

# commentary

from our viewpoint...

## Off to a terrible start for new governor

Governor-elect Kathleen Sebelius is off to a terrible start with her promised effort to overhaul Kansas government, and the truth is, she doesn't understand why she's in trouble.

Apparently oblivious to the state's Open Meetings Law, Mrs. Sebelius decreed that — except for a few public hearings — sessions of her study panels would be closed to the public.

She trotted out the same old tired excuse for closing the meetings that public officials always use: Members wouldn't be free to speak their minds if people were listening.

What that really means is, she expects the panels to come up with a plan that can be crammed down someone's throat if they are not watching.

The outgoing attorney general, Republican Carla Stovall, ruled that the committees can meet in closed session, but only until she is sworn in. At that point, they'll change magically into state-sponsored committees that fall under the law.

That ruling ignores the fact that as governor elect, Mrs. Sebelius is using state money and state employees on the transition process to help run the panels. At least the attorney general came down on the side of open government.

The tragedy here is that Mrs. Sebelius has shown she neither understands nor values the principle of open government which is central to democracy.

Legal or not, how can she propose that something as crucial as an overhaul of Kansas government be drawn up in secret session?

We don't let the Legislature work that way. We don't let the school board or the city council work that way, and with good reason.

The people need to know what their government is doing. Opponents need a chance to oppose cuts and consolidations. Supporters need to know what programs are threatened.

Of course, they'll react. That's how the system works. The only reason to plot in secret is the hope to slip a few by those who otherwise might object.

Doing things that way might result in a cleaner reorganization plan and a bigger budget cut, but it's not democracy in action. It's old-fashioned back-room politics.

With the state's economy in the tank and tax revenue in free fall, the incoming governor is going to have enough problems to deal with as is. She doesn't need the bad image being generated by her secret meetings. She doesn't need the lawsuit and the political losses it will entail. Already, the state's newspapers have here in court, and one of her token Republicans has quit the panels.

Most of all, though, she needs a lesson in civics and a clear understanding of how a democracy is supposed to function — with an informed electorate judging how it's elected officials function.

Judging by her stubbornness on this issue, she hasn't learned much yet in the school of hard knocks. — *Steve Haynes*



## Updating the honeymoon bulletin board

Daughter and son-in-law took several dozen of their closest friends and their parents along for their honeymoon in Italy.

Being the techie children (hey, they're only 33 and 28) that they are, they set up a bulletin board on their website and promised to keep everyone updated on their two-week trip, which started Nov. 23. They flew from Atlanta to Rome to Florence. They then went on to Sorrento (near Naples) and back to Rome by train before flying home.

For reasons that I'm afraid to ask, they call their site Tikigod's Surfboard. Nik is Tiki and Felicia is High Priestess.

The first posting was from Nik:

**We made it!** — "It was a long flight but we've arrived in Rome safely. Our stewardess was a bit of a b\*\*\*\*, hoarding the soda like it was some priceless treasure. Now we have several hours till we fly out to Florence. Airports are the same everywhere, but this one has free internet. (Happy face)

Then Felicia took over:

**Florence Day 1** — "I can't believe we made it. It only took 18 hours on planes and in airports, but Florence is worth it.

"We got in around 3 p.m. (9 a.m. for ya'll) and checked into the hotel. We finally got showers and rested and headed back out on the town for a gelato and dinner. It was so good.

"Nik and I have been floored by how beautiful it is here. Our hotel is on the Arno, and we have our own little balcony and a view of the Santa Croce. We're trying to stay up until 10 p.m. so we can get on the time schedule here.

**Florence Day 2** — "We slept in. I could have slept all day, but luckily, the bells at Santa Croce, right out our window, are very loud and they ring every hour. We stumbled out of the hotel in search of euros, food and sight seeing. We're really digging the cool little snack shops, with sandwiches and espresso.

"We went to the Duomo, the Baptistry and the Duomo museum today. It was awesome. The Duomo is huge and the facade is overpowering in green, rose and white. The Baptistry, which is incredibly old, was beautiful.

"The cathedral itself is much plainer, but even more beautiful, on the inside. The vaulting is unbelievable. I lit a candle at the votive trees, which were gorgeous.

"We didn't climb the dome (really long lines) instead we climbed the bell tower, so we could get a view of the city and the dome. It was amazing and worth every one of the 414 steps.

"After climbing the tower (and sitting down for a while) we went to the Duomo museum. The pieces in there, including panels of the Ghiberti doors of the baptistry and several statues by Donatello, including the really grotesque Mary. Now we're beat. I think we'll rest and then head out for more fabulous Italian food and cheap, but tasty, table wine.

**Florence Day 3** — "We went to the Uffizi to



**cynthia haynes**

• open season

day, and it was absolutely amazing. There were paintings by Raphael, Michelangelo, Leonardo, Titan, Caravaggio and Botecelli. We were stunned by the beauty of some of the art in person. It also wiped us out.

"I'll write more later. We're having technical difficulties with the camera, but will post pictures as soon as we can."

*Editor's Note: We're still waiting for pictures.*

**Florence Day 4** — "We had a great last day in Florence. We went to the Accademia, which basically has the original David statue. That was a nice, short trip compared to the Uffizi, which was almost air overload.

"The David is incredibly impressive. The scale, scope and emotion are all striking. And, he's pretty cute, too.

"After that we went over the Ponte Vecchio and had pizza. We also checked out San Lorenzo and the central market. Nik has taken a ton of pictures; we just need to find someplace that will let us upload them."

**Sorrento** — "We had quite the adventure getting to Sorrento. We got our tickets at the American Express office in Florence, which is on the tiny side street, on Wednesday. We got up bright and not too early Thursday to catch our 10:55 a.m. direct train to Naples.

"The train station was a madhouse. I think back to the almost empty domestic wing of the Rome airport and I can see why. Everyone uses the trains. And they're not too bad, even for two tourists that speak no Italian. I did sit in the wrong seat, but a nice young man, who was disputing my seat assignment, explained it was 'non importante,' translating for the man whose seat I was sitting in. (He was in my seat, hence the mix up.) The young man was disputing that one of us was in his seat, showing us his ticket. He was, however, on the wrong train and made a mad dash to get off before it left the platform. The older man, speaking no English, and I, speaking no Italian, shrugged at each other eloquently and left it at that.

"The ride was about three hours and was pretty comfortable. It was nice to sit and watch the countryside roll by, instead of walking everywhere.

"We got off the train in Naples, which has a reputation for pickpockets and thieves. So we were a little nervous. Our guide book warned about the private commuter train to Sorrento, saying many of his readers had been ripped off on that train. So we decided, in our infinite wisdom and with our oversized American bags, to take the ferry. We were going to walk to the port, but one look at Naples changed our mind. It is a city of two million and it

is a land of chaos. Traffic laws are at best suggestions, and people are everywhere.

"Our nice cabbie warned us of the dangers, and offered to take us to Sorrento for 70 euro. We told him no, that's all right, we'll take the ferry for 14 euro instead. That was at 3:30.

"The ferry was pulling away from the dock when we walked up. The next one didn't leave until 5. No problem, we parked ourselves on a bench with our bags and got a gelato. We forgot that it got dark at 4:45. Another nice young woman explained that no it was 5:20 and the ferry was late by 10 minutes. That helped, because Nik was getting sick of me asking every boat that came to dock to look at his ticket and tell him if it was the right one. We were thinking we should have taken our cabbie up on his offer.

"Once our boat finally came, we had to lug our huge bags onto the boat, enduring the awed, not cruel, stares of the locals on the commuter ferry. We also took up two extra seats with them.

"The ferry ride was nice though. It was a hydrofoil, and quite fast. We gave up on trying to figure out the public transportation system and just grabbed a cab.

"Our cabbie Raphael, driving a great Mercedes station wagon, told us he got a lot of his business from Americans.

"He deposited us at our hotel, a beautiful place on the cliff. The city is set on the mountain against the bay, across the water from Naples. It's a beautiful Mediterranean resort. Our hotel is amazing with Brown Palace-style service.

"Tomorrow we are going to take the train to Pompeii and Hercules."

**Wrapping up in Sorrento** — "We didn't make it to Hercules. To say that we underestimated the size of Pompeii would be a huge understatement. We started poking around in the ruins at 11 a.m. and never even stopped for lunch. We still hadn't seen everything when we left at 5 p.m. It was amazing. I love to imagine what it was like when it was a living, bustling city. It is amazingly well preserved.

"The next day, Sunday, we took a taxi tour of the Amalfi coast to Paestum, where they have the best preserved Greek temples in existence.

"We went to see the National Archeological Museum in Naples today and saw some of the most inspiring pieces so far. They have the whole Faranese collection of sculpture (Roman,) unbelievable Green pottery and all the good stuff from the cities surrounding Vesuvius. The museum was fabulous. Naples was like New York on crack.

"We're heading to Rome tomorrow. We miss you all and want to get home to our house, our pets, our families and friends. But in the meantime, we're having a blast.

*Editor's Note: That was the last update on the bulletin board. Five days would pass before we heard more.*

**Next week** — Italian emergency rooms, or why European women do not shave their legs.

### 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. 449-N, Topeka, KS 66612. (785) 296-7399

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e-mail: [daily@nwkans.com](mailto:daily@nwkans.com)

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N.T. Betz, Director of Internet Services ([nbetz@nwkans.com](mailto:nbetz@nwkans.com))  
Evan Barnum, Systems Admin. ([support@nwkans.com](mailto:support@nwkans.com))

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