep the department and its programs intact.

Employees say they sense a marked difference from the tenure of Dean Carlson, who ran the department through the Bill Graves era. They think that they have a boss who will challenge assumptions and not be afraid to stand up for their agency.

Ms. Miller is no stranger to the department. She was director of planning and development from 1984-1997, when she left to work as a consultant with a private engineering firm. Gov. Kathleen Sebelius brought her back.

While she's an engineer, her political skills will come in handy.

The state's budget crisis the last three years has pinched the highway program, but Ms. Miller says so far, she expects to be able to complete all the projects people have been promised.

That's important, she said. If you go back to the 1970, in the Bob Bennett era, the state promised an expansive freeway system that was never built.

"I believe without question that we can complete all the projects under the Comprehensive Transportation Program," she said, referring to the state's 10-year, \$10 billion program. "But we cannot sustain any more losses."

The Legislature took away the sales tax "demand transfer" money the road fund was supposed to get a couple of years ago, then raised the motor fuel tax 2 cents per gallon to make up for the loss. This year, though, the department was saddled with the Highway Patrol budget, for a \$200 million cut. (The patrol used to be part of the old Highway Department, but now reports directly to the governor.)

No one expects the state's budget situation to improve much for a couple of years. Where once there was money to spend and room to cut taxes year after year, now there is a fight for every dollar. Ms. Miller says it's important to keep the transportation budget up both because the state needs good roads and because the projects create a lot of jobs. That's vital in a recession, she said.

If worst comes to worst, and there have to be more cuts, she'd consider extending the program, but that's not her favorite idea. Ten years already is a long time.

"We're getting a long ways out there already," Ms. Miller said. "There are new needs coming up all the time."

But, she says, extending the program would be better than breaking the state's promises.

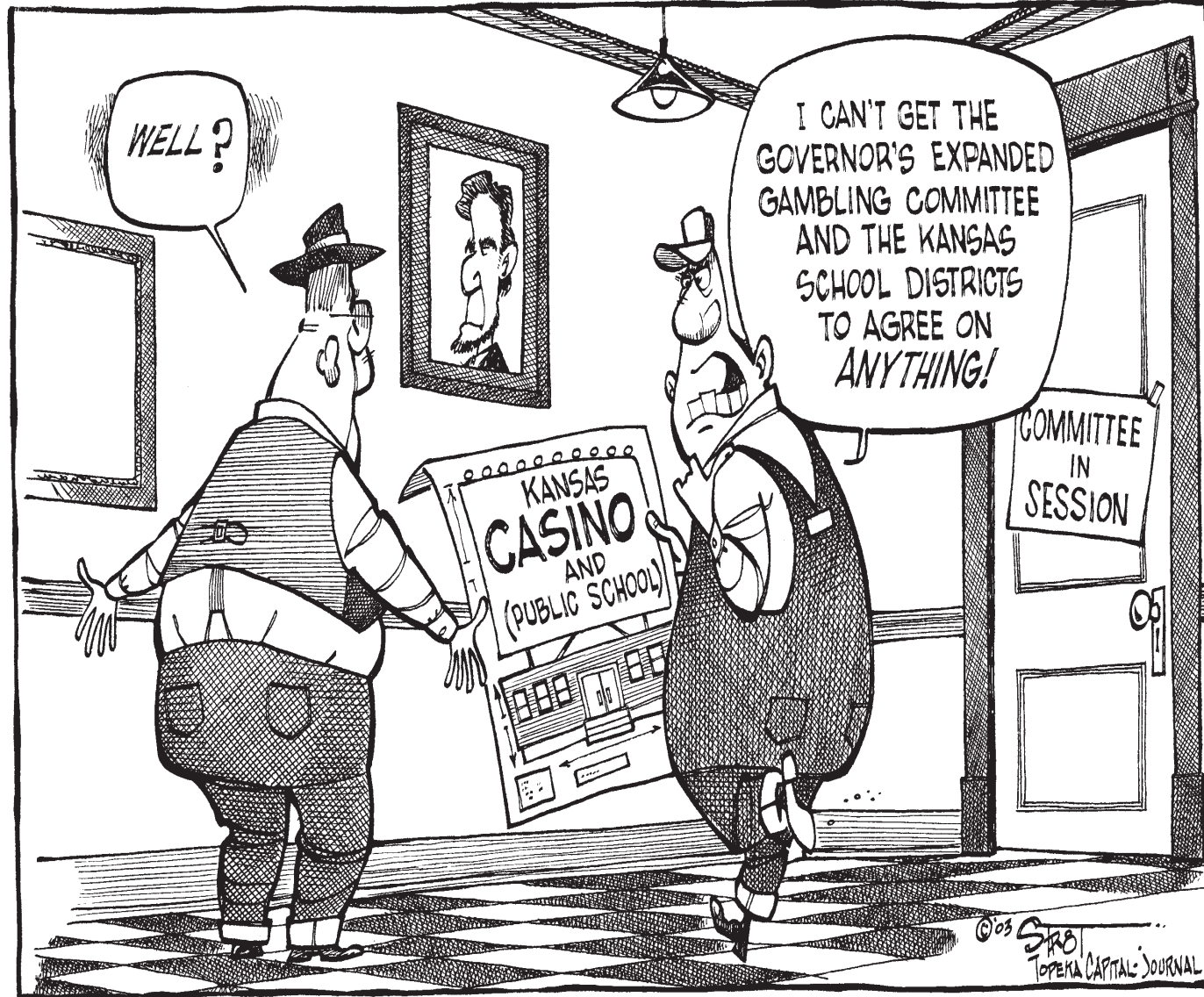
"It's imperative to meet our commitments," she says. "Lately, if the department has announced a project, we have built it."

And no one, she adds, wants to go back to the bad old days of the 1980s, when Kansas roads were falling apart — or wind up like — shudder — Missouri.

"The No. 1 priority has to be to maintain the system and preserve the system," she says.

Backed by a loyal corps of employees and supporters, no doubt she'll do just that.

— Steve Haynes



Music is wonderful gift for children

The Norton Community High School and Junior High vocal departments held their Christmas concert last Tuesday.

I have been honored to play the piano as accompanist for those two groups the last few years.

The students performed very well. The disappointing part was the fact that several of the students had decorated the high school auditorium and because of the postponements because of the weather, the concert was held in the high school gymnasium.

Oh, well, the world continues to go on. I enjoy playing even though I must admit that I may be getting a little old for the stress, or is it keeping me young? I will ponder that.

Christmas music is especially beautiful and such a joyous season.

One of the songs that was performed was "It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year," and there is something so true about that statement.

Some people however, try to find their happiness on happenings instead of the joy to be found inside yourself and because of the birth of Jesus.

Enough philosophizing. My piano playing has been a joy for me for many years. As I think back, and that's what I am supposed to be doing in this column, I was either 4 or 5-years old when my sister who was two years older began to "take piano lessons".

My parents felt they could not afford two piano lessons at that time, so I was

Memories

Sonya Montgomery



"allowed" to sit and listen.

Of course, my mother, who was a wonderful pianist could help me too. My very wise mother had the rule that I could practice the piano or wash the supper dishes and clean the kitchen.

Well, I practiced the piano while she washed dishes with the help of my sister who didn't like to practice. In later years, my sister and I played a lot of piano duets, so Mom did the dishes while we practiced.

It took so long for her to do dishes. Sometime later I managed to learn to wash dishes.

When I was older Aloise Ryan of Norton was my piano teacher — such a good, but strict teacher.

I think I was 9-years old when I began to play for the Sunday School songs, then did accompanying in junior high and high school.

Then I was honored when my children sang or played their instruments to accompany them.

Encourage your child if they have some ability to play the piano to learn to accompany vocal and instrumental.

We must help our future generation to

not only do this task, but to enjoy doing it.

Music is such a wonderful and important "subject" in the school system. I doubt that most people realize the benefits derived from music. It builds confidence when the students perform.

Music can be enjoyed for a lifetime.

Many studies have been made showing that music is one of the best therapies for many ills. I am talking about "music" and not noise and some of the other sounds that I occasionally hear on television and from passing cars.

Good music is learned and the Norton school system has a history of good music and I trust that will continue.

This does not seem like a long trip down memory lane, but I do hope parents will encourage their children to take an active part in vocal and instrumental music in school. They may not become "professionals", but it is something they will always enjoy.

One more thing — you may have noticed a tear in my eyes last Tuesday as I played since this year is the first year my father has not been able to attend a concert at which I played.

In my recollection, he attended every time I have been in a concert whether singing or playing, church or school. His health did not allow that this year.

I was so pleased to see a large number of parents and friends attend the concert. It is so important to the students even if they may not think so at this time in their life.

She gets her chance to be a writer

My mother was a writer. She wrote about interesting stuff and she wrote with humor. We children knew this from the wonderful letters we got at college and the annual Christmas epistle. (Not bad if correctly done, I have always maintained.)

If you talked to people who think they know her they might not know this aspect.

They would say she was a teacher, a wife, a mother, a member of this or that group. After her death we found stories she had written. All of them were true stories — that is based on true incidents. To my knowledge none of them were ever printed. There was some evidence that she had submitted some things to newspapers as features, I guess it didn't work out.

Thinking about my mom and the *Telegram's* appeal "Writer's Wanted" made me consider the things I want.

I am a writer, but I don't think many people know that about me. I remember one time my oldest child read something I had written and seemed very impressed and, of course, amazed.

I took some journalism classes in college. The reason I did well in the first was because my mother had taught me the basics. In one non-journalism class, where we had to do a lot of writing, my professor commented on my paper, "You write so well, you should have a column in a newspaper," he said.

I was proud. The professor was a very

Back Home Nancy Hagman



popular lady on campus, one whose opinion I respected. And she liked me — Wow!

When I got out of college I was already married and I wanted a job.

My career has been following my husband around, but I have had a lot of jobs. None of my jobs have been as a writer. Then one day, never mind how many years later I see an opportunity, "Writers Wanted," and I wonder — could I really do that?

And the age old question rears its head,

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.

what do I really want? Well here are a few things:

I want to take a nap.

I want a maid so I can sit down and watch TV after supper like the aforementioned husband.

I want a flat stomach.

I want my kids to have happy successful lives and relationships.

Of course I want world peace but that seems so far out of my range of influence, so I would settle for peace in my heart.

I want a nap, but I repeat myself.

In the movie "The Rookie" the father tells the son "It's fine to think about what you want to do until it's time to do what you were meant to do."

The son thinks his father is pouring water on his dreams. But I am an optimist, maybe the thing we want to do and the thing we are meant to do can be the same thing.

I want to be a writer and I really want a nap.

WRITE:

We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise.

We do not publish form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area. Thank-yous should be submitted to the Want Ad desk.

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
Kristen Brands reporter
Carol Erlenbusch advertising rep.
Barbara McCool advertising rep.
Vicki Henderson computer production
Susie Marble computer production
Sonya Montgomery bookkeeping

ISSN 1063-701X
215 S. Kansas Ave., Norton, KS 67654
Published each Wednesday and Friday by Haynes Publishing Co., 215 S. Kansas Ave., Norton, Kan. 67654. Periodicals mail postage paid at Norton, Kan. 67654.
Postmaster: Send address changes to Norton Telegram, Norton, Kan. 67654
Official newspaper of Norton and Norton County. Member of the Kansas Press Association, National Newspaper Association, and the Nebraska Press Association

Nor'West Newspapers

Dick and Mary Beth Boyd
Publishers, 1970-2002
Incorporating the Norton County Champion
Marion R. Krehbiel, editor

