

commentary

from other pens...

Kansas can learn from French elections

The Salina Journal on lessons for Kansas from the French elections:
There's a lesson here for Kansans.

At first it was funny to watch all those angry French protesters. Here they were, yelling, chanting and waving their signs, steamed at the fact Jean-Marie Le Pen, a far-right presidential candidate, had qualified for a runoff against President Jacques Chirac. Chirac won that runoff Sunday.

The whole thing was laughable because the French brought all this on themselves. ...

The results would have been different if the French would have displayed half the interest on election day as they did protesting.

But then this thought struck home: The same kind of thing could happen in Kansas. Not quite the same scale, mind you. But close enough to deserve some attention.

Kansas Republican voters will hold a primary election to decide who faces the Democrat candidate for governor, who will likely be Insurance Commissioner Kathleen Sebelius. So far the Republican primary will include Wichita Mayor Bob Knight, State Treasurer Tim Shallenburger and former Eudora School Superintendent Dan Bloom. ...

If Kansans display their typical voter apathy, then the Republican primary would be up for grabs. The GOP candidate could be an unknown like Bloom. A relative handful of voters could elect a conservative like Shallenburger, someone who is too far right to represent Kansans.

Democrats love the way this is shaping up. You can bet they are hoping another dozen or so Republican candidates enter the fray ... which further cements the chance Sebelius will win the general election.

From our perspective, we just want better voter turnout. As we see in France, it is more productive — and safer — if voters get excited before election day, rather than after.

The Lawrence Journal-World on combining local government agencies:

City and county officials should look for more opportunities to combine and coordinate their efforts.

Cooperative efforts by Lawrence and Douglas County like the agreement being considered this week to share maintenance of Broken Arrow Park simply make sense.

The agreement ... would make the city responsible for all of the equipment in the park, and the county responsible for all of the mowing. It's amazing such an agreement has taken so long to reach. ...

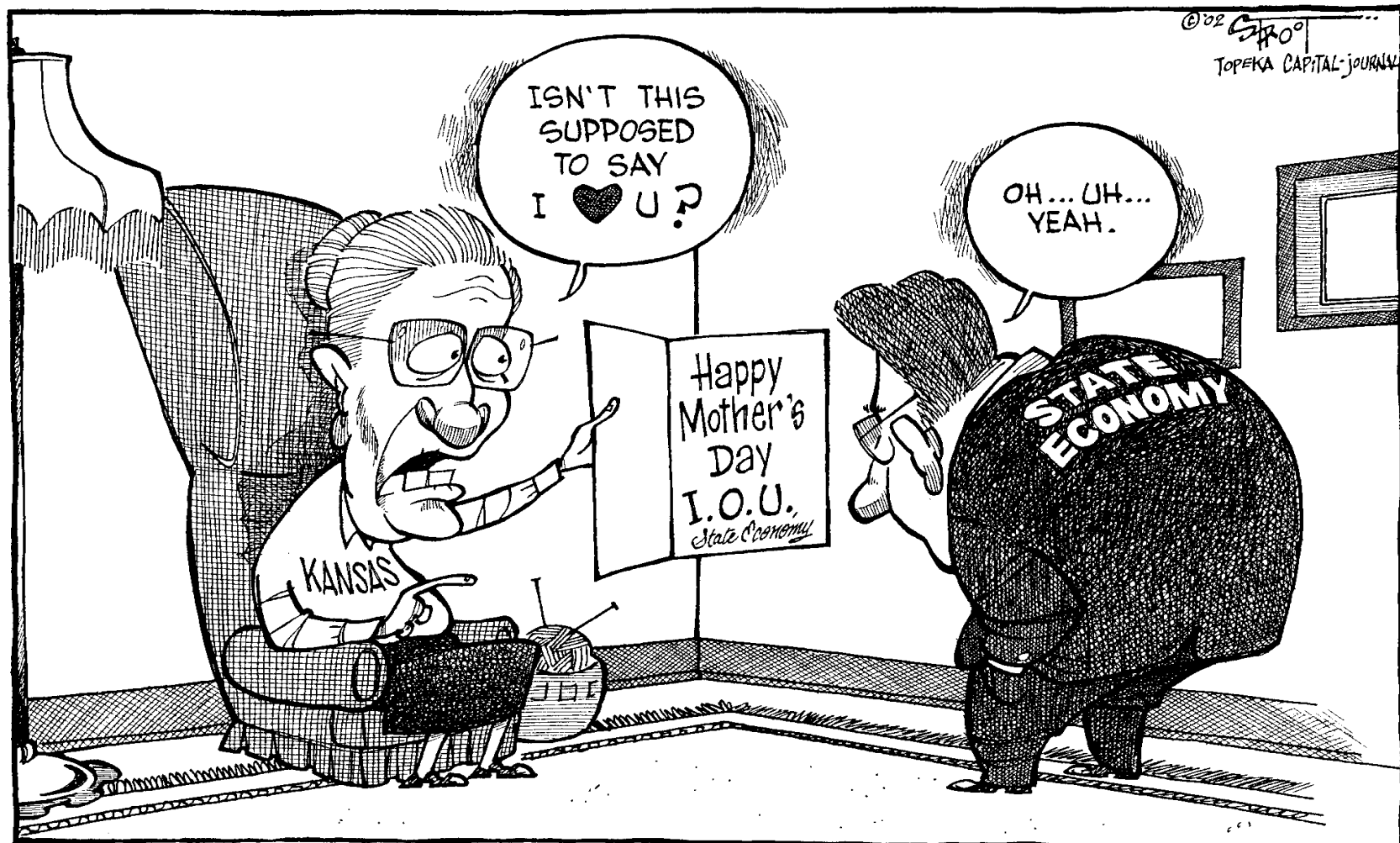
Sharing maintenance of the park would be one of several joint ventures between the city and county. The two governments already share a planning department. ... emergency services for the city and county are jointly handled. ... These are sensible collaborations and hopefully will set the stage for more joint services in the future.

... Kansas has 3,950 units of local government. Kansas ranks 32nd among states in population but is No. 5 for the number of taxing jurisdictions in the state.

We knew Kansans were an independent lot, but this is ridiculous. The state undoubtedly is losing out on many opportunities for government efficiency by stubbornly clinging to all of these separate boards. ...

... Although Kansans like their autonomy, they also are a practical people and may soon start to recognize the advantages both in terms of economy and service of combining more government functions.

Although Lawrence and Douglas County aren't likely to merge ... their governments any time soon, reasonable steps toward coordination and cooperation will benefit residents in many ways. City and county officials are wise to pursue such efforts whenever they make sense.



Is death a natural part of life?

My grandmother died last week after spending the last seven years in long-term care. She was 95 years old and had been in poor health for at least the last 30 years of her life.

At the time she finally died, she had gangrene in her legs and would soon have to have them amputated even though there was no way she could survive the surgery. She had been on morphine to control her pain.

The truth is, aside from murderers, nobody really wants to see another person die. No matter how sick someone is, and no matter how much they are suffering, deep down, we really don't want them to die. It seems too final.

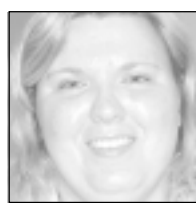
Some people say death is just a natural part of life, but who really feels that death is natural? If someone you are really close to dies, you miss that person. Some who have lost young children in death have become angry at God, thinking he was selfish to take their child to be with him in heaven.

And people often wonder why God would allow people to be in such poor health and in so much pain as my grandmother was.

Is it really reasonable to think God takes children away from their parents? Why would he have made the human family to produce and raise children if he wanted them in heaven? Why, if death is natural, do people grieve when people in their 80s or 90s reach the end of their life? Does God want people to suffer?

The answer is found in the Bible. After God created Adam and Eve, he told them at Genesis 1:28, "Be fruitful and become many and fill the earth and subdue it, and have in subjection the fish of the sea and the flying creatures of the heavens and every living creature that is moving upon the earth."

God had a purpose for mankind: To populate the earth and to take care of the earth and its animal inhabitants. It doesn't take much sense to see around us that things have gone awry. Family breakdowns are common. Mankind is destroying the earth with pollution and threatens to destroy all life with nuclear weapons. And man definitely does not have all of animal life in subjection — if



sharon corcoran

• use it or lose it

you don't believe me, watch someone try to train a dog sometime.

So what went wrong? Reading on in the book of Genesis, we find the answer. Genesis 2:15-17 says, "And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.'"

Before this command, there was no mention of mankind growing old and dying or dying of sickness or accidents. And there was no mention of man going to heaven. God had created the earth for man to live on and with everything he needed on it.

Chapter 3, verses 1-5 go on to relate: "Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, 'Yea, hath God said, "Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?"' And the woman said unto the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden, but of the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God hath said, "Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.'" And the serpent said unto the woman, 'Ye shall not surely die, for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.'"

Most people are familiar enough with the Bible to know that Adam and Eve did eat the fruit, that they were cast out of the garden of Eden and then had to deal with problems.

Some may notice the scripture said that in the day they ate from the tree they would die. If that were the case, how did they produce children?

Genesis 5:5 says, "So all the days of Adam that

he lived amounted to nine hundred and thirty years and he died."

Adam lived 930 years, plenty of time to have children, but does that mean he didn't die in the day he ate from the tree?

2 Peter 3:8 says, "But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord God as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."

By this standard, Adam did die in the day he ate from the tree as he did not live to be a thousand years old.

Romans 5:12 says, "Through one man (Adam) sin entered into the world and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men because they had all sinned."

Because of Adam's sin, all of mankind (his offspring) inherited sin and the consequence, death. Before Adam's sin, people did not get sick, grow old or die. But has Adam's sin left us without hope? No. For 1 Corinthians 15:45 says, "The first man Adam became a living soul. The last Adam (Jesus Christ) became a life-giving spirit."

By dying for mankind's sins, Jesus gave us all the opportunity to have eternal life. How is that possible for those who have already died and those who die before that time?

Revelation 20:13, 14 says, "The sea gave up those dead in it, and death and Hades gave up those dead in them, and they were judged individually according to their deeds. And death and Hades were hurled into the lake of fire. This means the second death, the lake of fire."

Those who have died will be resurrected with the opportunity to live forever on earth, and, later, death and the grave of mankind will be destroyed forever.

Of that time, Isaiah 65:21, 22 says, "They will certainly build houses and have occupancy; and they will certainly plant vineyards and eat their fruitage. They will not build and someone else have occupancy; they will not plant and someone else do the eating."

Then people will live up to God's purpose for the earth when he created it and everything on it.

Leaders use flexibility in rules to push tax increase

TOPEKA — Civic classes and dusty textbooks have given students a relatively straightforward explanation of how a bill moves through an American legislative process to become law.

Then there's how some bills before the Kansas Legislature become law.

Lawmakers have a fairly bendable set of rules that make it difficult to kill some ideas, easy to revive others and possible for still others to pop up in odd places without much debate.

It's something worth noting this year because of the state's budget problems and the widely held conviction among legislative leaders that taxes must increase to prevent damage to education, transportation, social services and other government programs.

Through 101 days in session, the House refused to pass any significant tax increase. Leaders had and would continue to use a flexible interpretation of the rules to get around the House's opposition in hopes of raising taxes.

If those leaders can bend the rules to further their goals, they also can make the legislative process more difficult to follow.

"It serves to confuse people out there," said Sen. Tim Huelskamp, R-Fowler. "It's very hard for them to keep abreast of things."

The desire for a flexible legislative process began with a crisis.

Legislators have sent Gov. Bill Graves a \$4.4 billion budget for the state's 2003 fiscal year, which begins July 1, and Graves has said he will sign it.

But that budget is \$290 million out of balance, and Graves has said he will be compelled to cut spending if lawmakers don't send him a package of tax increases.

Graves and legislative leaders insisted the state must increase taxes.

Yet the House remained deadlocked, its moderate Republican leaders caught between conservatives' opposition to higher taxes and Democrats' demand that any package include higher income taxes, which they view as the fairest way to raise money.



john hanna

• ap news analysis

"They're absolutely desperate," said Rep. Tony Powell, R-Wichita, a conservative.

The legislative process is supposed to be relatively straightforward.

A bill is introduced in one chamber, considered by a committee and voted on by that chamber. The second chamber assigns it to a committee, which may advance it so that the second chamber can vote on it.

If the second chamber makes amendments, the first chamber reviews those changes and decides whether to accept them. If not, a conference committee of three senators and three House members drafts a final version.

In theory, negotiators are supposed to be limited by what each chamber has approved. Legislative rules suggest the same by declaring anything that has not passed one house can't be considered.

But legislative leaders have interpreted that rule to mean that any idea that has won approval in one chamber can be considered by any conference committee working on any bill related to the same subject.

That's how they're getting around House members' refusal to pass a tax increase.

Senate Bill 39 began life last year as a bill making small changes in income tax credits for charitable contributions.

Work on it was all but finished last year. The bill landed in conference committee, with relatively minor issues to resolve. No activity on it occurred for 13 months.

House Bill 2009 dealt with an exemption from property taxes for equipment used in producing biodiesel fuel. It won House approval in February 2001 and remained before the Senate Assessment and Taxation Committee for 14 months.

Then, the Senate committee stripped out those provisions and put in a \$335 million package of tax increases. The Senate rewrote HB 2009 again and approved a \$294 million package, returning the bill to the House.

Though House members never approved any tax package, its leaders still negotiated with senators, because both chambers had passed something under the same bill number. House negotiators could agree to anything, because their chamber had no position on any tax increase.

Using HB 2009 did have one drawback. A conference committee report on a House bill is voted on in the Senate first, then the House. Senators faced voting over and over if negotiators couldn't find a package House members liked.

That's where SB 39 came in. Because it was a Senate bill, the House would vote first on any conference committee report. Using it, senators could simply wait for the House to pass a package, then vote once to send it to Graves.

Legislative leaders appointed the same negotiators for each bill. They put a \$283 million package into SB 39, signed a report Saturday and presented it to the House, which rejected it.

But after rejecting it, the House voted to send SB 39 back to conference committee, where the same negotiators can try again.

Legislative leaders don't want to start over with a new bill, because it would have to go through both chambers again. Because a conference committee report is drafted by negotiators, both chambers get only an up-or-down vote on it, with no chance to amend it.

"Some unusual measures are occurring because we're out of time," said Senate Majority Leader Lana Oleen, R-Manhattan.

Those unusual measures are designed to bring about one result: passage of tax increases, despite the House's repeated refusal so far to approve a package.

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

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