



## Free Press Viewpoint

### School officials see problems with suit

Northwest Kansas school officials are on the right track, in our opinion, when they question the wisdom of joining in a new round of lawsuits by some Kansas school districts against the Legislature.

While the last court battle did result in forcing the Legislature to give schools more money, it did so only at a cost of millions in taxpayers' money. It brought about a corruption of the government process where the courts wound up telling the Legislature how much to spend.

And as we all learned in high-school civics classes, that's not the way it's supposed to work. Several area school board members and superintendents have said as much.

In any event, the victory by a group of "medium-sized" districts was short lived. Faced with a rapid decline in state tax revenue in the national recession, the governor and Legislature have been cutting programs in all parts of state government. Schools were protected from most cuts, but wound up losing almost \$90 million.

There is another problem.

A new lawsuit might result in an order to give schools more money, but the state is broke. Where would the cash come from?

The Legislature would have little alternative but to raise taxes. And with thousands of Kansans out of work, and most of us hurting after two years of economic distress, who can afford more taxes?

The attitude among some school administrators seems to be, "Why should we care? We want the money."

No one doubts that Kansas schools could use more. But anyone with any sense could see that right now, the state doesn't have it.

The spectacle of school districts, basically units of state government, using state tax money to sue the state is unseemly. It's wrong.

It's *our* money they're using to sue *us* and force a tax increase on all Kansas citizens.

This year, apparently, the group behind the lawsuits, which calls itself "Schools for Fair Funding," wants every Kansas school district to join in a new lawsuit. If anyone really benefits from this, it won't be taxpayers or, in the long run, students and teachers.

It'll be the sharp lawyers who are promoting the idea of another suit. They stand to make millions, and with that kind of fee in sight, they'll be able to pay the new, higher tax rates.

The rest of us won't be so lucky.

It's nice to see, though, that school officials out here not only see the problems with this, but care about the impact of a lawsuit on taxpayers and our system of state government. We urge them all to stay clear of this mess.

— Steve Haynes



### Security stops tiny burglar

The intruder entered the dark house quietly. There was good stuff to be had in here.

He slipped along the wall as silently as possible. But not quiet enough.

The guard sensed something was wrong and left her post to patrol the perimeter. She had been brought in especially for this task: to keep intruders from getting the good stuff.

She struck. There was a short scuffle and it was all over. The intruder was dead. The guard returned to her post.

It was about 4 a.m. when Molly Monster licked Steve's nose and purred. That was about the only part of him she could get at, since it gets cold in Colorado at night in a house with no heat.

She purred. She licked. She got kicked off the bed, so she curled up in her usual spot and went back to sleep. After all, she's a cat. That's what she does.

We found the dead mouse on the floor in the morning.

"Good cat, good cat," we both said.

Molly was no longer interested. She had done her duty. She had protected her domain from intruders. She was ready for breakfast



**Cynthia Haynes**

• Open Season

and then, perhaps, a nap. After all, she's a cat.

That left me to get rid of the deceased, and carefully, because it was a deer mouse, the kind that are supposed to spread hantavirus. A hantamouse, if you will. No ordinary domestic mouse.

This is the second time in three years that a cat has presented us with a mouse during our fall trip to Colorado. It's one of the reasons they come along.

The first time we were protected against the horror of mousedom, it was April Alice who left us a trophy in the middle of the night.

April is our best traveling cat. She doesn't particularly like the 10- to 11-hour journey cooped up in a cat carrier, but she endures it stoically.

Molly complains for the first couple of hours. The first few trips, it was loud, demanding cries. These days, it's just soft complaints. After awhile, however, she just goes to sleep. After all, she's a cat.

I always wait until the last minute to put the cat in the carrier, since the trip is so long and they won't eat, drink or relieve themselves during the journey. Believe me, I've tried to provide these amenities. I've just ended up with a mess or a cat under a car — or one memorable time, a wrecked train. Don't ask.

This year, April got a good look at the stuff I had piled in the kitchen to take with me and promptly disappeared. Molly, on the other hand was purring and rubbing my ankles.

Guess who got a trip to Colorado, where she spent most of her time finding sunny spots to sleep? After all, she's a cat. And a fair mouser at that.

*Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor'West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes@nwkansas.com*

### Budget cut causes backlog of evidence

Our state is in a difficult financial situation. Belts are being tightened and programs tasked with helping Kansas families are feeling the pain.

We at the attorney general's office have done our part by streamlining administrative costs, reducing operating and travel expenses and sharing resources with other agencies. While many state agencies are able to absorb legislative reductions to their budgets without gutting core functions, tough cuts to the budgets of law enforcement agencies jeopardize the resources needed to continue protecting families, investigating crime and prosecuting criminals.

One example of the serious consequences of excessive budget cuts and increased legislative requirement to law enforcement agencies is the DNA backlog at the Kansas Bureau of Investigation lab.

Starting in 1996, the Legislature required law enforcement to collect and store DNA samples from people convicted of sex crimes. This was a step forward in our ability to track offenders and solve crimes using DNA. In 2002, the Legislature expanded the database by requiring law enforcement to collect DNA from all convicted felons. And again, in 2008, the Legislature dramatically expanded the database by requiring law enforcement to collect DNA from all persons arrested for felonies.

While increasing the DNA database is critical, the Kansas Legislature has failed to provide the bureau with the budget to test and



**Robert Six**

• Attorney General

analyze the additional 10,000 samples on average now being submitted each year. The number of samples submitted jumped from 935 in 2001 to 14,834 in 2009. The KBI budget has not kept pace with these mandates from the Legislature.

On Jan. 12, I sent a letter to the Senate president and the Speaker of the House outlining the significant backlog of DNA samples waiting to be tested. To be clear, this backlog is not one of samples from active criminal investigations, but from persons arrested or convicted as required by the Legislature. The letter outlined the backlog problem and a possible solution. Part of that solution was additional money for forensic scientists and lab space to assist in the testing of this DNA.

Since 2002, the bureau has not been given adequate funding to keep up with the dramatic increase in samples being submitted. This includes funding to pay experienced forensic scientist competitive salaries. I asked the Legislature for help and requested additional money.

Instead, the Legislature cut the bureau's budget — making the problem worse. While I recognize the difficult budget situation the state is facing, cuts to this agency represent an excessive, irresponsible cut that is now affecting the safety of our families. It is an example of the serious problem "unfunded mandates" can cause for law enforcement.

The effectiveness of timely testing and analysis of this DNA cannot be disputed. In the late 1990s, a DNA sample collected from a convicted rapist — Kenneth Wilson — was tested by the bureau and entered into the database. In 2008, the bureau matched Wilson's DNA to a cigarette found at a murder scene in Osborne County. Because of that match Wilson was connected to the crime scene. I know just how important the database is for law enforcement. I personally prosecuted Kenneth Wilson this year and put him away for life.

The state is in a difficult budget crunch and all agencies are expected to make sacrifices. But important law enforcement tools — like the DNA database — must be a priority. Lawmakers should understand that there are real consequences for cutting the budgets of agencies, like the KBI, which are responsible for analyzing evidence vital to keeping our families safe. That is why I am asking the legislature to restore funding to the bureau and help Director Bob Blecha and I eliminate the DNA backlog.

### Write us

The *Colby Free Press* encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of general 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. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise. Nor do we run form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area. Thank-yous from this area should be submitted to the Want Ad desk.

### COLBY FREE PRESS

155 W. Fifth St. (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963  
Colby, Kan. 67701 fax (785) 462-7749

Send news to: colby.editor@nwkansas.com

State award-winning newspaper, General Excellence, Design & Layout, Columns, Editorial Writing, Sports Columns, News, Photography. Official newspaper of Thomas County, Colby, Brewster and Rexford.

Steve Haynes - Publisher  
s.haynes@nwkansas.com

### NEWS

Kevin Bottrell - News Editor  
kbottrell@nwkansas.com

Andy Heintz - Sports Reporter  
aheintz@nwkansas.com

Marian Ballard - Copy Editor  
mballard@nwkansas.com

Vera Sloan and Aubrey Spencer - Society Editors  
colby.society@nwkansas.com

### ADVERTISING

Jasmine Stewart - Advertising Manager  
jstewart@nwkansas.com

Heather Woofter - Advertising Sales  
hwoofter@nwkansas.com

Kathryn Ballard - Graphic Design  
kballard@nwkansas.com

### BUSINESS OFFICE

Robin Tubbs - Office Manager  
rtubbs@nwkansas.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator  
support@nwkansas.com

### NOR'WEST PRESS

Richard Westfahl - General Manager

Lana Westfahl, Jim Jackson, Betty Morris, Jim Bowker, Judy McKnight, Barbara Ornelas, Tasha Shores, Kris McCoil

THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the days observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Nor'West Newspaper, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

PERIODICALS POSTAGE paid at Colby, Kan. 67701, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 6 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 herein. Member Kansas Press Association and National Newspaper Association.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: In Colby, Thomas County and Oakley: three months \$35, one year \$85. By mail to ZIP Codes beginning with 676 and 677: three months \$39, one year \$95. Elsewhere in the U.S., mailed once per week: three months \$39, one year \$95. Student rate, nine months, in Colby, Thomas County and Oakley, \$64; mailed once per week elsewhere in the U.S. \$72

### Where to write, call

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774

U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-6521

U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 2202 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715 or Fax (202) 225-5124

State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St. Room 143-N, Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785) 296-7676 e-mail: jmorriso@ink.org

web: www.morrisonfamily.com

State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol Building, 300 SW10th St., Room 128-S., Topeka, Kan. 66612, (785) 296-7399 ralph.ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

### Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

