

commentary

from other pens...

Topeka store clerk gives lottery black eye

The Topeka Capital-Journal on the lottery:

... Last year, the Kansas Lottery had to admit its former computer information resource manager, Richard Lee Knowlton, had bilked the lottery out of nearly \$63,000. Though he ultimately paid it back, and was convicted and sentenced, the negative publicity stung the lottery.

Now, it's happened again. This time, a store clerk in Topeka tried to cheat a ticket buyer out of — gulp! — a quarter-million-dollar jackpot.

The clerk ... told the Kansas Cash ticket-holder he had won \$100 when, in fact, the ticket was worth \$255,626. ...

At Knowlton's sentencing, lottery officials put all the blame on him. And certainly he deserved it. Moreover, in this latest case, the store clerk was not a lottery employee.

Yet, the lottery needs to guard its credibility jealously. This is not someone else's problem — in other words, just some rogue clerk. To think that would be missing the point. Certainly buyers need to beware. But any system that would nearly let a clerk rob a customer of a quarter-million is questionable. The lottery has various levels of security procedures in place, but they need to be rethought. Officials can't sit back and chalk this up as another criminal in their midst. They need to do everything possible to prevent this kind of thing from happening again.

It's more than the customer's money that's at stake; it's also the lottery's credibility.

How much is that worth?

The Garden City Telegram on state's economy:

Ominous signs appear in news reports today that paint a bleak economic picture for Kansas.

Once the glaze of the holiday season wears off, Kansas lawmakers will return to Topeka facing a formidable financial challenge.

With revenues not meeting financial obligations, lawmakers will wrestle with few choices. They can attempt to discover new revenue streams they can trim expenditures by cutting services or laying off state employees, or they can raise taxes to meet commitments.

All options will be on the table and none should be summarily ruled out. Trying to figure the means by which the state meets essential services should be enough of a headache to cause a few sleepless nights when lawmakers take up residence in Topeka in mid-January. ...

Kansas' judicial sector is an equally tenuous position and many courtrooms are under orders to limit their operating hours causing delays in expediting cases. Southwest Kansas felt the impact of the financial troubles last summer, when replacement for a retiring judge was delayed.

Lawmakers shun the idea of raising taxes as much as Kansans bemoan paying more for government. But there may be little choice this year. Kansas will answer at the ballot box next November how well lawmakers feed that concept to constituents.

where to write

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Black seeing red at Harvard

In a fit of what may be called Ivy Pique, three prized professors from Harvard's Afro-American Studies department spent their Christmas holidays very publicly mulling a possible mass exodus in a definite mass huff from dear, old Harvard to dear, almost-as-old Princeton. Why? Harvard's new president, Lawrence H. Summers, it seems, needed a quick course in political correctness.

Not that anyone involved said so — or much of anything else on the record. Anonymous surrogates kept whispering to the press in Boston and New York, but Summers wouldn't discuss conversations with faculty members; Afro-Am department chairman Henry Louis Gates Jr. wouldn't discuss complaints from department members; Afro-Am professor K. Anthony Appiah wouldn't discuss meetings with Princeton officials; and Cornel West, another Afro-Am professor who recently made a few choice headlines by declaring that America had been "niggerized by the terrorist attacks," wouldn't discuss anything — not his rap CD recorded while on medical leave, not his role in the Rev. Al Sharpton's presidential exploratory committee, not Harvard's endemic grade inflation, nothing. And certainly not what The New York Times called the "critical moment" in this contretemps — West's private meeting with Summers in October, at which such sore subjects were reportedly raised, leaving West feeling "violated." Or so says The Rev. Jesse Jackson.

Jesse Jackson? How did he get into this? The short answer is that the good reverend flew in, descending on Cambridge on New Year's Day, to push for a "national conference on racial justice" (natch) and to seek "clarity" on Harvard's "diversity policy." This policy — creed, really — is the source of the controversy. As it happens, Harvard's new president of six months has nothing but unqualified support for "diversity," that semantically slippery term for the goals of affirmative action.



diana west

• commentary

(According to Harvard's admissions office, the university has never, ever practiced affirmative action.) The question being asked of Summers was whether his commitment to "diversity" was unqualified enough.

Meanwhile, not to be out-raced, Sharpton made his own public pitch for "clarification." Sharpton suddenly wanted to know whether Harvard had "rebuked" Cornel West — who claims, according to his own words, that he has an "intellectual lineage...through Schopenhauer, Tolstoy, Rilke, Melville, Lorca, Kafka, Celan, Beckett, Soyinka, O'Neill, Kazantzakis, Morrison, and above all, Chekhov" — for joining Sharpton's proto-presidential campaign. If so, Sharpton told The Boston Globe, it could not only keep professors across the nation from supporting his candidacy for fear of repercussions, but it could also drive Sharpton to file suit against Harvard as an "aggrieved party."

It's enough to make you pity a poor Harvard president — almost. How could this have happened? Summers, not one to see college applicants through color-blind glasses, supports "diversity" and says so — or his spokesman does — at every opportunity. This, apparently, has been insufficient. "It's absolutely critical that the president make an unequivocal public statement in support of affirmative action. That would be encouraging for those scholars ... recruited because this was going to be the premier institution of black intellectual inquiry," says Charles J. Ogletree, Jr., a Harvard Law School professor best known for leading the legal

effort to extract reparations for slavery, to The New York Times. (Oops: Since Harvard says it doesn't practice affirmative action, didn't the law prof mean to call for a presidential statement supporting "diversity"?) Ogletree, magnanimously, has since signaled a willingness to work with Summers to "make Harvard a pre-eminent university."

Maybe that won't be necessary. Summers has decided to begin the year right — at least, more correctly — by publicly restating his diversity creed. In a written statement, Summers announced his intentions "to create an ever more open and inclusive environment," by drawing on "the widest possible range of talents" to promote "ever greater opportunity for all," because "diversity contributes to educational excellence." (Summers also took the opportunity to underscore Harvard's desire "to see the current (Afro-Am) faculty stay at Harvard," promising to "compete vigorously" — ka-ching, ka-ching? — "to make this an attractive environment.")

Looks like he finally made the grade. The statement "meets the objectives that many people had set forth," Ogletree told the Harvard Crimson. "It's strong, it's clear, it's unequivocal." Even Jesse Jackson called Summers' statement "positive," while Appiah now says his Princeton visit was purely social. No word as yet from Gates, West and Sharpton, but it does look as if Harvard is heading for, if not a happy ending, at least an ending.

Not so fast. According to The Boston Globe, there's trouble ahead: "Now, echoing some top scholars in Harvard's Afro-American Studies department, many Latino professors are questioning Summers' commitment to diversity, and some say they are considering jobs at other universities...."

Can't wait to hear what Harvard has to say about that.

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Graves hasn't sold legislature on tax increases

By John Hanna

Associated Press Writer

TOPEKA — Cuts in education spending and social services. Canceled highway projects. Closed minimum-security prisons.

Gov. Bill Graves took the unusual step of divulging the outlines of his proposed budget a month early, in mid-December, in hopes of convincing legislators tax increases are necessary to prevent some of those bad things from happening.

But Graves hasn't sold legislators on tax increases yet.

Some legislators remain adamantly opposed to any tax or fee increase and believe state government should cut spending. They're skeptical Graves has given the state a good picture of the alternatives.

Other legislators say the Legislature may consider increases in some targeted taxes, such as those on cigarettes and liquor, but they're not certain even those proposals would pass. They flatly rule out an increase in sales or income taxes.

Even Graves has expressed doubts that he'll be able to convince legislators who resisted tax increases last year to endorse them this year.

"I'm still not holding out, you might say, tremendous optimism that many of the attitudes will have changed," Graves said during a year-end interview.

When he disclosed the outlines of the budget he plans to submit to legislators when they convene their 2002 session next Monday, Graves said he wanted to make the seriousness of the state's budget problems clear. His staff estimates that the state has to close a \$426 million budget hole.

That's the difference between the amount of tax money the state expects to collect in its general fund in fiscal 2003, which begins July 1, and the spending to which it is committed by Kansas and federal law. The general fund is the largest source of money for Kansas government programs and where the state deposits most of its tax revenue.

Graves' proposed budget must rely on existing revenues. He would cut aid to public schools by \$158 per pupil, decrease university budgets, cut social services, cancel nine highway projects and close five minimum-security prisons.

He has said he'll propose tax increases to raise money, but not enough to close the entire budget gap.



john hanna

• ap news analysis

But many legislators do not believe Graves' statements represent a serious attempt to do anything but scare them. The sentiment is especially strong in the House, where all 125 seats will be filled in November elections.

"This budget is kind of a delusion," said Rep. Carlos Mayans, R-Wichita. "We are not convinced the proper cuts have been made in the proper places. We believe there are other avenues to correct this problem, but they have not been put on the table."

In the Senate, President Dave Kerr, R-Hutchinson, and Steve Morris, R-Hugoton, chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, plan to outline their own budget plan this week. Kerr said it would close the gap without increasing taxes.

Kerr noted that many states are facing economic problems that have left them short of money for programs.

"The problems are more serious in a lot of other states," Kerr said.

Other legislators argue that increasing taxes when the economy is slumping — and Kansas has less money — is bad policy.

"We will try almost everything to not raise taxes," said Rep. Doug Mays, R-Topeka.

Graves said he won't propose an increase in income taxes, the largest source of tax revenue. He said he doesn't think it's possible politically or desirable, noting that Kansas income tax rates already are higher than those in surrounding states.

The other big general source of revenue is the 4.9 percent sales tax. Most legislators don't see an increase as likely.

"I don't think there's any possibility of a general tax increase," Mays said. "What I think will receive the most serious consideration is targeted tax increases in the area of sin taxes."

However, Morris noted that senators rejected proposals last year to increase tobacco and alcohol taxes to raise money for public schools.

"I don't know if the support is there to get that

passed," Morris said.

In addition, legislators said they want to go hunting for savings in the budget first. They are not convinced that Graves did a thorough job of looking.

"I haven't talked to anybody who's taking that budget very seriously," said Rep. John Edmonds, R-Great Bend, chairman of the House Taxation Committee. "There are lots of ways to have a current resources budget, and the governor has proposed one of them."

Finally, legislators point out that they have 90 days in which to discuss the state's budget problems.

"We have not even begun to fight that battle or define those issues," said Rep. Rocky Nichols, D-Topeka, a member of the House Appropriations Committee.

Legislators' sentiments show that Graves has yet to begin to sell the idea of a tax increase.

Associated Press Correspondent John Hanna has covered state government and politics since 1987.

berry's world

I WOULD LIKE TO SIGN UP FOR THE — UM — LET'S SEE — THE — UM — THAT'S IT.



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