

# commentary

from other pens...

## Truman reclaims The White House

A half-century ago this week, after more than three years of demolition and careful reconstruction, Harry S. Truman reclaimed the White House as the home of America's presidents.

On March 27, 1952, Truman, who had supervised the job with rising interest and impatience, stepped out of his limousine under the North Portico, accepted a symbolic gold key and strode into a wholly rebuilt interior.

In 3 1/2 years the interior of the 150-year-old house had been demolished and carted away until only the old sandstone walls remained. The creaky old floors on which Abraham Lincoln, Andrew Jackson and Theodore Roosevelt had walked were gone.

Inside the old walls was a new executive mansion, with a similar floor plan and familiar style but otherwise entirely fresh and up to the minute.

Supported by a grid of iron beams, the new interior was stronger and more durable than the old, which had become shaky after decades of hard use and Truman feared it would fall in upon his ears.

An exhibit, organized by the White House Historical Society and the Truman presidential library in Independence, Mo. tells the story in 42 photographs by Abbey Rowe, Truman's White House photographer. The show is at the White House Visitor's Center on Pennsylvania Avenue.

One image shows the White House hollowed out, light pouring through the vacant window openings and trucks rolling around inside. The space measured 165 feet long by 80 feet wide by 70 to 80 feet high.

In that space workmen poured 126 reinforced concrete support columns to a depth of 25 feet, providing space for two new basement levels. The weight of the exterior shell was transferred to a skeleton of iron beams that supported the new concrete floors. In the finished rooms marble and stone would largely replace wood and plaster.

Truman had sparked strong protests in two earlier building projects. His plan to bulldoze the low-rise West Wing and erect a more spacious building for his staff was stymied. He acted like a bulldozer himself in insisting a second-floor balcony be erected in the South Portico of the White House. Critics raged at him, saying he had spoiled the historic profile of the house.

A former senator, Truman would have been aware of the old Capitol Hill adage that there is no education in the second kick of a mule.

When he determined the entire State Floor and living quarters of the White House needed to be replaced, he carefully prepared the ground.

"He got architects, political leaders from both parties, the press in to see the actual condition of the house for themselves," said George Else, an aide and adviser to Truman, describing the project in a recent lecture. "He got consensus. He made it a nonpartisan effort. He had learned his lesson from everything that had taken place earlier."

The Truman renovation was the most drastic restructuring of the White House since British troops burned it to its walls in 1814.

As 1952 began, after 3 1/2 years of living in the cramped quarters of Blair House, Truman was anxious for the project to be over. The presidential elections that fall would choose his successor. He wanted to occupy the new White House as president, even if just for a few months.

One of the Secret Service agents often at Truman's side was Rex Scouten, who later managed White House operations as chief usher and still later became its chief curator.

On the day before leaving for vacation in Key West, Fla., in March 1952, Truman marched up to the Army general who was the project's chief engineer.

Scouten tells the story: "He said, 'General, I'm going to Key West tomorrow. I'm going to come back on the 27th. And I am going to sleep in this house.'"

"With that he turned on his heel and walked away without another word," Scouten said. It wasn't exactly an order, but the president's intent was unmistakable.

The White House was ready when Harry Truman returned.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Lawrence L. Knutson has reported on the White House and Washington's history for *The Associated Press* for 34 years.



## Recipes from New Mexico come with humor

Some writers make their cookbooks more palatable by including shortcuts, household hints, artwork and humor. The following recipes are from "Come and Dine" by Abigail Brown Collins. She resides in New Mexico and there are some Mexican and native American recipes that hail from that state. She has included some really funny quips



pat schiefen

• postscript

### Black Eyed Pea Casserole

- 2 slices bacon, cut up
- 1 package frozen chopped spinach, thawed and squeezed
- 2 cups cooked rice
- 1 can black-eyed peas, drained and rinsed
- 2 tablespoons fresh parmesan, grated
- 2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon red chile pepper flakes
- 2 ounces mild cheddar cheese, shredded
- Fry bacon and leave grease in the pan. To the bacon add garlic, back-eyed peas, garlic and spinach. Add rice, red pepper, salt and cheeses. Mix well. Cover and bake 20-30 minutes at 350 degrees.

### Posole

- 2 quarts chicken or turkey broth
- 2 quarts water

- 2 1/2 to 3 pounds pork roast or meaty ribs
- 1 12-ounce package dry posole (blue preferable but can use white)
- 1 teaspoon salt (more or less depending on the personal taste)
- 1/4 teaspoon Lawry's seasoned pepper
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 medium carrot, peeled and grated
- juice of one lime
- Combine all ingredients, except the carrots and lime juice, in large soup pot. Bring to a boil, then lower heat and simmer for 4 hours, covered. Remove meat. Remove all fat and bones. Chop meat and return to pot. Add the carrots and lime juice and simmer one more hour. If using white posole, the kernels will be fairly soft; if using the blue posole

the kernels will be a bit crunchy, but still fairly soft. Adjust the seasoning if necessary with more salt. May be served with warm tortillas.

Posole is a southwestern form of hominy. It is dried nixtamal (type of corn) which has been treated with slaked lime.

The following is an example of the humor included in the cookbook.

**Welcome to the Psychiatric Hotline:**  
If you are obsessive-compulsive, please press 1 repeatedly.

If you are co-dependent, find someone to press 2 for you.

If you have multiple personalities, press 3, 4, 5, and 6.

If you are a paranoid-delusional, we know who you are and what you want. Just stay on the line and we'll trace this call.

If you are schizophrenic, listen carefully and a little voice will tell you which number to press.

If you are manic-depressive, it doesn't matter which number you press. No one will answer. Thank you have a nice day.

## Size of state's budget gap difficult to grasp

TOPEKA — Mark Reber acknowledges that he and other Kansans find it hard to grasp the big numbers coming from the Capitol these days, including the estimated \$700 million budget shortfall.



john hanna

• ap news analysis

But when it's explained in terms of cars, the picture becomes clear.

Reber is a salesman at a Laird Noller dealership lot about a mile from the Statehouse. Parked on its lot is a charcoal gray, four-door Ford Focus with a sticker price of \$15,765.

That \$700 million — or \$698.7 million, to be more precise — would buy that Focus for every full-time state worker, nearly 41,000 cars, with enough left over to cover sales tax and pay for gas.

"That puts it into perspective," Reber said, a little stunned by the idea.

For legislators, \$700 million is the projected gap between expected revenues and required spending over the next 15 months.

Legislative leaders tend to think of the number in terms of its potential consequences: reduced spending on education and social services, closing minimum-security prisons, canceling highway projects and forcing government workers to take unpaid vacation days.

Some constituents naturally find themselves thinking that way, too.

Brenda Wenrich, who owns two Quizno's sandwich shops in Topeka, worries about potential cuts to public schools and higher education.

Her downtown shop, a block from the Capitol, receives orders regularly from Gov. Bill Graves for tuna on whole wheat, a bag of chips and a chocolate chip cookie.

One of Wenrich's children has graduated from Kansas State University and another is preparing

to graduate. She plans to send her three other children to college as well.

"If they've got to cut salaries for teachers or the number of teachers, does that mean my 9-year-old is going to be in a class with 45 other students?" she asked.

Then, she thinks about her businesses, and adds: "Are they going to raise our sales tax? Is that going to help us? No."

Yet she admits finding \$700 million a difficult number to grasp, because of its sheer size.

And legislative leaders acknowledge struggling to convey the dimensions of the budget problem to their constituents.

"They don't have any good way to put that into perspective," said Senate President Dave Kerr. "I'm not sure we've done a good job of explaining how large it is."

It's this large: For \$698.7 million you could buy the Empire State Building a dozen times over, at last week's reported selling price of \$57.5 million.

Or, in terms closer to home, it's \$673 for each of the 1,037,891 Kansas households counted in the 2000 census.

That's enough to buy a \$450 television, a \$150 DVD player and a \$25 copy of "The Wizard of Oz" — and pay the sales tax on those items.

Laid end-to-end, \$698.7 million worth of \$1 bills would stretch 66,165 miles, enough to circle the equator twice and go two-thirds of the way on a

third trip around the world.

"That's scary," said Rep. L. Candy Ruff, D-Leavenworth.

At Wenrich's downtown sandwich shop, that \$698.7 million would be enough to buy 11.6 million, 6-foot long party subs. At 20 minutes to make each one, she and her descendants would finish them in 443 years.

Or consider that at one Topeka grocery store, \$698.7 million would buy more than 1.2 billion rolls of toilet paper, sold in packages of 16. That's enough to cover Cherokee, Labette and Montgomery counties — almost 1,896 square miles, in fact.

"I'd hope we would get a volume discount," joked Sen. Derek Schmidt, R-Independence.

Then, seriously, Schmidt added: "It's very hard to convey the magnitude of the budget problem."

At the car dealership in Topeka, salesman Reber can visualize for a moment every state employee buying a Ford Focus — although he chuckles about how the lot couldn't hold all those vehicles and people.

He said the Focus they'd get is more than a "base car," meaning it has extra features like air bags, power windows and a CD player.

Without considering the budget figures in terms of cars or something similar, Reber believes, most Kansans have a hard time understanding them.

He adds, though, "They know the figures are huge."

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Correspondent John Hanna has covered state government and politics for *The Associated Press* since 1987.

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