

# commentary

from other pens...

## 2001 legislative session not good for schools

**Olathe Daily News on the Kansas Legislative session:**  
The 2001 Legislative Session was not a good one for legislators or for public school districts. ...

... Ultraconservative Sens. Karin Brownlee and Kay O'Connor, along with ultraconservative Reps. Dan Williams and John Toplikar, share the view that the state's school districts are getting more than enough money from the state. ...

Brownlee says it is up to individual school districts to decide how to spend state funding. The implication is that school districts are receiving ample funding from the state. ...

... State legislators are quick to say public education is a priority, but are inept in providing adequate funding to support their oratorical zeal. ...

Legislators could have made a huge impact in funding public education this session. They could have made a statement that they put the kids of Kansas first. ...

They failed — miserably. Legislators turned their backs on the teachers, students and patrons they serve by their inability to produce a financially sound school funding package. ...

The ultra conservatives of the Olathe delegation have vowed not to increase taxes for any reason — not even to ensure quality education in our classrooms or to adequately pay the people who teach them. That would be commendable as long as they find another way to provide the necessary funding for public education — something they didn't do. And now, the public school teachers and students they represent will suffer for it. For that, legislators get an "F."

### The Emporia Gazette on the Kansas Legislature:

Only days after the longest wrap-up session in the history of the Kansas Legislature, our state politicians are already coming forward with proposals aimed at keeping such a debacle from ever happening again.

Senate President Dave Kerr, R-Hutchinson, recently told his hometown newspaper that he'd like to stop paying lawmakers after 90 days. Anything beyond that, and our state senators and representatives would be working for free ...

... Kerr's proposal is a classic knee-jerk reaction squarely aimed at addressing only a symptom and not the real problem. ...

Kerr's proposal ... is as unfair as it is unwise.

... None of our state politicians gets rich off the meager wages the state pays for legislative service.

It would be grossly unfair to withhold compensation to lawmakers after 90 days, especially in years like this one, when a late state revenue projection threw a \$200 million monkey wrench into the budgeting process.

... If lawmakers are seeking a cure, they should strike at the root causes. They need to construct a budgeting timetable flexible enough to handle untimely financial setbacks.

... The respective leaders of the House and Senate should lead ... rather than letting the bickering of obstinate legislative cliques become an insurmountable roadblock.

Our state lawmakers don't need the threat of pinched pocketbooks hanging over their heads when the going gets rough. They need to be better statesmen in order to avoid getting into sticky situations in the first place.



## Techno? Heck no!

I know I've said a lot about technology in this column, but it keeps coming up in my life — and let's all remember I have to write one of these every week.

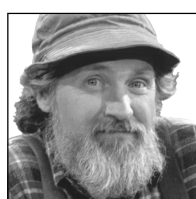
So my latest take on technology is that it carries a negative message buried deep within itself. Now, I know life is better with computers, and DVD players, and microwave ovens, and garage door openers. But the truth of the matter is, very few of us have any idea how these things work — which means every new piece of technology in my home is just one more thing I can't fix.

You know that feeling you have as the mechanic stares blankly at your engine and does a few "uh-oh"s? That's not a good feeling. That's not something you want to experience in your own home. Over time, being in an environment that you don't understand eventually causes you to give up control, and before you know it, you're buying Zirconium jewelry off the Shopping Channel.

Then there's the disposability factor. This technology is not only complicated, it's also relatively cheap. That means when it doesn't work, you throw it out. This could mean trouble for you — especially if you haven't worked for a while.

### INPUT/OUTPUT

Have you noticed how gigantic kids are these days? I know kids were pretty tall for a while there in the '70s, but it was mainly the shoes. Today kids are just plain big. I asked a doctor friend why this was, and he said it was due to better nutrition. And it goes farther than that.



**red green**

• north of forty

Farmers are feeding the plants and animals better, and those nutrients are passed on to whoever eats them. And it affects kids more because their cells are dividing faster than those of adults. This is the food chain at work here.

Now when I look at a kid I try to figure out what nutrients were soaked to the food he ate. I can usually spot iron and vitamin E, and, at the other extreme, lead. And when I watch politicians answering questions, it's obvious that the plants they eat are heavily fertilized.

### TOO MUCH WHINE

Nobody likes a whiner. The trouble is that as we get older, we sometimes overreact to trivial problems, and friends are hesitant to point out this flaw, particularly if you own a firearm. So here are some signs that you're a whiner.

— 90 percent of your conversations revolve around dissatisfaction with your bodily functions.

— Nobody ever does what you tell them to.

— A hundred people are experiencing the same inconvenience, but you're the only one who's mad about it.

— Your complaints versus your compliments are

sustaining a seven-to-one ratio.

— You think everyone wants to hear about your sore knee.

— Nobody has said "How are you?" for over a year.

### LIVE LONG AND PESTER

We have several industries devoted to extending our lives. That's a good thing, but there is a limit. Yes, we want doctors, and nutritionists and fitness experts to help us make sure we get our full quota of time on this Earth, but let's face a few hard facts before this escalates out of reason.

The goal seems to be to get as close to immortality as possible. Let me be the first to stand up and say "Not for me, thanks." I can go 80, 90, even 100 years. But immortality? No.

Living forever means way too many phone calls from charities and too many tax increases and too many Windows upgrades.

By the time I get to 150, it's very unlikely that I will have an original thought, and if I do, it will be extremely dangerous.

Life is like a movie — you should leave when it's over. You don't need to sit through the credits.

Quote of the Day: "Anybody who's egotistical should get married or take up golf." — Red Green. *Red Green is the star of "The Red Green Show," a television series seen in the U.S. on PBS and in Canada on the CBC Network, and the author of "The Red Green Book" and "Red Green Talks Cars: A Love Story."*

## Now Bush must really reach out to Democrats

As this week's tax fight makes plain, President Bush has failed to take the partisan poison out of Washington.

Now that his party is set to lose control of the Senate, he's got to start meeting — and conciliating — with Democrats, starting with Sen. Thomas Daschle of South Dakota.

Bush is not solely to blame for the toxic climate, of course. Democrats miss no opportunity to blast Bush as the servant of special interests.

The Democrats may sound shrill and negative, but the latest Zogby poll indicates that they have managed to keep Bush's job-disapproval rating above 40 percent.

Bush's approval rating is a strong 55 percent, up a few points from Zogby's last poll, taken amid widespread criticism of his environmental policy. His disapproval rating is 42 percent, down 2 points.

Bush fares better on a personal level, with 62 percent of voters thinking favorably of him and only 33 percent perceiving him negatively. Almost 30 percent of last year's Al Gore supporters say they like him, though only 22 percent approve of his job performance.

Bush's approval numbers in the Zogby poll closely mirror the findings of other polls, but his disapproval number is higher than in other surveys, such as the bipartisan Battleground 2002 survey last month, which put it at just 27 percent.

The Democrats' incessant hammering at Bush — over tax cuts allegedly too large and skewed to the rich, a "unilateral" foreign policy, an environmental policy said to favor polluters — seems to be having an effect.

Moreover, it does not seem to be damaging the Democrats, who have a slight edge on the generic Congressional ballot in the Zogby poll, 29 percent to 25 percent, although 42 percent of respondents were undecided.

The Zogby results indicate that, on energy, the public is prepared to believe the Democrats' con-



**morton kondracke**

• commentary

spiracy theory that oil companies are to blame for soaring gasoline prices.

A plurality of 31 percent of voters puts the blame on them, while 18 percent holds OPEC responsible, 8 percent cites an increased demand, and 5 percent puts the onus on gas-guzzling SUVs.

However, only 10 percent of voters so far blame Bush. Even fewer respondents (8 percent) blame former President Bill Clinton, who has been accused by Bush aides of having had no energy production policy during his eight-year run in the White House.

Democrats are hypercritical of Bush partly because they genuinely oppose his policies, but party leaders in Washington also accuse him of ignoring them and pursuing conservative policies masked as moderate.

In the Battleground survey, two-thirds of voters said Bush has made significant efforts to reach out to Democrats. Even 45 percent of Democrats gave him credit on that score.

Nevertheless, Democratic Congressional leaders complain that, since the few perfunctory visits immediately following his inauguration, he's had no contact with them and has instead been trying to beat them by peeling away enough Democrats to win floor votes.

Bush succeeded with that tactic on taxes for a while, but that's over as soon as Democrats control the Senate.

Before Bush was inaugurated, Daschle said he hoped for regular air-clearing meetings with Bush. That never happened, and with the White House writing off both Daschle and House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt, D-Mo., as enemies.

Reaching out might not have worked, but failure to conciliate has made Democratic opposition all the harsher. Delaying the tax bill is an example. Even if Democrats are not going to stop trying to thwart his agenda and band together to block his more controversial nominees, Bush can put the onus of partisanship on them if he makes more gestures of cooperation.

Another tactic Bush is trying — sometimes not too successfully — is to cast a centrist image on policy. After a spate of decisions that appeared anti-environmental (on arsenic, carbon dioxide emissions and the Kyoto Agreement), the President sud-

denly reversed course and took steps on lead emissions and federal lands that looked pro-environment.

Similarly on energy, Bush and Vice President Cheney pooh-poohed conservation and alternative fuels as solutions, making those ideas seem almost wimpy. But when the energy plan was announced, conservation became a lead item.

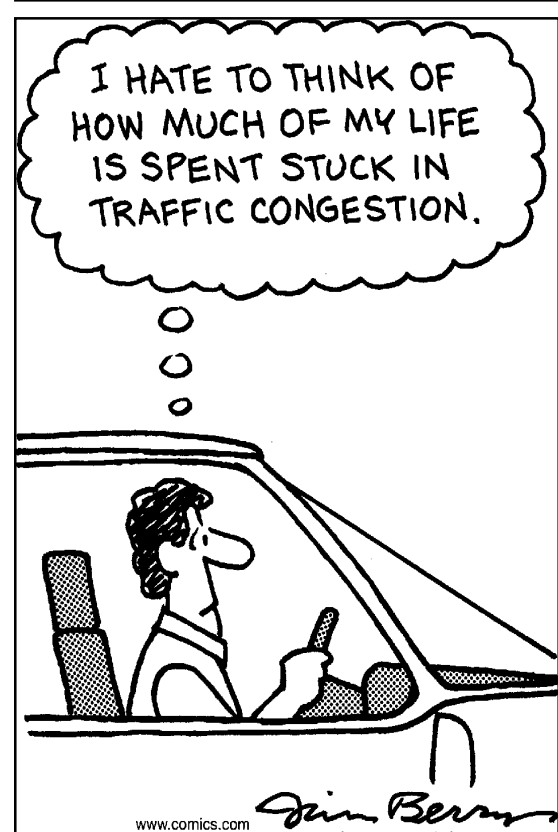
Politically, Bush obviously would have been better off touting conservation and environmental protection in the first place.

In the Battleground survey, Bush's inconsistencies led 51 percent of voters to say he was flip-flopping on the environment and health care. Fifty-six percent of seniors, 54 percent of upscale suburbanites, and 56 percent of independent women made this charge.

All the polls indicate that 85 percent of Republicans and conservatives approve of Bush's job performance. His base is solid; therefore, he can afford to make nice with Democrats — even if it's only to shift the burden of acting in a bipartisan manner to them.

But he should try it for real. Morton Kondracke is executive editor of *Roll Call*, the newspaper of Capitol Hill.

### berry's world



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