

commentary

from other pens...

No tax increase leaves candidate optionless

The Hutchinson News on Shallenburger's promises:

Tim Shallenburger won the Republican primary last month by promising not to raise taxes. He reiterated that promise in the debate Saturday at the Kansas State Fair with Kathleen Sebelius, his Democratic opponent in the Nov. 5 general election.

Lost among that consistent message on taxes, however, are the other promises made by the GOP standard-bearer.

First, Shallenburger has pledged to work to fulfill the state's commitment to construct new highways. ...

... Without a tax increase, Shallenburger would have to make deep cuts in state programs to free up the money required to fund all \$1 billion worth of new transportation projects scheduled over the next seven years.

Second, Shallenburger has promised to revamp the state school funding formula, seeking to allow (or force) local school boards to gain voter approval of additional spending initiatives beyond the "suitable" funding offered through the state.

... The candidate would make property, sales and income tax mechanisms all available to local districts. Even Shallenburger admits the change would set in motion a process that could lead to higher taxes, yet he shrugs responsibility for the increases by shifting the decision to local officials.

Third, Shallenburger has promised to work to establish a regents center in southwest Kansas. When pressed for details, he said that it could involve community colleges in Dodge City, Garden City and Liberal working with Fort Hays State University.

Yet when he says the participating institutions should have the "capacity" to accommodate the needs of place-bound students seeking four-year degrees, that means he expects the colleges to pay for it out of existing resources.

... The tax pledge, and the unrealistic emphasis Shallenburger has placed on it this campaign season, will severely hamper his ability to deliver on his other promises.

The Wichita Eagle on Connie Morris:

Connie Morris, the St. Francis Republican who wants the state to refuse to educate the children of undocumented immigrants, released a statement Tuesday that only arms those opposed to her ascension to the State Board of Education, by inexplicably linking the children of undocumented residents to future terrorism.

"Six-year-old children across the world, perhaps on our own soil, are being trained today to perform terroristic acts," Ms. Morris wrote in the statement. ...

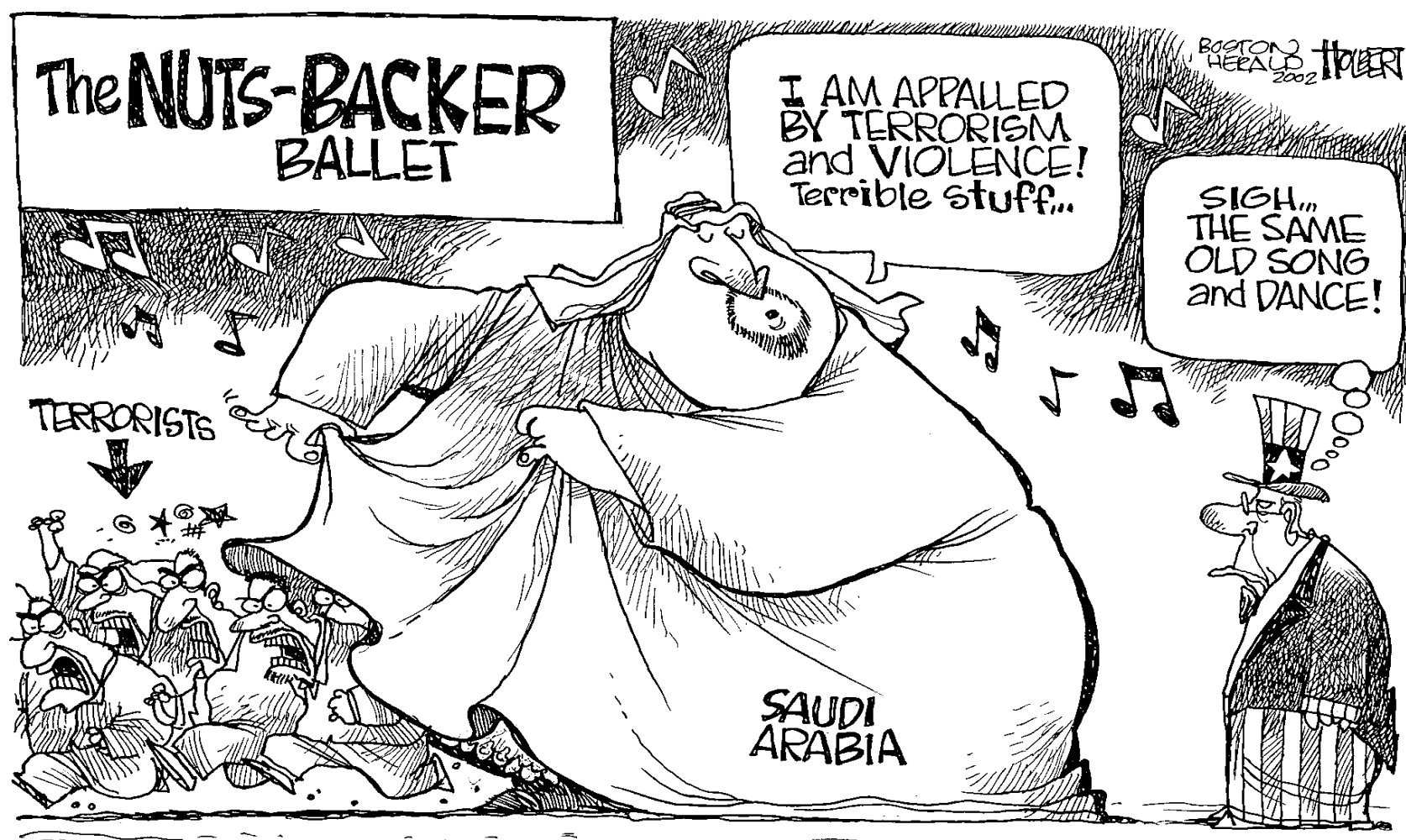
Suggesting that school secretaries start asking for proof of legal residency, Ms. Morris added, "Acting aggressively upon this problem now may prevent more innocent children from being caught up in the tragedy of war, economics and politics, as our country faces now."

Huh? What a bizarre, twisted reading of the situation, one that's especially unfortunate amid this week's 9/11 remembrances and calls for unity.

So far, Ms. Morris has rejected the multiplying cries for her to remove her name from the Nov. 5 general election, in which she is unopposed. But the write-in campaign for board chairman Sonny Rundell, whom Ms. Morris defeated in the GOP primary last month, is gathering strength. Still, like all write-in efforts, Mr. Rundell's task will be difficult.

We wish him well.

Coping with rising immigrant populations can be a challenge. ... But undocumented immigrants from Mexico and elsewhere are living, working and paying taxes in Kansas, largely unchallenged by the broken-down U.S. immigration system. It is wrong — and pointless, given the U.S. Supreme Court's 20-year-old ruling on the issue — to advocate that our public schools be closed to their children. These kids are going to grow up, and it's to the benefit of the future of the state's workforce that they be not only educated, but educated well.



Sopranos? Think again

He is a complicated New Jersey character living behind a veneer of respectability with his big house in an affluent neighborhood and his kids in private school.

In his corrupt underworld, the abnormal is normal. There is no boundary between one's personal and professional lives. Morality is relative: If the poor shlubs out there are stupid enough to let him fleece, dupe and push them around, then they deserve to lose their money. He's the indisputable boss and therefore gets what he wants, including a disproportionate cut of the take.

The challenge is to keep a step ahead of the feds.

Yes, I'm talking about Dennis Kozlowski, the former Master of the Universe CEO of Tyco.

The son of a Newark cop, Kozlowski was charged last week with racketeering and "enterprise corruption," a charge generally used in Mafia prosecutions. The feds cited stock fraud, falsified expense accounts and bribery, saying Kozlowski "looted" more than \$170 million from Tyco and obtained another \$430 million by fraud in the sale of securities.

To paraphrase Uncle Junior, the federal marshals are so far up Kozlowski's derriere he can taste Brylcreem.

With more revelations every day of corporate excess and criminality, with resentment and anger toward the entitled rich crackling ever closer to the surface, Kozlowski stands out as an emblematic



joan ryan

• commentary

character, the Gordon Gekko of the new millennium.

He already had been charged in June with evading more than \$1 million in taxes on six paintings he said were going to Tyco's headquarters but instead went to his own apartment. So last week's indictments are only the latest installment in a riveting drama that, if it were pitched to a Hollywood executive, might be summarized as "'The Sopranos' meets 'Bonfire of the Vanities.'"

I admit I am hopelessly hooked. I'm a huge fan of the Kozlowski story. I devour the emerging details of his excesses and hubris like buttered popcorn: The \$6,000 gold-and-burgundy floral-patterned shower curtain. The \$1 million birthday party for his wife under the stars in Sardinia with Jimmy Buffett crooning "Cheeseburger in Paradise." The personal doctor and fitness trainer, the yachting expert and chef, all placed on the company payroll at Kozlowski's insistence. The \$1.7 million of Tyco money donated to his daughters' private school for what became the "Kozlowski Athletic

Complex" and the \$5 million pledge of Tyco money to Kozlowski's alma mater, Seton Hall, for Kozlowski Hall. The \$11 million in company cash that paid for antiques, art and furnishings in Kozlowski's Fifth Avenue duplex — for which Tyco paid \$18 million.

There was also the \$19 million no-interest loan from Tyco that paid for a 15,000-square-foot mansion with a pool and tennis court in Florida. The loan was then forgiven — and Tyco even paid millions in taxes that Kozlowski owed on the loans.

Here's my favorite, though. After earning more than \$400 million in salary, stock grants and gains from the sale of stock options during the past four years, Kozlowski squeezed the company for more. He landed a retirement package paying him at least \$4.1 million a year for life after age 65.

Meanwhile, Tyco shareholders watched their stock tumble about 80 percent in value since the beginning of the year.

I can't wait until the next episode. Will the feds find offshore accounts? Will they find cash under the floor of the pool house? I am staying tuned for what promises to be a satisfying conclusion to the Dennis Kozlowski drama. As Tony said this week about Uncle Junior, "If you had his legal problems, you'd be garling with Drano."

Joan Ryan is a columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle. Send comments to her e-mail at joanryan@sfchronicle.com.

I brake for all kinds of crap

Over the years, we've all collected stuff that we are ashamed to have in the house. Stuff that is too ugly to keep, too expensive to throw out — unfortunate Christmas presents, out-of-date furniture, wide paisley ties we thought might come back into fashion. So what do we do with it? The town dump? The Goodwill? The Recycling Center? Of course not. We spread it out on the front lawn and put prices on it. We have a lawn sale.

It sounds like such a good idea. A way to get rid of six-pound wooden tennis rackets, dented chafing dishes, Carpenters' albums, eight-track tapes, battered recliners, unused fondue pots, Dictaphones, coolers in the shape of giant beer cans; beat-up copies of "Jonathan Livingston Seagull"; embroidered linen pillowcases and stacks of "Reader's Digest Condensed Books." Unfortunately, it is the exact same stuff everyone else is trying to get rid of. That's why lawn sales are held on the weekend, so the entire mess won't be confused for garbage and accidentally collected.

I don't stop at lawn sales because I think I will find a copy of the Declaration of Independence hidden behind a \$2 picture of dogs playing poker,



jim mullen

• the village idiot

I stop because I'm a snooper. There's nothing like pawing through a table full of personal effects in the hot sun to learn how your neighbors spend their time and how they spend their money. Junk on a folding table in the driveway speaks to me.

One silver teaspoon. Did someone steal the other seven or did you always just have one? Or do spoons in a dishwasher disappear like socks in a dryer?

A cross-country-ski exercise machine for fifty bucks. They twisted their ankle trying to learn how to use it the day it arrived and then gained two pounds convalescing. Here it is out in the front yard, making them feel guilty every time they look at it. "Buy it," it says to me, "get it out of their life."

Lawn sales are full of kitchen gadgets that are so food specific no one ever used them. A left-

handed, deep-fat frog-leg fryer. A waffle iron in the shape of Paul Prudhomme. "Nothing peels kiwis better than the New Zealander 5000!" It is still in the box. "Grill Fish In Your Hotel Room With the Fry It and Forget It!" Where do these people stay? Motel 666?

Skis, wheelchairs, hurricane lamps, roller skates, TV trays, baby clothes. You never find good stuff at the yard sales selling baby clothes. You can either have children or you can have good stuff. But there is a law of physics that you can't have both.

Golf clubs. Tons of golf clubs. I saw a beautifully balanced putter at a yard sale, the lady said I could have it for a quarter. I told her that brand new it probably cost \$80. She said she was glad it made me happy, "because it never made Henry happy."

"He doesn't play any more?"

"Not since he died."

"Oh, I'm sorry."

"I'm not."

I asked Sue if she'd sell my stuff after I died. She said, "What makes you think I'll wait for that?"

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