



## Free Press Viewpoint

### Study bodes ill for courts out west

A study of the state's judicial system announced this month by Lawton R. Nuss, chief justice of the Kansas Supreme Court, is the kind that never bodes well for rural Kansas, especially western Kansas.

Chief Nuss said the 24-member "Blue Ribbon Panel," made up of judges, lawyers, legislators, court workers and a few citizens, will look for ways to improve the way courts serve Kansas. What he really means is ways to handle the growing caseload without any more state money.

Kansas courts have increased fees to keep up with their budget, but still had to enforce unpaid furloughs last year to make ends meet, closing court offices for days at a time. With the state budget already facing a \$550 million shortfall next year, there's little prospect of getting more from the Legislature this year.

The panel will use figures from a "weighted" caseload study initiated by the courts last summer to come up with its recommendations, the chief said. Whatever those are, and the group has not yet begun its work, we might expect cuts in court services, judge positions and coverage for our area.

The chief justice said the panel "is authorized to consider such issues as the number of court locations needed to provide Kansans access to justice, the services to be provided in each court location, hours of operation, appropriate use of technology, cost containment or reductions and flexibility in the use of human resources."

Since court unification in the 1970s did away with county courts, with an elected county judge in each county, Kansas by law has maintained at least one judge in each county. Some counties have a district judge, others a district magistrate judge who may or may not be a lawyer.

Judges are elected in rural areas, but appointed in most urban counties. They serve 31 judicial districts across the state, with from one to 26 district judges.

When courts look to cut costs elsewhere and focus on the growing caseload in urban counties, one of the answers often suggested is to cut back on services, employees and judicial positions in rural counties. So far, that has not happened, but it's clear the new commission could take another look at the "one judge, one county" promise.

Rural Kansas does not make for efficiency. With 105 counties, the state has a widely dispersed local government system. Yet the state expects - requires - more of counties each year.

If there's pressure to cut court services in rural areas and shift resources to the cities, we'd like to know how people in rural Kansas will continue to receive the kind of service they are used to, and deserve.

Will defendants be hauled across two or three counties to see a judge? Will people have to drive half a day to see judicial records? Will filing court documents become an all-day trip for some?

Who knows? Judicial slots allocated to small counties are coveted by the cities. There's no money to grow the system, so something has to give.

All of rural Kansas needs to watch the progress of this effort by the courts. The panel includes several rural residents, some from western Kansas, but pressure will be great to shift resources to the cities.

We will have to fight for our courts and services.

- Steve Haynes

### COLBY FREE PRESS

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### A CURRENT EVENTS RORSCHACH TEST



### Parents have to grow into the job

Watching a video of my son-in-law with his hands inches from my granddaughter's behind as she climbed her first set of stairs got me to thinking about the evolution of a parent.

Son-in-law is a normal overprotective first-time father. He's crazy about his little girl and worries that she will somehow hurt herself. Of course, she's a 10-month-old who spends her days trying new and dangerous things.

My daughter is actually a lot more calm about the whole process than I expected. Maybe those three years of teaching helped to mellow her.

She still didn't know how to get her daughter to take a pacifier, though.

I did. I crammed it into the baby's mouth and put it back in every time she spit it out until she gave up and started to enjoy a nice suck.

I wasn't nearly so determined with my own first child. She wouldn't take my breast and she wouldn't take the pacifier. She didn't want to be held while she ate and she sure didn't



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

want to suck on anything that didn't have food in it.

I let her get away with it, a mistake I refused to make with my granddaughter.

So, anyway, here is my evolution of a parent as seen through pacifiers.

Baby spits out pacifier and it lands on the floor.

1. Newest parent - immediately grabs pacifier and boils it to disinfect.
2. Mostly new parent - grabs pacifier and runs it under hot water to disinfect.
3. Somewhat new parent - worries less and less about the temperature of the water.

4. Kid's been around for awhile - wipes on shirt.

5. Second child - hands pacifier to oldest child with instructions to wash. Watches oldest child go into bathroom knowing full well she can't reach the sink.

After giving you the punch line, I came up with two other pacifier stories.

One new mother I know uses pacifier wipes - specially made for cleaning pacifiers.

Well, that's better than the machine for warming baby wipes, but only a little.

Another friend says that if the baby spits out the pacifier, she picks it up, wipes it off, puts it in her own mouth to disinfect it and gives it back to the baby.

That might be carrying the maternal spit bath a little bit too far if you ask me.

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@nwkansan.com

### Legislative session offers promise

Jan. 10 was the beginning of the 2011 legislative session.

We had a new governor inaugurated that morning. At 2 p.m., the representatives were sworn in and the session began.

I was fortunate to receive four committee assignments: Education, Commerce and Economic Development, Insurance and Local Government.

Wednesday evening, Gov. Sam Brownback delivered his State of the State address to all Kansans. We were all anxious to hear his plans for the state.

I was glad to hear he plans no tax increases. Instead, he wants to cut the state budget for the first time since 1972. The governor wants a spending freeze bill on his desk by the end of the month.



Rick Billinger

• Capitol Review

Gov. Brownback presented a long-term financial plan for education, the Kansas Public Employees Retirement System and Medicaid, and asked for legislation to provide long term solutions. He wants to eliminate eight state agencies and 2,000 unfilled job positions.

It is exciting to know we have a governor who has the best interests of western Kansas in mind.

Wow! What a State of State address.

Thank you for letting me represent the 121st District. Please don't hesitate to contact me with your concerns and thoughts. If you are in the Topeka area, feel free to stop by and visit my office in the Docking Building, seventh floor, room 754.

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Rick Billinger is the state representative from the 121st District. He currently serves on the Commerce and Economic Development, Education Funding, Insurance and Local Government committees.

### Old faces missed; new faces welcomed

I am pleased to announce my appointment to two new Senate committees. I will be chairman of the Natural Resources Committee and serve on the Reapportionment Committee representing western Kansas.

I look forward to the challenges of these two additional committees. I continue on Agriculture, Federal and State Affairs, Local Government and the Joint Committee on Administrative Rules and Regulations.

There are many new faces in the Legislature this year, and I want to mention a few: Rep. Rick Billinger, a Goodland Republican from District 121; Ward Cassidy, St. Francis Republican from District 120; and Dan Collins, Plainville Republican from District 110. They are excited and determined to serve our great state.

I want to acknowledge and thank Rep. Dan Johnson and Rep. John Faber for their years of service.

I am sharing with you a tribute to Rep. Jim Morrison. This is a difficult time for the Morrison family, and I ask that you remember them in your prayers.

Jim was a dear friend and colleague who will be missed. He strongly believed in open



Ralph Ostmeyer

• State Senator

government and effective use of technology.

Jim used his talents as a radio engineer to produce daily shows for stations in our districts. He always had everything ready to go as we discussed the latest issues.

Jim arranged for proponents of various bills to appear and explain why their ideas were important. His goal was transparency so Kansans would know what was going on in Topeka. Our constituents were well informed and asked questions because of his daily program.

Jim was an innovator in the use of technology. After I arrived in the Legislature, he told me that everyone was going to have a laptop computer and his Health Committee meetings would be broadcast on the Internet. He made both of those things happen.

He would tirelessly help train any legislator

of either party on how to use the computers. His efforts and leadership in the use of technology to improve government in Kansas and nationally will make a lasting difference. His service on the Joint Committee on Information Technology made many positive changes possible.

One of my favorite memories was Jim in the House speaker's chair, presiding over a session. When he had the gavel in hand, he ignored House procedures and did it his way. As he left the podium, Speaker Doug Mays said, "That won't happen again," and Jim said, "I know," with a smile. When Jim walked by my desk, he simply said, "with another smile, 'I had always wondered what it was like to be Speaker of the House.'"

I will never forget Jim's love and respect of his wife, family and community.

Students who would like to serve as Senate pages should contact my office at (785) 296-7399 or e-mail Ralph.Ostmeyer@senate.ks.gov. Dates are Monday, Jan. 31; Monday, March 14; or Monday, March 21.

Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer

### Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

