

Election choices make for an interesting year

Kansas voters can't say they don't have any clear choices when they go to the polls this fall. GOP conservatives, who peaked two years ago after decades on the outs in Kansas politics, will have to defend their lock on state government from what could become an onslaught of liberal-moderate reaction.

Gov. Sam Brownback has opposition from a prominent Democrat, Rep. Paul Davis, minority leader of the Kansas House. The choice between the two is stark: the governor has slashed income taxes, cut state spending for the first time in decades and turned Topeka away from an ever-growing budget. Mr. Davis is clearly on the other side.

While his policies have been criticized as favoring the rich over the poor, undoubtedly, many ordinary Kansans who voted for the governor are pleased with his performance.

On the other side, he faces an alliance of teacher unions, liberals and many moderate Republicans, who are out of power and none too happy about it. On both sides, people believe they are doing what's right for the state.

By November, we will know if the conservatives can hold on and get time to prove their economic theories – or to meet with failure.

After little more than a year of tax cuts, despite the harsh judgments of some big-government fans, it's way too soon to tell.

Two years ago, frustrated by moderates and liberals in the state Senate blocking their reforms, conservatives mounted a drive that gave them control of both houses in the Legislature and the governor's office. If anything, the new Senate is even more conservative than the

House. It insisted on inserting untried policy reforms into a bill answering a Supreme Court order on equalizing two funds in the school finance formula.

It remains to be seen if the conservatives can hold their beachhead or will be driven back this fall. While Rep. Davis seems to have some traction – and is attracting money both in the state and from outside – no one has a handle yet on how legislative races will go. Surely there will be some good races, but enough to shift control?

And while liberals decry the involvement of the conservative Koch brothers of Wichita and their political groups, including Americans for Prosperity, national unions and liberal groups will target Kansas, which is now seen as a battleground of ideas akin to Wisconsin a few years ago. The conservatives held out there, however.

However this election goes, it's likely to be a watershed year for our state, which could go either way. At this point it's hard to see control of the Legislature moving back to the left. It's also hard to say the governor is in trouble – Mr. Davis is not exactly a household name – but we don't think the school finance debate helped Mr. Brownback much.

It may be true that, as his opponents claim, slashing the income tax means the state can no longer afford some of the programs it once had. Money for colleges, highways, even public schools will be tight for some time.

But it remains to be seen whether the average Kansan disapproves or whether people will become more comfortable with a smaller state government. And that's what makes this such an interesting year. – *Steve Haynes*



Sign policy needs clarification

To the Citizens of St. Francis:
As many of you may know, I am privileged to serve on City Council here in our city. Many issues come up from time to time, and as bodies of elected officials often do, not always is everybody in agreement. That being said, I feel that that is one of the reasons we council members have been elected, to resolve those issues, however difficult they may be.

That is why I have chosen to write this letter to the editor, and to you. An issue has come up regarding the digital sign the city council authorized, funded, and oversees that we have on the highway that was installed last year. I'm sure many of you have benefited from the information that has scrolled across the display, as have I. It is something I personally feel is an asset to our community. I truly appreciate the people who helped to get it in place with both the funding and manual labor. Some of these people were city council members, JR and the city crew, community members, etc.

Several weeks ago, our elected official, Senator Ralph Ostmeyer, conducted a town hall meeting at a local business here in town. His office neglected to get notice to the public in time for it to be pub-

Letter to Editor

lished in the Herald, for whatever reason. At the last minute, an effort was made by an interested citizen to get the Senator's town hall announcement displayed on the digital sign, only to be turned down by the oversight committee (appointed by city council) because it was "too political." That interested individual then appeared at the city council meeting with concerns of whether there was an actual written policy for this sign, and if so, what it was. A discussion took place that was reported in the Herald; many of you may have read the article.

As a result, our city attorney has drawn up a proposed policy, yet to be decided by the city council. I feel this proposed policy needs to have input from the citizens of St. Francis. I invite you to talk to your council members and educate yourselves on this issue.

Some feel the proposal on the table is too restrictive. Some feel it prohibits announcements of "religious" or "political" activities in our community from being displayed on the sign. What do those terms mean? Under the criteria put forth by this oversight committee, they have admittedly said that the President of the United States, Barak Obama, would not be allowed to place an announcement on the sign if he were visiting St. Francis. What about our own

hometown state representative, Ward Cassidy? No, says the committee, he would not be allowed to announce his town hall meeting on that sign.

I respectfully submit that as a general and fair rule, the city policy should follow the example of our local paper whatever is allowable in the "Bulletin Board" section of our local paper should be allowable under the policy of the digital sign. In essence, any announcement that the public is invited to should be allowed to be displayed on the sign.

I encourage your participation in this discussion by contacting council members with your thoughts and concerns, whatever they may be. It is your sign, the taxpayers of St. Francis paid for it, and I, for one, welcome your comments. What may seem like a small issue is really a very important issue: Are we going to allow the free-flow of information, public announcements that encourage the basic freedoms we were granted by our Constitution such as speech and thought? Or are we going to unnecessarily, in my opinion, restrict our citizens to "content neutral" messages (again, whose definition?) that go against the closely-held liberties and freedoms our country was founded on? –*Paula Keller, St. Francis City Council member*

Casey's Comments

Happy Easter

By Casey McCormick



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There sure are a lot of rules we have to follow.

It goes with the territory, so it should be no surprise knowing that if you are a member of a society you have to follow the laws of that group.

Of course, this makes sense since no thinking individual wants anarchy to reign supreme.

But sometimes, the laws get in the way of what is really important.

For instance, two thousand years ago the Jewish religious leaders of Israel tried using the laws against a power much higher than themselves.

The four books of the gospel give examples of how the Pharisees and Sadducees tried to trap Jesus with the laws of their religion. Rather than seeing the Son of God as their savior, they saw him as a threat to their control, who had to

be destroyed.

While we are here on this earth we need to "give unto Caesar that which is Caesar's." We should follow the rules and behave like law abiding citizens.

But during the Easter celebration it warms my heart to know that there is something so much greater than the here and now. Happy Easter to all!

Legislative News

Education Funding

Every year at this time, the news from Topeka is about education funding. It was March 7 when the legislature received the Gannon decision. The task was before us and only a short time to get it done – equity and adequacy.

Building consensus between the House and the Senate on any topic is always difficult. The House originally passed a bipartisan bill that would have met the Gannon equalization mandate. The Senate leadership wanted policy attached, and so back and forth we went.

My biggest concern was funding. I saw problems developing that could have resulted in the layoff of at least two teachers in each of my districts. When the debate was on to reduce transportation expenses, I received information from most of the 120th District Superintendents as to how much that would cost their district. The message was to do my best to not let that happen.

When all was complete, our districts received property tax relief and

more money to the classroom. For that to happen, the House had to agree to teacher tenure being revoked and to a tax credit for corporations to grant a scholarship to pay for low-income students to attend private schools.

The corporate scholarship program is capped at ten million dollars—not a real high price compared to the six billion that will be spent on K-12 in Kansas this year. I have learned a lot about the diversity of education in Kansas and how our achievement gap keeps widening between poor students and those not on free and reduced lunch.

Legislators are looking for ways to diversify our education. Right now, the only real school choice in Kansas is our virtual schools. Virtual schools are growing rapidly, and we now have 93 approved virtual school programs in the state.

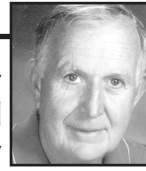
I had no problem voting for the tenure portion, as I have always been opposed to that provision. What the tenure piece does is to eliminate the mandate that local districts provide a due-process hearing upon termination

or non-renewal of a teacher contract, simply because the teacher has been with the district for more than 3 years. Due-process hearings will remain intact for any teacher who feels they were terminated because they were exercising a constitutionally protected right in the course of their job duties. School districts can still choose to include due-process hearings based on longevity. Again, the bill just revokes the state mandate to do so.

Teacher unions are not strong in Northwest Kansas. Teachers realize their local boards and administrators are trying to provide a quality education for students and to put their teachers in a position to succeed. I know all of the 120th superintendents, and they would never give up a quality teacher just to save money by hiring a lower-paid teacher.

What I am most proud of this session dealt with higher education. I was again able to help Colby Community College and Northwest Kansas Technical College get decent funding and to curtail some proposals that would

By Ward Cassidy



120th State Representative

have hurt both institutions.

What I like best of all is helping constituents with state agencies. I have good contacts, in every agency, and have helped solve a number of problems for people in the 120th district this year.

The legislature returns for the Veto Session April 30, and I will have a wrap-up story at that time.

GOD SAYS
I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord which made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber.
Psalms 121:1-3

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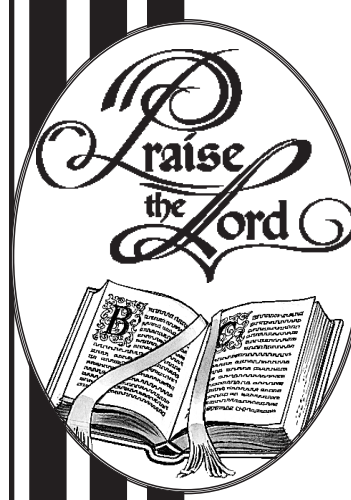
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