

commentary

from other pens...

Plagiarism case shows cheaters won't succeed

The Manhattan Mercury on Piper School District:

The letter the academic deans at Kansas State University sent to the Piper Board of Education won't garner the national publicity that came with word that the board overruled a biology teacher who had given students F's for plagiarism on a major semester project.

What's more important is that folks at Piper High School, and for that matter other high schools in Kansas, get the message that academic cheating won't be tolerated at the next level...

The deans were right to be concerned that in dealing with parents concerned about their children's grades, the Piper school board gave too little consideration to what those children and their classmates who worked diligently on the projects might take from this episode.

In what ought to be a teachable moment, the deans want Piper officials to understand that the dangers of unwittingly encouraging or rewarding dishonesty, as the deans put it, include teaching students that cheaters can indeed prosper...

KSU and other such institutions have their own academic integrity to protect and enhance, both as a matter of principle associated with the pursuit of education and as a practical consideration so that employers and other academic institutions recognize that achievement at KSU is genuine...

Hopefully, the interest that KSU academic deans have taken in Piper High School's controversy will remind students and adults there and across the state that there is no substitute for academic integrity.

The Hutchinson News on Western Resources:

Kansans concerned about plagiarism have another group of individuals to take to task beyond 28 Piper High School sophomores.

They should also question the copycat writing practices employed by 25 state legislators...

Western's Statehouse lobbyists urged legislators to write the (Kansas Corporation) commission on the company's behalf; 26 complied with the request...

Many of the letters legislators sent to the regulatory commission contained language drawn directly from a sample letter circulated by the lobbyists.

Rep. Jerry Aday, R-Ellsworth, and Sen. Larry Salmans, R-Hanston, closely followed the Western script. Rep. Doug Mays, R-Topeka, used virtually the same language contained in the sample letter. Sen. Susan Wagle, R-Wichita, rearranged a few words. Sen. Kay O'Connor, R-Olathe, submitted a letter that picked up the draft language and closed by urging the regulatory commission to act quickly.

Although Sen. Christine Downey, D-Inman, joined the letter-writing campaign, she asked the commission's chairman for "an update and timeline" on the debt-restructuring case. At least the experienced educator avoided the plagiarism problem.

Beyond the copycat writing practices, however, all the legislators who sent letters to the commission on Western's behalf should explain how those actions mesh with representing constituents' interests. In this case, that's a far more serious concern than plagiarism.

where to write

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 302 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774

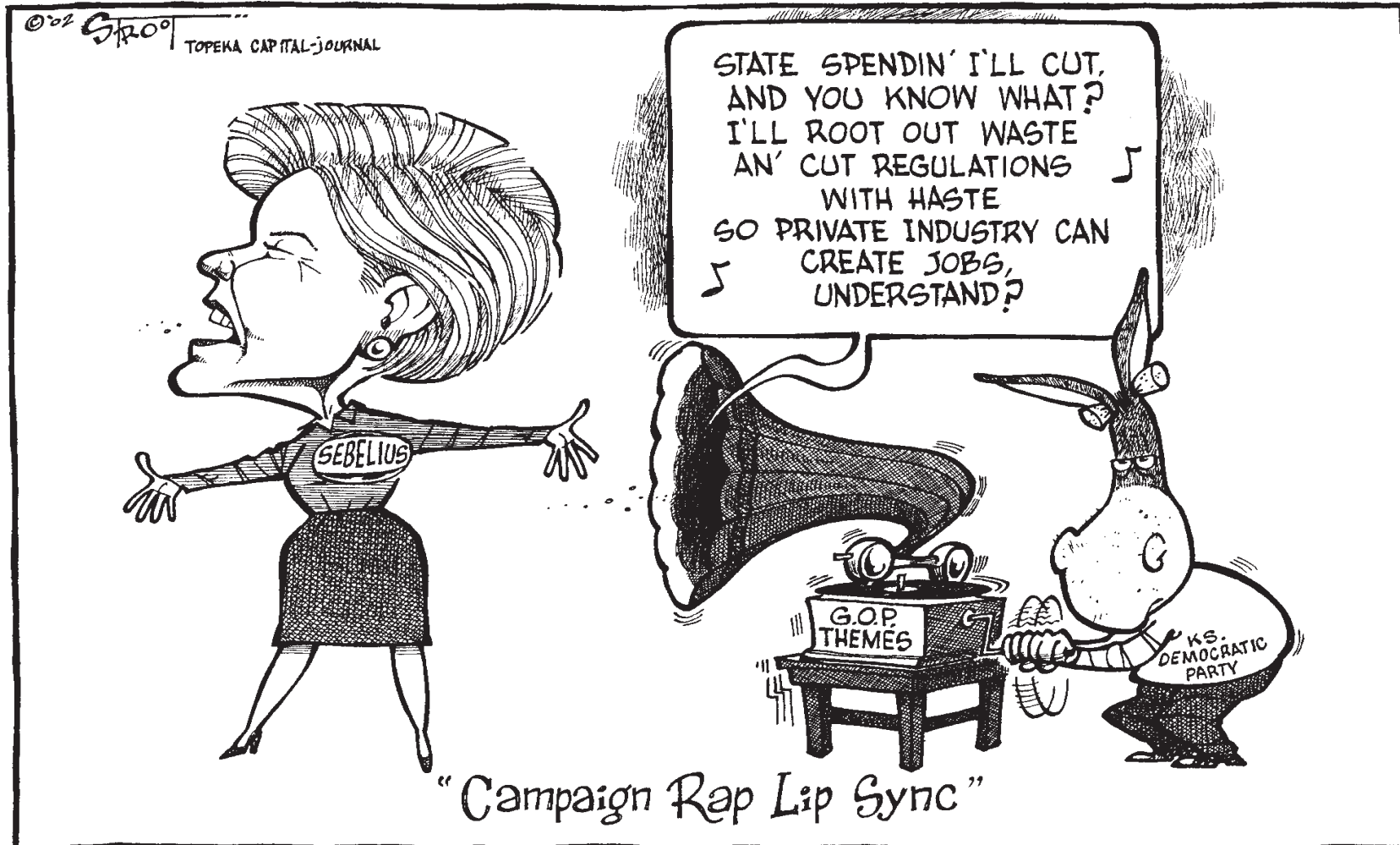
U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. (202) 224-6521

U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 1217 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 225-2715

State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building Rm. 174-W, Topeka, KS 66612. (785) 296-7676

State Sen. Stan Clark, State Capitol Building Rm. 128-S, Topeka, KS 66612. (785) 296-7399

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Tips for hiring moving company

Dear Attorney General Stovall:

My family is going to be moving soon to a new town. However, the last time we moved our experience with the moving company was rather unpleasant. Attorney General Stovall, what advice can you give us in dealing with moving companies?

Dear Kansas Consumer:

Moving is not an experience many people look forward to. However, careful planning can make it as hassle-free as possible.

When hiring a professional moving company, be sure to get estimates from several businesses. Remember that these estimates are not guaranteed and the final charges may end up being higher. Also, be wary of estimates that seem unreasonably low. A common scam is to underbid the competitors by greatly underestimating the weight of the belongings. After the movers load the truck, they get the actual weight of the load and the price increases.

Once you have a list of companies you are considering, call my Consumer Protection division and your local Better Business Bureau to see if complaints have been filed against any of the companies you are considering. Ask for, and check, references from other customers. Once you choose a company to hire, obtain a copy of its contract in



carla j. stovall

• consumer corner

advance and read it very carefully. Never sign any documents with blank spaces to be filled in later. Your desired pick-up and delivery dates should be clearly stated. Make sure you understand the time frame in which the company has to deliver your items. Make sure you fully understand the company's liability for damaged items and verify that the company is insured. If you have very valuable items, you may want to consider purchasing a higher level of insurance. Also, some companies will not take responsibility for items you pack yourself.

Take inventory of the belongings to be moved and describe the condition of each item. Once all the items are off the truck and placed in your new home, the movers will require you to sign the household inventory sheet. Do not sign the sheet until you have checked all your possessions. A practical way to accomplish this is to check each box off the list as it is unloaded. It is a good idea to have

one person checking items off the inventory and a second person telling the movers where to put the boxes or furniture. Make note of any items that are missing or damaged. Take your time and do not let the movers rush you. Your ability to make a claim could be limited by signing an incorrect inventory.

Finally, keep copies of all documents related to the move, such as the inventory, estimates, the contract, and any other documents the moving company gives you. If you must file a damage claim, or if you have any other dispute with the company, you will need to refer back to the paperwork. If you find that you have problems with a company and have not received a remedy after making attempts on your own, you may file a complaint with my Consumer Protection division by calling 1-800-432-2310.

Attorney General Carla J. Stovall offers this public service to help you avoid becoming a victim of consumer fraud. Although some of the details have been changed, the cases appearing in this column are based on actual complaints. For further information or to file a complaint, please write Attorney General Carla J. Stovall, Consumer Protection Division, 120 SW 10th, 2nd Floor, Topeka, Kansas 66612, or call the toll-free Consumer Hotline, 1-800-432-2310. Leave your name, number and subject of your inquiry with the receptionist and your call will be returned promptly.

Nine working days left in legislative session

Unbelievably the legislative session is rapidly nearing the end. In less than 9 working days, all regular committees will cease meeting so work by the "committee of the whole" (meaning each full chamber sitting as one committee) will be working and debating legislation passed from the various committees. Conference committees will meet to reconcile differences on bills passed by both chambers before final voting and passage on to Governor Graves.

The session started at the latest possible date (second Monday in January of each year) January 14. The "wrap up" session has been scheduled to start May 1 and last (normally) four days. This year-end is likely to be either very long (up to late mid May) or on time (May 4). Leadership is "testing" the idea of adjourning a week early in April (by the 8th rather than the planned 15th) to allow more time to spend during the wrap up to complete the budget. Such a move requires 2/3 vote of each chamber in the Legislature and I really do not think that would happen if the vote was taken right now. Many members have commitments that require they be back in their hometowns in early May and would not appreciate being held over by leadership.

School District Budgets - Last week, the House Education Committee received a performance audit report on School District Budgets: Determining Ways to Structure the Budget Document to Make it Understandable and Allow for Meaningful Comparisons. The Post Audit used example budgets from Manhattan, Topeka, Wichita and



jim morrison

• capitol review

Salina. The audit asked, "What changes in school district budget documents are needed to make those budgets more useful to district officials and the public?"

In order to answer the first question, Post Audit identified problems with the school districts' budget processes, which ranged from fundamental and system wide flaws, to inconsistencies among districts, to lack of clarity in reporting. The report determined that Kansas school districts do not report important information in their budget documents or do not report certain information consistently. In addition, Post Audit found that some school districts miscategorize or mislabel expenditures in either their local budgets or the ones they submit to the state. After addressing these issues, the Post Audit developed a new format for school districts' local budgets that consolidates categories, includes all revenue and expenditure information and provides more summarized and understandable budgetary information. Admittedly, the new format would likely create some additional work for school districts and the Department of Education. However, the new format proposed by the report should be viewed as a step in improving school districts' local budget documents.

In addition, the performance audit asked the question, "How could the new budget documents be used to improve school district operations?" It was found the new budget format should be a tool to help district officials and other identify where operating costs may be out-of-line or where adjustments can be made. The Post Audit Report made recommendations to the Kansas Legislature, the Department of Education and to officials and school boards in sample districts. One of the recommendations to the Legislature was "to ensure that any standardized budget format adopted for school districts' local budget documents is as workable and meaningful as possible, and that the information reported in those documents is uniform and comparable across the state. Following the report, the Education committee held a two-day hearing on HB 2904, which is a bill that would require school districts to use the same standardized accounting format for their school district budgets. The committee did not take any action on the measure last week. I have no idea if we will even revisit this issue this session.

As always please get in touch with me if you have suggestions, concerns or questions regarding State Government. I truly appreciate representing you in Topeka and look forward to continuing to do so in the future. Thanks for all your help.

Email Representative Jim Morrison at <jmorrison@ink.org>.

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