

## State saves money by dumping cost on cities

The Kansas Department of Transportation has announced it will close the main exit at Abilene from Interstate 70 from one direction again this summer, despite a hue and cry from city officials and businesses around the interchange last year.

Oh, the department promises it'll limit the closing to 42 days and says it's built incentives into the contract to keep the road builders on schedule. That's great, but why close the exit at all? Major exits are kept open during most re-paving jobs.

To save money, we suppose. So the merchants of Abilene will have to suffer for a month and a half during the busiest traffic season of the year. Many drivers, confronted with a closed exit, are not going to get off the Interstate a few miles east of Abilene and drive back to get gas or food. They'll go on to Chapman or Junction City.

Abilene merchants will lose a lot of money so the state can save some. Is that right?

We know the Transportation Department never has enough money for rebuilding roads. And every time the state is short for some other cause, the Legislature seems to rob the highway budget.

But look at it this way. If the state saves – just guessing here – \$4 million or \$5 million on a \$24 million project in Abilene and merchants in town lose \$9 million to \$11 million, as the city estimated after a similar closure last year, how

does that add up?

What it amounts to is a huge, one-time tax on Abilene merchants. And that just is not fair.

The department ought to have to account for costs to traffic-dependent businesses when it calculates the cost of any detour. It should plan to keep businesses open as much as possible through any project, discussing the alternatives with the public well in advance.

In fact, it does just that many times. And often, the engineers change the way a job will be done to accommodate businesses. The outcry in Abilene apparently caught the engineers off guard, but it shouldn't have.

They designed a project to replace concrete pavement on one side of the freeway or the other without keeping that vital exit – the main one for a substantial town that depends on highway and tourist trade – open all summer.

And what does this have to do with us out here in western Kansas? That's easy. The highway department makes decisions like this all the time. It might be your local businesses that are affected next – unless the department has to account for business losses along with its own costs.

Today, sometimes it does, other times – as in Abilene – it doesn't. The state could change that, and it should. What's happened in Abilene is a horrible way to treat a town. – Steve Haynes

## The Gardener

Plants and the names they are given

Can't you just visualize this scenario? Two successful plant scientists had just completed the development of a new tomato, and had tested it carefully for several years. It was a beautiful tomato that was sure to win the favor of gardeners everywhere as soon as the seed was released to the public. The two gentlemen were sitting out on the patio having coffee and contemplating their success.

Charlie--So, what are we going to name this thing Harry? Harry--Oh I don't know. We are having a little celebration out here this morning, so how about just calling it "Celebrity." Charlie--Now, that's already been taken. You know Harry, this is a really big tomato. How about naming it "Big Beef?" Harry--Can't do that.

There's already one of those, too. How about we just call it "Red Tomato!" Charlie--Sounds good to me. "Red Tomato it is!"

Charlie and Harry did good, especially when you consider that there are more than 3,700 different named tomato cultivars out there. In fact, "Red Tomato" may have already been taken!

Wouldn't it be interesting and enlightening to know how all the flowers and vegetables got their names? "Yaya carrots come to mind. I'll bet there's a good story behind that name. I've been hearing good things about a new sweet corn lately, and I see it's available in the Gurney catalog. It's called "Gotta Have It." Kinda makes you want to send old George a check for a couple packs, doesn't it? One of my favorite tomatoes is called Northern "Exposure. The name pretty well describes what it's all about.

J.W. Jung has a new one this year called "Pretty Pleasin" peas, as well as a new green bean named "Annihilator." That's pretty scary. Read the description and it tells you that it is so much better than the other green beans that that they should be annihilated from your thoughts. Jung also offers a pink blueberry dubbed "Pink Lemonade." That might be a bit confusing, or even deceiving.

Burpee is offering a whole series of "Honey-moon Hibiscus." Don't believe I'll go there. Nor do I wish to order "Hollow Crown" parsnips. They've been around for over 50

By Kay Melia



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years, so maybe the crowns are filled by now.

Toy Choi Pak Choi makes an interesting play on words, doesn't it? The name "Sure Thing" sounds a bit enticing. But, alas! It's a zucchini! Of course it's a sure thing, like all zucchini.

Burpee also has a great 3 to 4 inch radish that is descriptively called "Fire and Ice." The top half is red and the bottom half is white. They are beautiful radishes, with great taste.

Some catalogs really try to sell their customers on certain offerings. The Territorial Seed Company in Cottage Grove, Oregon excels at descriptions. For example, Territorial offers a one-inch size tomato called "Orange Panuche." Listen to this. "The quintessential flavor of summer is captured in these succulent, sweet and flavorful fruit. Orange Panuche excels in production and taste with astonishing quantities of orange fruit that are vitamin packed!"

I can just barely resist ordering a packet of Orange Panuche seed. Then comes the reality of it all. Fifteen seeds for \$6.55, plus shipping and handling. I think I'll wait until next year. But I'll be thinking about Orange Panuche all summer!

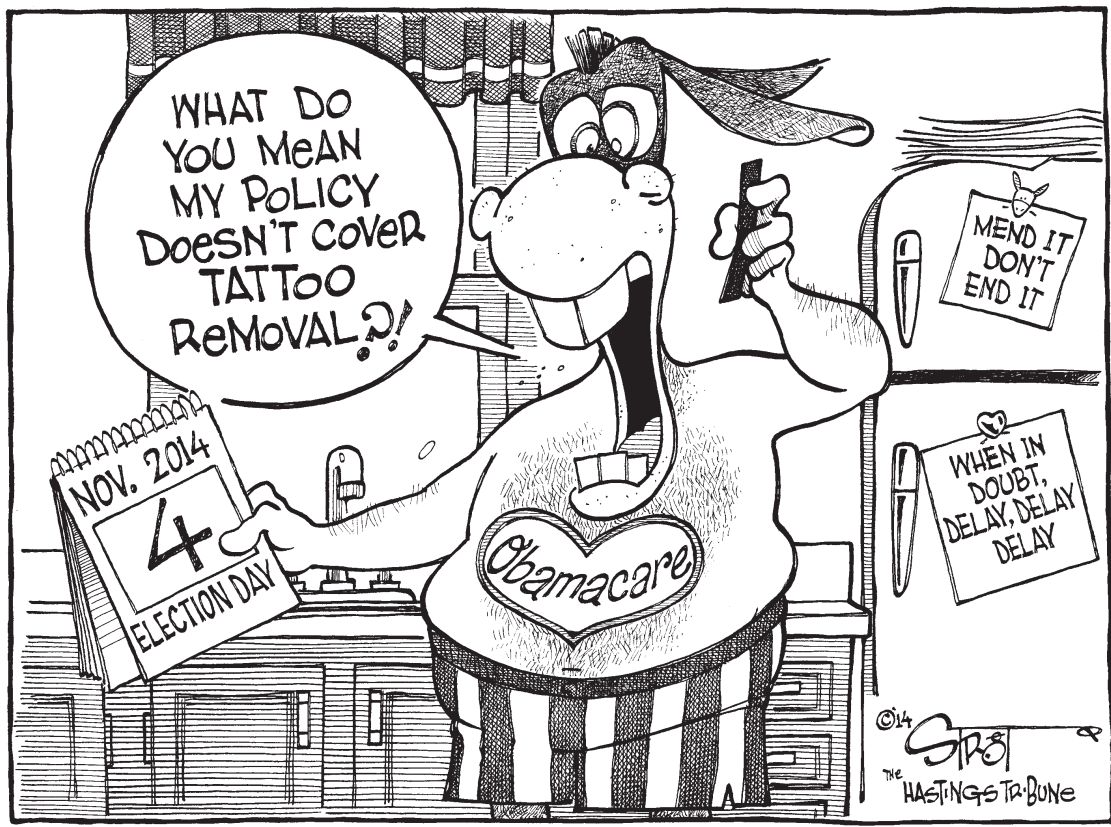
The names given to plant-life are truly amazing and their descriptions make it difficult to decline their offer.

GOD SAYS Uphold me according unto thy word, that I may live: and let me not be ashamed of my hope. Psalms 119:116

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## Legislative News

The Equity issue of school funding

By Ward Cassidy 120th State Representative

In my next two articles, I will try my best to explain the details of the recent Supreme Court ruling in the Gannon case. There are two components mandated by the Supreme Court – Equity and Adequacy. This week, I will write about the Equity component.

The Supreme Court unanimously ruled that the state failed to provide equity of educational opportunity as required by the Kansas Constitution. The equity issue surrounds equalization of two funding sources for schools. Those two sources are Capital Outlay and Local Option Budgets (LOB).

Equalization is a process that sets out to equalize the difference in money collected among all school districts. Some districts have more property value to collect tax on. In general, urban school districts collect more taxes from 1 mill levy than rural school districts. The equalization difference is made up by the state giving some districts that collect tax more revenue out of the State's General Fund to make up the difference, or equalize.

Here is an example of how this works. In an urban area, 1 mill may collect \$1,000,000 in property tax. A rural area 1 mill might be \$400,000. Equalization money from the State General Fund would be \$0 to the urban district and \$600,000 to the rural district. Thus, both districts would have \$1,000,000 in equalization funds.

Schools are allowed to levy up to 8 mills of property tax to fund their capital outlay needs. Capital outlay purchases would be for things like buses, new buildings, building repair, and certain types of equipment. The state was to equalize amounts collected by districts. The state stopped equalizing in 2009. The Supreme Court found that stoppage to be unconstitutional on an equity basis. The amount needed to solve this deficiency statewide is approximately \$25 million dollars.

Local school districts can also raise additional money locally for general operation of their schools through property taxes. Equalization works a little different with these Local Option Budget

(LOB) funds. Schools that are at the 81.2 percentile or more in Assessed Valuation Per Pupil (AVPP) are regarded as "wealthy districts" and receive no equalization aid in their LOB. However, schools that are less than the 81.2 percentile in AVPP receive money from the state to bring them up to the 81.2 percentile. For the 2013-2014 school year, the state only equalized at 78% rather than the full amount. The cost for this inequity statewide is about \$104 million.

The Supreme Court has said these Equity issues have to be solved by July 1, 2014. The correction must come in the form of fully funding, funding over a specific time frame, or making changes to current statutes.

In the House, the Appropriations Committee, which I am a member of, has been given the task of solving these issues. Next week, I will address the Adequacy issue of the Gannon ruling.

## Casey's Comments

Local veteran earns Medal of Honor

By Casey McCormick mccormickcasey@rocketmail.com

Last Tuesday, March 18, a local veteran earned the highest military honor this country has to offer.

Jack Weinstein, of St. Francis, joined nine other Korean War soldiers who were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor posthumously from President Obama.

To put this into perspective, only 3,463 of these medals have gone out since the Civil War. Sergeant Weinstein joins a select group of only about 30 Kansans, the latest being military chaplain Father Emil J. Kapaun, also

during the Korean War, for his service to other soldiers while being held in a P.O.W. camp before he died.

On October 19, 1951, Sgt. Weinstein's platoon was fighting on a hill near Kumson, Korea. The enemy, with vastly superior numbers, forced a retreat. Volunteering to stay behind to provide cover, Sgt. Weinstein killed six combatants. When his ammunition ran out he took grenades from the dead North Koreans and continued to fight off the advance until friendly forces were able to

retake the location.

Looking at the other Kansans who have held the Medal of Honor, the conflicts they participated in were the Civil War (2), Indian Wars (9), Philippine Insurrection (5), Mexican Campaign (1), World War I (2), World War II (7), Korean War (4) and Vietnam War (1).

Jack Weinstein died on April 20, 2006. But having a Medal of Honor recipient in this area will certainly leave a lasting impression.

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