

# Opinion



## A Kansas Viewpoint

### How was the money spent?

The arrogance of the group which keeps suing to force Kansas to spend more and more money on schools apparently knows no bounds.

The group, which calls itself Schools for Fair Funding, has been suing the state for seven years. The case finally ended last week when the state Supreme Court said the Legislature had put enough money into schools to comply with its orders.

The court invited the schools to sue again, though, and the group's lead lawyer, Alan Rupe, is making noises about another case.

The group got nearly all its money from 18 school districts, which in turn got it from the state they are suing. In effect, the state had to pay for both sides of the lawsuit against it.

When Kansas newspapers asked, though, Mr. Rupe refused to say how he spent more than \$2 million in tax money.

The *Topeka Capital-Journal* asked for an accounting, claiming the group falls under the state Open Records Act since its all tax money.

Mr. Rupe offered to list where the money came from, but refused to say how it had been spent.

At least one Kansas editor, Tom Bell writing in the *Salina Journal*, commented that made him wonder just what they had spent the money on. Why wouldn't they want taxpayers to know? What do the school lawyers have to hide?

"I think they're playing hide-and-seek with the money," said Mike Merriam, a Topeka First Amendment lawyer who filed the suit for the *Capital-Journal*. "What the ... public needs to know is how the school districts are spending money through this corporation."

It's bad enough that school districts spend taxpayer dollars to try to get more money — legislators have been grumbling about their heavy spending on lobbying for years — but the constant, expensive lawsuits are an insult to those of us who have to pay for them.

Voters essentially have no say in this process — the schools and the judges have taken school finance decisions out of our hands and put them in the courts, where those who pay the bills have little influence.

We're entitled to an accounting of how our money is being spent by this group and by the school districts that contributed to the suit.

Are the lawyers spending it on fancy dinners and greens fees? Trips out of state? Private ventures?

No one knows.

Taxpayer money should never be spent in secret. It must always be accounted for in the open.

And the dubious nature of this effort to squeeze more money out of the state through constant lawsuits only makes the matter worse.

Shame on you, Mr. Rupe. Shame.

What are you hiding?

Tell the taxpayers what you did with their money, and do it now.

— Steve Haynes

Steve Haynes is owner of Nor'West Newspapers including the Colby Free Press

Comments to any opinions expressed on this page are encouraged. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. 5th St., Colby, Kan., 67701. Or e-mail [jvannostrand@nwkansan.com](mailto:jvannostrand@nwkansan.com) or [pdecker@nwkansan.com](mailto:pdecker@nwkansan.com). Opinions do not necessarily reflect the *Free Press*.

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Colby, Kan. 67701

State award-winning newspaper, General Excellence, Design & Layout Excellence, Column Writing, Editorial Writing, Sports Columns, News, Photography.

Official newspaper of Thomas County, Colby, Brewster and Rexford.

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THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the day observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Haynes Publishing Co., 155 W. Fifth, Colby, Kan., 67701.

PERIODICALS POSTAGE is paid at Colby, Kan. 67701, and at additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to The Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth, Colby, Kan., 67701. THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday to Friday, closed Saturday and Sunday. MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, which is exclusively entitled to the use for publication of all news credited to it or not otherwise herein. Member Kansas Press Association, Inland Press Association and National Newspaper Association. **SUBSCRIPTION RATES:** In Colby by carrier: 4 months \$38, 8 months \$53, 12 months \$70. By mail with in Colby and the nine-county region of Thomas, Sheridan, Decatur, Rawlins, Cheyenne, Sherman, Wallace, Logan and Gove counties: 4 months \$50, 8 months \$62, 12 months \$78. Other Kansas counties: 4 months \$57, 8 months \$67, 12 months \$81. All other states, \$81, 12 months.

**Nor'West Newspapers**  
Haynes Publishing Company

BRACKING RICHMOND TIMES-DISPATCH 8/10/06



### Some jobs we never forget



**Patty Decker**

• Deep Thoughts

Many years ago, I wrote a column about summer jobs, and a terrible one that a friend talked me into. The reason I got to thinking about it was because we are in sweet corn season and it just so happened, corn was the job.

It was during the summer of my junior year in high school, and my friend, Carol Lansford, talked me into taking a job she said would be a real money-maker — detassling corn.

For those unfamiliar with the process, it's basically a matter of pulling out the tassels from corn to assure a more hybrid crop. Our job was to pull out the tassel with our hands — requiring a lot of reaching over our heads.

Having never done anything like that, I thought it would be great. My buddy told me we would be making \$3 an hour (which was a very good wage in 1968) and we could work on our tans.

One of the downsides, though, was we had to be up by 5 a.m. and worked until about 6 p.m. everyday — even on Saturdays and Sundays for about six weeks.

I started visualizing all the positive things about this job, the ways to spend the money (I hadn't made yet) and the great tan I could show off.

Anyway, the big day finally arrived. I had a lunch and drink packed, wore my shorts, T-shirt and had a swimming suit top underneath.

My friend and I arrived at the high school, where the bus was waiting to pick us up, along with about 30 to 40 other people I had never seen before. By 6 a.m., we were at our destination, which was a cornfield about 30 miles from home. As we all piled out of the bus, I was still pretty excited about this job opportunity — after all, my friend had been detassling corn for a couple of summers already.

After getting our final instructions from the foreman, we all headed into the cornfield. Each of us was assigned a different row to start in, and, those of us who were new had a person assisting us in the proper way to detassle the corn.

Still excited about all the money I was going

to make, I was an apt student watching how it was done. Once the trainer thought we were good enough, we were on our own detassling our little hearts out.

For those who complain about the humidity in northwest Kansas, they might think again about living in central Illinois. The humidity there gets as high as the temperature. I can remember many times getting out of the shower and not being able to dry off...the humidity there is bad. Anyway, within a couple of hours after starting my new job, I was beginning to wonder why I agreed to do it. It was miserable out there. Hot, humid, and the bugs were thick in those fields, not to mention I was getting scratches all over from the corn.

By noon, it was time for a lunch break. Unfortunately, there were really no good places to sit and enjoy the time off. It was so humid, I didn't feel like eating and I would have given anything for a nice shade tree, but those were all taken up by the more experienced detassling crews.

As I walked out of the cornfield into an open area, there was my buddy, just grinning from ear to ear and bouncing over to have lunch with me. I can vividly remember how happy she looked and she had this smile that wouldn't stop. Not wanting to disappoint her, I struggled to put a smile on my face too as she asked me what I thought of the job so far.

What I wanted to say and what I did say were certainly not the same.

"Oh, it's going good," I told her, as the sweat

poured down my face and my legs were bleeding from the bug bites and arms scratched up from the corn stalks.

As we sat eating our lunch, I couldn't help but notice she didn't have a mark on her.

"Hey Carol, what's up with that?... You don't have a mark on you," I said. She looked down at her arms and legs and said, "oh yes I do...see here's a scratch on my arm."

Great, one scratch and here I was looking like I had been attacked by a dozen cats.

After a 30-minute lunch break, it was back to work.

Not wanting to look wimpy, I acted like I couldn't wait to hit the old cornfield again and detassle some more corn.

"Oh boy!," I said to my friend, "the day is half over." As I started working again, all of sudden I realized my upper arms were beginning to ache. Doing all that reaching was agonizing.

At the end of the day, I couldn't believe my eyes...my buddy came bouncing out of the field almost as if she had just gotten there.

"What do you want to do tonight?," she asked. "Maybe we can go drag Main or see a movie...What do you think?"

All I wanted to do was get to a cool place and sleep. I lasted almost a week detassling corn with more than 95 percent of my body covered in mosquito and other insect bites and scratches. My tender, sore muscles lasted about five days and even though my buddy tried to convince me it would get better — I told her I wasn't doing it anymore.

Suffice to say, it was one of those jobs that I admired people for doing, but it was too much for me.

Even today, every time I eat corn on the cob, I think about my short-lived detassling job. Fortunately, I still love corn, but cringe when I see the tassels.

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Decker is editor of the Free Press. Her column appears on Fridays.

### Immigrants: Essential to the economy

**By Jorge Mursuli**

As Congress holds a series of grandstanding, election-year hearings to rile up anti-immigrant fervor in conveniently selected sites, far too little attention has been paid to the enormous economic benefits immigrant labor brings to our economy. Let's set aside emotion, anecdotes and political calculation, and look at the facts.

Concerned that immigrants' positive impact on our economy was being obscured by exaggerated fear and misguided commentary, more than 500 economists, including five Nobel laureates, recently penned an open letter to President George W. Bush and Congress reminding them that immigrants have made America richer both economically and culturally.

"Overall, immigration has been a net gain for existing American citizens..." the letter reads. "America is a generous and open country and these qualities make America a beacon in the world. We should not let exaggerated fears dim that beacon."

Set aside the fact that attempting to deport some 12 million people would not only be inhumane, but practical impossibility. Instead consider the reality that losing these workers would cripple significant industries nationwide, including construction, hospitality and landscaping, which is why the U.S. Chamber of Commerce is working for the passage of comprehensive immigration reform.

The U.S. Department of Labor reported that last year 450,000 jobs went to foreign workers -

yet there were only 10,000 worker visas available. That means 440,000 jobs are likely to have gone to undocumented workers.

In North Carolina, 29 percent of the state's construction workforce is Hispanic, according to a study by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Without the Hispanic workers, a majority of whom are undocumented, the study estimated North Carolina would have lost "up to \$10 billion in construction, including: a revenue loss of up to \$2.7 billion for companies supplying construction materials and supplies; a loss of up to \$149 million in revenue for companies renting buildings, machinery and equipment; and up to 27,000 houses not being built."

In South Carolina, the Latino population grew by 273 percent between 1990 and 2003. Douglas P. Woodward, an economic professor at the University of South Carolina, found, among other things, that immigrant labor had helped the state's lumber industry survive. The high productivity of the immigrant laborers has also helped revitalize other businesses, Woodward said.

According to a report by the Center for Continuing Study of the California Economy, almost all of California's workforce growth between 2005 and 2030 is likely to come from immigrants and their children.

The economic implications are clear: Many American businesses cannot survive or thrive without immigrant labor. So why doesn't Congress pass comprehensive immigration reform

to fix our broken immigration system? Why can't they find a way to make sure needed workers have a path to legalization and that the system is fair to everyone seeking to emigrate?

It's an election year, that's why. National polls clearly show that incumbents — especially the GOP incumbents who control Congress — are in trouble. So they booted immigration reform off the congressional calendar until they're safely past the November elections, and they're holding hearing to rev up anti-immigrant emotion. They want to turn out their voters on a hot local issue, instead of facing judgment on a record of service that has seen a faltering economy, an unpopular and expensive war, and a decline in American security at home and abroad. It's scapegoating at its worst.

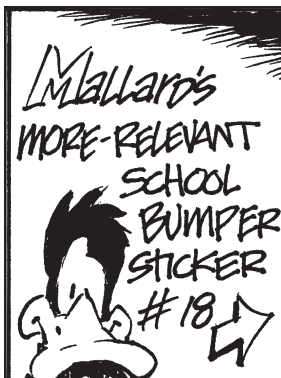
We are a nation of immigrants. Our strengths lie in welcoming laborers, nurses, carpenters and academics from across the globe to achieve the American dream freedom, prosperity and better life for themselves and their children. America has, never turned its back on them, and we shouldn't let unfounded fears eradicate their dreams and diminish our success.

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Jorge Mursuli is vice president for Hispanic Outreach at People For the American Way Foundation, and national executive director for Democracia USA. People For the American Way was established to meet the challenges of discord and fragmentation with an affirmation of "the American Way." [www.pfaw.org](http://www.pfaw.org)

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• Bruce Tinsley



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