

Kansas legislature makes Madison spin in his grave

You have to hope that James Madison isn't spinning in his grave. But if he's gazing down on Kansas, he probably is.

This nation's fourth president was a hero of the Bill of Rights. The 251st anniversary of his birth was March 16, celebrated by those who cherish open government as Freedom of Information Day. And open government is under assault this session in the Kansas Legislature.

Let's go to the dubious scoreboard:

- One bill (HB 2149) that would have made advisory boards and task forces appointed by the incoming governor subject to open meetings law has stalled in the Kansas House. Speaker Doug Mayes, R-Topeka, reportedly doesn't think it should pass. You may remember that the bill was prompted when then-Gov.-elect Kathleen Sebelius appointed a set of committees (using tax money) to study the state budget in secret. Its passage ought to be the easiest of legislative decisions.
- A so-called "utility security bill" (HB 2374) looks like it will sail through the Legislature. The bill would let utility companies charge customers for "homeland-security" upgrades — without revealing the amount of the charge. The idea is that public knowledge of these charges would somehow endanger homeland security. That's an amazing stretch of logic.
- A current law requires Kansas school districts to publish the names, positions and salaries of superintendents and department heads every year. Few, if any, actually do. Now a bill (SB 82) has been introduced to do away with that law. It passed the Senate 39-0. It's worth noting that the action was prompted by the Kansas Association of Schools Boards, which apparently doesn't believe taxpayers need to know much about how their tax money is spent, though it wants a lot more tax money spent on public schools.
- And then there's HB 2420, an Internet filtering bill motivated by concerns about child pornography, which already is against the law. This bill is especially dangerous to the state's libraries. It requires the use of costly filtering technology by institutions already under budgetary assault. These programs are far from fool-proof. The bill contains language that's already been overturned by federal courts. And it ignores the most trenchant fact: Library staff members already work hard to make sure Internet access in their care isn't abused.

In short, HB 2420 is flawed and gratuitous. It is a solution in search of a problem. Sure, politicians are right to be for "homeland security" and against "child pornography." But governing isn't that quick and easy. And openness, an essential element of a democratic society, must be weighed in the bargain.

To be fair, the Legislature is considering two laws that would well serve the public's interests. One (SB 67) would open records after a child's death because of abuse and neglect. Another (HB 2413) would require private agencies that contract with government to open records of the portion of their business funded by tax dollars.

These bills should be passed.

Open government is not a cosmic phrase that's disconnected from real life. It is the only independent way to find out if government — police, courts and all other public institutions — is working well and in the public interest.

Kansas lawmakers should get past the knee-jerk, feel-good politics and consider more carefully the rights of citizens and taxpayers.

Randy Brown, Senior Fellow in the Elliott School of Communication at Wichita State University, is president of the Kansas Sunshine Coalition of Open Government. He is also chair of the public affairs committee of the city of Wichita's library board.

Miss Muffet now is a biology teacher

Little Miss Muffet sat on a tuffet
Eating her curds and whey
Along came a spider
and sat down beside her
And frightened Miss Muffet away.

And what did Miss Muffet become when she grew up? A biology teacher.

Youngest daughter was afraid of everything that crawled when she was little. A garden spider would send her screaming for the house. A house spider would send her into a frenzy of stomping, hitting and smashing. Sometimes she even killed the spider.

Last week, she called us from Lawrence to say that the tarantula had arrived in the mail.

I don't know if I was more amazed that my little Miss Muffet had gotten a spider or that the U.S. mail had delivered a poisonous insect.

I don't know how her junior high science classes felt about the new arrival but, she said, it was a sensation in the teachers' lounge.

The social studies coach grabbed the



cynthia haynes

• open season

newly arrived arachnid and chased both of the sixth-grade teachers around the room with it. Since he was, and hopefully still is, married to one of them, I suspect he is in the dog house at home.

While daughter was happy to get the tarantula and three leopard frogs from the postman, she was worried because her scorpion hadn't come.

A scorpion lost in the mail. That conjures up some weird thoughts.

She was worried the poor thing would die, since the school was closed for a snow day and then it was the weekend. What if? What if? What if? she moaned.

What if someone else opened up her package? I wondered. Instead of a shipment of computer disks, they get a poisonous bug. They could talk about their computer bug for years.

Ski trip turned cold, wet and expensive

Evan and I smiled.

It had been a pretty good day. Nothing had overflowed.

It was supposed to be a nice, cheap ski trip.

A new valve on the water line ensured that we could open up the house, stay there and save motel expenses. A slab of ham and some bread meant we could avoid overpriced ski-area food.

And of course, we believed this would all work out.

Our wives had no interest in spending four days in the cold and snow, so they stayed behind.

Other invited guests demurred. Maybe they knew what was coming.

The first hint of trouble came when Ron, the cabin guy who opens and closes houses (in real life, he's a carpenter), called.

When he had gone to turn on the water,



steve haynes

• along the sappa

he said, it sputured up through the casing around the key. Not a good sign, especially since the valve had been installed new last fall to allow us to turn it on in the spring.

Ron said he'd called a plumber, the water district maintenance man and a back hoe guy. It sounded expensive.

By the next day, they had the water back on and had filled the hole. It was expensive, but it was OK to come on out.

And so we drove on into the night. We got there too late to eat at our favorite Mexican restaurant, but we had Chinese instead. We drove on to the house.

It was cold. There was some water on the floor in the laundry room, but we wiped it up. We didn't know this would become a pattern.

We built a fire, filled the hot tub and went to bed.

At least the blankets were warm.

Come morning, things started to unravel.

The hot tub, it was cold. We traced the problem to a seal on the pump which was admitting air. We went back to the bathroom to take a shower, and found water on the floor. Lots of it, and more, coming UP out of the shower. It didn't take long to find out where the water was coming from, or why.

One look in the sewer cleanout out back showed it was full of ice.

Apparently, ever since Ron turned the water on, it had been backing up in the sewer line.

We called Ron, who came out, and shook his head. The water district guy was unreachable. The city crew said they'd try to

clear the line with their water jet.

Evan and I mopped up the back room and bailed out the shower, six 2 1/2-gallon buckets worth of foul, nasty water.

We went skiing. We were late, but that at least that went well.

We got home anticipating a shower, but no dice. The bottom of the stall was filling up again — neighbors upstream who thought their sewer was working were still flushing — so we bailed again. We soaked in the lukewarm hot tub. It felt good, but we shivered when we got out, and built up the fire.

We fixed the seal, but by then it was bed time. Since we'd stoked the fire so much, we had to peel off the covers. That's weird in the winter at 9,000 feet.

The next day, we went to the valley to get potatoes, stopping at the Mexican restaurant on the way back. That made us a little late, but we went skiing again.

When we got back, the shower had drained and the toilets worked.

We could shower!

We decided to wash the nasty towels we'd mopped the floor with in celebration. But when we started the washer, the water ran out onto the floor. More towels and a mop were needed, we reconnected the lint filter, and things were good.

Saturday, we spent the morning cleaning up, packing and hauling 400 pounds of potatoes back to the truck. We were a little late to the ski area, but it was one of God's own days: sunny, 40 degrees, lots of powder, and the runs were golden. Warmer than Kansas, actually.

We started the long drive back tired, but happy.

Nothing had overflowed. Life was good. And we made it home by 3 a.m.

The skiing was good, but the trip wasn't easy. And I've got a hunch it wasn't cheap, either.

Our property rights are being plundered

To the Editor:

I urge those of you who value your property Rights in rural Kansas to oppose House Bill 2112 which is now in the state Senate.

This bill would allow county commissioners to set up special code courts with appointed non elected judges to enforce county nuisance codes. A nuisance could be an unmowed lawn or a couple of old cars, whatever the county resolves to go after. (The only real nuisances are politicians who persist in sneaking through bills which trample on our rights.)

This bill would allow counties to make money from fines paid to the code courts. Code enforcement officers will be driving around spying with their binoculars and handing out citations with new empower-



from our readers

• to the editor

ment authority to summons you to court, similar to cops in a small-town speed trap.

The usual remedy to stop county commissioners who implement such codes (or do anything else we don't like) would be to recall them. However, another bill, Senate Bill 103, will make all recalls much more difficult. We need to make recall requirements easier, not more difficult. Our ancestors never intended to allow such petty officials as county commissioners, city councilmen, and school board members to have significant power over us. We need to have strong recall powers to remove tyrants.

As of this writing, H.B. 2112 is in the Senate Local Government Committee, Sen. Barbara Allen, chairperson. Her phone number is 785-296-7353. The recall bill, S.B. 103, is in the House Ethics and Election Committee, Don Myers, chairman. His phone number is 785-296-7695. Maybe it is time to call some of these people, including your own representative and senator. You can contact any legislator through the capitol switchboard operator at 785-296-0111 or you can call 1-800-748-4408 and ask them to transfer you.

Gary Simpson
fourth generation farmer
Milton, Sumner County

student of the week



Name: Amanda L. Hoffman
Parents: Richard and Lyn Hoffman
Grade: Senior
Age: 18
We've nominated this student because: Amanda's energy and motivation takes her well beyond the average student! She is that student that shines as a person! She is a hard working, dedicated, academically successful student at the Goodland High School. Her attitude is positive and shows respect to her peers, faculty and staff. Amanda is a proven leader in the classroom as well as leading the State of Kansas Family, Career and Community Leaders of America's 6000 members as their President.

Student Comment: My favorite aspect of school life is eating school lunch. My favorite subject is English. I also like vocal. I will always remember hearing the X-Pressos sing the song I wrote called "Our Song." It was a dream come true.

Activities involved in at school: FCCLA, National Honor Society, American Field Service, FCA, musical, band, jazz band, X-Pressos

My choice of movies, books, and games : My favorite movie is Spiderman or Indiana Jones: Temple of Doom. My favorite song is "A Moment Like This" or anything Celine Dion sings. My favorite books are written by Beverly Lewis or Mary Higgins Clark. My favorite game is Twister.

After I leave Goodland High School I intend to : Attend a four year college and major in music education with an emphasis on vocal or music therapy.

And 10 years from now, I think I'll be: 28 years old, happily married, maybe a child and living a successful life. Hopefully I will be making differences in the lives of others through music and showing our society how important music is in people's lives.

Favorite Quote: "With great power comes great responsibility." Spiderman



What time is it? What time should it be?

Should Sherman County become part of the Central Time zone?

Every Sherman County citizen over 18 will have the chance to vote on this question on Tuesday, April 1, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. at the Sherman County courthouse. We encourage everyone to vote for the city and school board candidates at the VFW and then come to the courthouse to express their opinion on the time question. Results will be in the Friday, April 4 edition, and posted on our web site.

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