



Other Viewpoints

Senate pension bill good step forward

To their credit, state lawmakers agree that the state's pension plan needs reforming and seem determined to act. Now the two houses of the Legislature need to agree on the best fix — which is the Senate's balanced, bipartisan approach.

House and Senate negotiators will soon meet to reconcile their plans for reducing the unfunded liability in the Kansas Public Employees Retirement System. Mostly due to investment losses and chronic underpayment by the state, the system faces a projected shortfall of \$7.7 billion between long-term revenues and promised benefits.

The Senate's bill would eliminate much of this gap by increasing contributions by state and local governments and by public employees. Starting July 1, 2013, it would raise the annual increase in employer contributions to the system from 0.06 percent to 1.1 percent, or about an additional \$28 million. It also would increase contributions from public employees who were hired before June 2009 from the current 4 percent of their salaries to 6 percent by 2015. Employees hired after June 2009 (who already contribute 6 percent) would have to increase their contributions to 8 percent if they want to receive cost-of-living-adjustments after they retire. Employees hired after July 1, 2013, would contribute 6 percent but would not get cost-of-living adjustments.

The Senate bill also would create a commission to study and recommend by Dec. 15 any further reforms, such as possibly moving toward a 401(k)-style retirement plan. And it requires the Legislature to vote next session on the commission's reforms in order to trigger the increased contributions by public employees and employers.

The House bill would increase the employer contributions to the system by about \$13 million. But it also would reduce the unfunded liability by reducing benefits. Starting July 1, 2012, it would give public employees 20 percent less credit toward benefits for each year of service after that date. It also would enroll employees hired after July 1, 2013, in a 401(k)-type plan.

This proposal, part of which was created on the House floor and didn't go through committee, likely would lead to legal problems. Kansas law and past court decisions prevent the concessions imposed on public employees from being overly one-sided, the Associated Press reported. Senate President Steve Morris, R-Hugoton, also is concerned that if the state starts a 401(k)-type plan, accounting rules could require it to pay off the system's unfunded liability within a decade. And the more people who moved out of the system into a defined-contribution plan, the less money there would be to help reduce the unfunded liability.

The Senate plan had bipartisan support in its chamber. Public-employee groups also see it as reasonable, though the Kansas Organization of State Employees is concerned about the potential recommendations from the study commission, the AP reported.

The state may want to make the transition to a "defined-contribution" plan at some point. But that's a longer-term solution that needs careful study. For now, the Senate bill is a good step forward. The House should agree.

— *The Wichita Eagle, via the Associated Press*

We encourage comments on opinions expressed on this page. Mail them to the *Colby Free Press*, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701, or e-mail colby.editor@nwkansas.com.

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Obama's 'change' to Chicago Democrats

It occurs to me that just as most people missed what Barack Obama meant by "change" when he was running for president, most of us missed what was happening after he took office.

For the "change" he was talking about did not mean liberal Democrat control of the White House, the House and the Senate, as most Republicans assumed. The country had seen and survived that before.

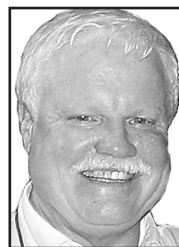
No, in this case, "change" meant turning the White House over to the Chicago Democratic party machine.

Hard to believe? Perhaps, but true nonetheless.

For while the president talked about being a "community organizer," the former Illinois senator in fact was tight with the party power structure. He's about as old-fashioned a Democrat as you can find.

One of his chief backers, of course, was Richard M. Daley, 54th mayor of Chicago and nominal head of the current-day Democratic machine. Richard M. is the eldest son of Richard J. Daley, 48th mayor of Chicago.

Yes, that Mayor Daley, the one who delivered Chicago and Illinois to John F. Kennedy in 1960, snatching (or stealing, depending on who you talked to) the election from Richard Nixon. The same Mayor Daley who issued shoot-to-kill orders during the 1968 Chicago riots and whose police made sport of smash-



Steve Haynes

• Along the Sappa

ing hippies' skulls outside the Democratic National Convention that year.

Richard J. Daley reigned in Chicago for 21 years, a record surpassed only by his son, who had been mayor for 22 years and holds the all-time record.

Richard J. Daley was known as the last of the old-line big city bosses, maintaining tight control over the party machinery and the city government from his office. The son of a sheet-metal worker, he lived in the predominantly Irish Bridgeport neighborhood nearly all his life.

His son John P. Daley still lives there, in fact, still attends the wakes and other neighborhood gatherings his dad was famous for. John P. seems poised to inherit the family mantle as boss of bosses as older brother Richard M. slips into retirement.

John Daley is a member of the Cook County Board of Commissioners and chair of its finance committee. He holds the family post representing the 11th Ward on the Cook Coun-

ty Democratic Central Committee, passed down by his brother and father. His wife is the daughter of reputed Chicago mob figure, cementing family ties to yet another Democratic power bloc.

Replacing Richard M. as mayor is Rahm Emmanuel, a former Illinois congressman who has been Obama's chief of staff. And replacing Emmanuel as White House chief of staff was William M. Daley, a former Chicago banker and brother of the outgoing mayor and the current county commissioner. And son of that Mayor Daley.

You might think things have changed in Chicago since the 1950s, and it's true the city will have a Jewish mayor in place of an Irish Catholic machine politician. The machine seems to be pretty healthy, however.

Scandal still abounds in local government and city contracts. One recent episode involved trucking contractors with ties to the city and to John Daley's lucrative private insurance business.

But if you have any doubt who's in charge at the White House — or what the president meant by "change" — this should set you straight. It's new in Washington, so that's change, but for the Chicago machine, it's business as usual.

Steve Haynes is editor and publisher of The Colby Free Press and president of Nor'West Newspapers. When he has the time, he'd rather be reading a good book or casting a fly.

Opportunity zone, abortion bills signed

Gov. Sam Brownback was at the Colby airport Monday morning for a ceremonial signing of Senate Bill 198, known as the Rural Opportunity Zone Act.

Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, Rep. Don Hineman and I were in attendance, along with Secretary of Commerce Pat George, Secretary of Labor Karin Brownlee and Revenue Secretary Nick Jordan.

The bill provides a five-year state income tax exemption to anyone who moves into any of the 50 counties in the opportunity zone from another state. One other provision in this bill deals with student loans. Counties may participate in a state matching program to pay up to \$15,000 dollars on a student loan, \$7,500 from the county and \$7,500 from the state over a five-year term.

The governor noted that the quality of life and values of rural Kansas are "a well-kept secret" and we need to advertise in the cities across the nation. A special thank you to all that were able to attend the signing.

Abortion Bills

Tuesday, Gov. Brownback signed two pro-life bills at the Statehouse in Topeka. This important legislation will help protect the lives of unborn children.

One (House Bill 2218) enacts new restrictions on late-term abortions by adding provisions addressing the ability of an unborn child to feel pain. The bill defines a "pain-capable child" as an unborn child of the gestational age of at least 22 weeks and sets restrictions and requirements on physicians performing abortions.

The bill includes exceptions where the life of a pregnant woman is at risk or where the pregnant woman will experience "substantial and irreversible physical harm" if the pregnancy continues.

The bill passed the House 91 to 3 and later



Rick Billinger

• This week in Topeka

passed the Senate 24 to 15. The Senate amended the bill to clarify that eight weeks after fertilization, an unborn child reacts to touch and by 20 weeks, the unborn child reacts to stimuli. The House agreed to the changes and approved the final version March 29, by 94 to 28.

The second law (House Bill 2035) places further restrictions on late-term abortion procedures, expands parental consent requirements for minors seeking abortions and strengthens the state's "partial birth" abortion law to where it better aligns with tighter federal law. This particular measure is a combination of bills passed during prior sessions by vetoed by democratic governors Kathleen Sebelius and Mark Parkinson.

Key provisions include:

- Requires a specific medical diagnosis for a late-term abortion to occur.
- Requires women seeking abortions to be provided with information that states they procedure will terminate the life of a human being.
- Allows for civil lawsuits against doctors who violate late-term abortion laws.
- Requires additional reporting of sex abuse on minors wanting an abortion.
- Clarifies when courts can bypass parental consent requirements.

The House originally passed HB 2035 by 96 to 25. It passed the Senate 24 to 15 on March 23. The Senate amended the bill by requiring a person employed or who volunteers with or-

ganizations providing social services to pregnant teenagers, including counseling, adoption services and pregnancy education and maintenance, to report suspected child abuse or neglect. Another amendment by the Senate altered the effective date of the bill. The House concurred with the Senate changes and approved the final version March 29, by 100 to 22.

I am currently distributing survey cards throughout the 121st District. If you are interested in completing this short survey, please stop by your library, bank, implement dealer, city building or other businesses for a copy. I would like to receive these back by the end of April.

If you are interested in receiving the results, please include your e-mail address or name and mailing address, and I will send them.

Thank you again for the opportunity to represent the 121st District. If there is anything you would like to discuss or I can do for you, contact me at (785) 899-4700 or rick.billinger@house.ks.gov.

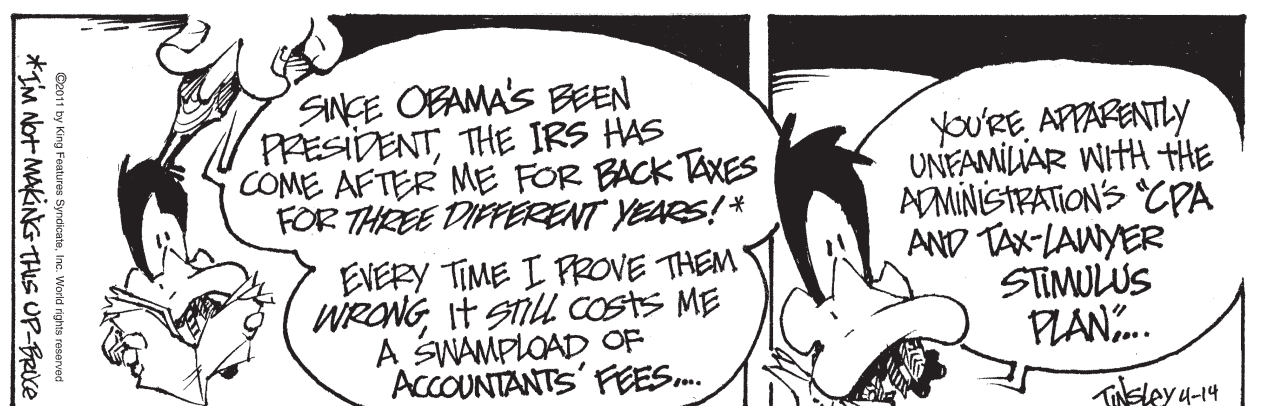
Rick Billinger is the state representative from the 121st District. He currently serves on the Commerce and Economic Development, Education Funding, Insurance and Local Government committees.

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