

from our viewpoint...

## Widening U.S. 36, big pay off for state

A study of widening U.S. 36 to four lanes by the Docking Institute for Public Affairs at Fort Hays State University shows what transportation activists have suspected for a long time:

Kansas, and particularly the 13 counties along the northern tier, stand to get a big payoff from the job.

The state would invest about \$1.4 billion to widen the road to a four-lane expressway from border to border. The 13 counties would reap benefits of nearly \$2.4 billion in the first 10 years, including \$1.4 during construction and \$1 billion from increased business, new motels and stores and tourism.

More importantly, 898 jobs would be created along the road as new or larger businesses feed on the increased traffic a four-lane road would bring. To an area of the state long accustomed to the economic doldrums, this could be a godsend.

The study bears out the fact that a better road would attract far more in business than it would cost to build.

Since the opening of Interstate 70 more than 40 years ago, only a handful of new motels have been built along U.S. 36 in Kansas. No truck stops. Few chain or local restaurants. Because the freeway sucked up all the cross-state traffic that once traveled U.S. 36, U.S. 24 and other roads west.

But many questions remain, including:

- Would traffic ever be heavy enough to justify a four-lane road?

Out here, right now, no. Back east, between Wamego and Troy, the road is busy enough today to need four lanes.

Illinois has an Interstate open to the Mississippi River, and Missouri will complete its four-lane road to the river at St. Joseph this summer. Then more traffic will start to flow west.

And federal projections show truck traffic across Missouri to 10 to 20 times today's. Congestion in Kansas City and Omaha will send drivers around, not through, these cities, and U.S. 36 offers a fast, straight, attractive route west.

- Will we ever see a four-lane road in western Kansas?

Someday, maybe 20 years from now, maybe longer, traffic will build. In the meantime, the U.S. 36 Highway Association, which paid for the Docking study with help from the Dane G. Hansen Foundation and county commissioners along the road, supports a better two-lane road all across the state.

- Will Colorado ever improve its part of the road, more than 125 miles between the state line and I-70 at Byers?

Not any time soon. But just as Kansas will have to respond to a four-lane path across Illinois and Missouri, so will Colorado have to respond to a four-lane road to St. Francis. It will happen.

- Will bypasses hurt Kansas towns?

No. The study envisions any bypasses being built very close to a town, so business can adjust. Bypasses would be decided by the state and local communities together, after a public scoping process. On U.S. 81, for instance, Concordia rejected the idea of a bypass while Belleville has a road right along its west edge.

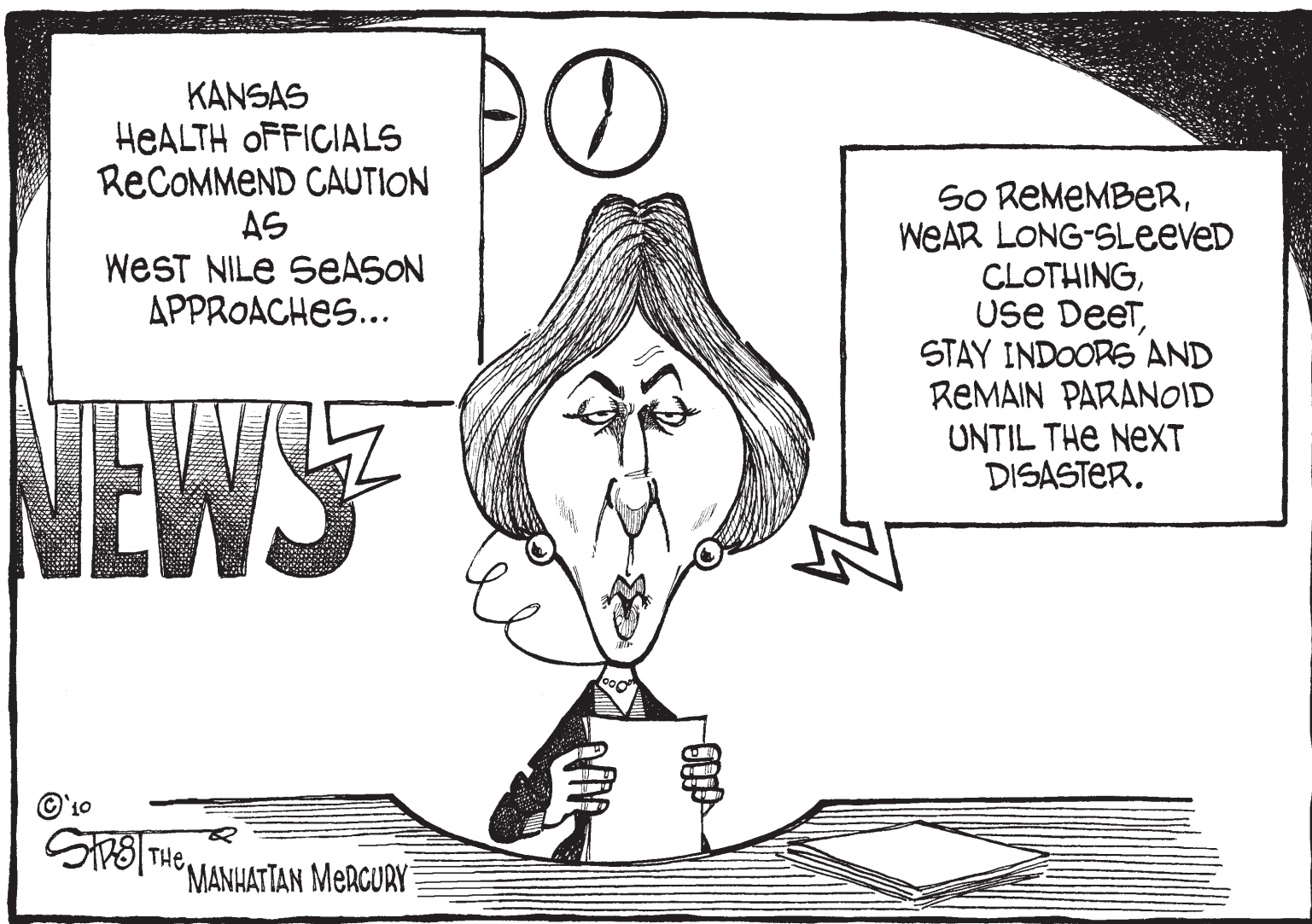
- How long will it take to get the job done, to open a four-lane road across the state?

It took more than 30 years for supporters to get U.S. 81 widened north of Salina. Finally, the project just took off.

U.S. 36 supporters, particularly out west, can expect as long a process. The important part is to begin.

And with completion of the Docking study, that has been done. The rest will follow, but it will require a long-term effort on the part of everyone along the road.

Our children and grandchildren will reap the rewards. — Steve Haynes



## Bird feeding is her deal, I do wild animals

This about Cynthia's bird feeders. They're not mine, though I do watch the show now and then. But she says I write about wild animals and she does the pets.

(Carolyn Plotts has the farm animals, but that's a whole 'nother column.)

This feeding stuff started a couple of years ago. She bought two feeders and hung them in the back yard. Then a couple more. Then the squirrels got into the ones on the tree, so we're down to the pair on the iron double shepherd's crook. No rodent can climb those.

Oh, we've always had humming-bird feeders in Colorado, but that's a given. Hummers are cute and cuddly and everyone loves them. It takes more interest and a bird book to get into the bigger birds.

Last year, she started feeding the big birds in Colorado from another double shepherd's crook out front. We noticed that it takes a couple of days for the bird supply to build up. Maybe it takes time for the word to spread, but spread it does.

And so this week, after she filled the feeders, she complained that the birds were awfully slow finding them. At home, where the feeders offer nearly 365-day-a-year service centers, she has to refill them every couple of days. In the mountains this year, they'd gone a couple of days with hardly a noticeable decline in the seed level.



steve haynes

• along the sappa

Then the next day, she noticed that one of the feeders, the left one, was down more than an inch while the other was still nearly full. We couldn't quite figure this out, and besides, we had company, and it was time to go to the theater.

When we got home that night, we got an idea what was happening.

Standing in the front yard, right in front of the feeder, licking one of the tiny openings, was a full-grown mule deer doe. Now that's some bird.

Bambi's sister didn't want to move, either, but when we parked and opened the doors, she ambled off, watching over her shoulder to see if we would stay.

She hasn't been back as far as we know, but the bird count has started to build. Lots of wrens and sparrows, but none of the big black-birds that crowd the feeders at home. Cynthia got pretty excited the other day when we saw a red-headed house finch. Some plain brown birds that may be female finches, but none of the flashy yellow ones.

Then today, there was a mountain bluebird. It said it must be the bluebird of happiness, but it didn't land at the feeders.

This evening, I spotted a robin on the ground below the feeder. I thought that unusual, because robins seem to prefer bugs and worms to grain. You never see them at feeders.

Then a fledgling, with white-spotted wing feathers and a red-orange breast, hopped out from under the spruce tree behind the feeder, and momma popped a worm in its mouth.

So that's what's up!

I have to admit, while I'd never have bought bird feeders, I can spend as much time watching the continual show out front as Cynthia does. Between the humming birds on the porch and their big cousins out front, there's always something going on. Tonight, a couple of male ruby-throats are staging a dogfight.

And now I notice, she's got another shepherd's crook stashed out by the kitchen window, where we have breakfast, waiting for feeders. So I guess we'll have even more birds.

As long as she doesn't start feeding bears or lions, I guess I can handle it. The cats think it's OK, too, but that's not my department.

Oh ... gotta go. A pair of bluebirds just landed out front. Maybe I can get a picture....

## State has responsibly handled budget crisis

By Governor Mark Parkinson

"I'm proud of how we have handled the budget crisis in Kansas. While many other states are just now making the tough decisions to balance their next year's budget, in Kansas we have already done so. I wanted to write about how we've been able to do this.

"I'm reluctant to write about the challenge State government has faced in the recession, because I know it is nothing compared to what Kansas families and businesses have had to endure. Lost jobs, lost savings, lost businesses and sometimes, lost hope, are found all too often across the state. I'm very aware of this and praying for those who are facing difficult economic times.

"But the job of the Governor is to balance the budget and my goal was to develop a plan that would work for the next five years. Provided we have normal economic growth, we've been successful in meeting that goal.

**Triple whammy created budget challenge**

"Our budget problem was the result of three factors, all of which converged on this fiscal year. Most people realize the first is the recession. It resulted in much lower revenue for the state. To put this in perspective the state had never had more than one year in a row where we had declining revenue. We have now gone through three years of less revenue than the year before. This created an unprecedented challenge.

"The second and third factors are less talked about. The second factor is we dramatically lowered State taxes during the 1990's and 2000's. You may be asking yourself what I'm talking about because you haven't noticed your taxes going down — and you'd be right. We lowered or eliminated taxes most people don't pay. For example we eliminated the estate tax, we eliminated the franchise tax and we eliminated the property tax on machinery used in manufacturing. These actions and others resulted in a loss of over \$1 billion to state revenue.

The third factor is we were spending more money than we were taking in, even before the recession. This was principally because the legislature responded to a court ruling requiring adequate funding for Kansas schools, but failed to find the additional revenue to meet this requirement. So, for two years right before the recession we were spending \$500 million more than we were taking in.



from other pens

• commentary

"The bottom line is the state would have had major budget problems even without the recession. With it, we had a real challenge on our hands.

**How we fixed it**

"I want to avoid a long discussion of numbers because I realize it's hard to follow. But some general things will help. Our State General Fund budget was around \$6.4 billion. We had a \$1.3 billion shortfall.

We filled the \$1.3 billion shortfall by making \$1 billion in cuts and raising \$300 million in revenue from a sales tax increase that will last three years.

"Obviously, my preference would have been to solve the entire shortfall with cuts. No one wants to raise taxes. But, after the fifth round of cuts, I became convinced to cut any further would hurt our public schools, universities, public safety system, roads and safety net.

"Fortunately, 64 members of the Kansas House and 23 members of the Kansas Senate agreed with me. The result is we balanced our budget for 2010 and now have a balanced budget heading into 2011.

I view this as a significant competitive advantage over many states. While they are still in gridlock, or cutting, we protected what we have built up and are moving forward to the future.

**Tough decisions avoid catastrophe**

"There are some who argue our \$1 billion in budget cuts went too far and others who believe our \$300 million one-cent sales tax was unnecessary. What those critics fail to realize is the cost of doing nothing, of delaying the tough decisions into the future, would be much worse.

"Many other states in the country have delayed these painful decisions and are just now starting to pay the price. Illinois is just one example. A July 2, *New York Times* article explains:

"Even by the standards of this deficit-ridden state, Illinois's comptroller, Daniel W. Hynes, faces an ugly balance sheet. Precisely how ugly

becomes clear when he beckons you into his office to examine his daily briefing memo.

He picks the papers off his desk and points to a figure in red: \$5.01 billion.

This is what the state owes right now to schools, rehabilitation centers, child care, the state university — and it's getting worse every single day. This is not some esoteric budget issue; we are not paying bills for absolutely essential services. That is obscene."

"Unfortunately, Illinois is not alone. Last week I spent time with the Governors from New York, Michigan, Washington, Maryland and Pennsylvania. The stories were all the same — their budgets are out of balance and essential services of state government like schools and public safety will likely be cut severely.

When you look at the devastation these states will face and what Kansas could have faced, our decision to make deep cuts early and then modest revenue enhancements, appear to be good decisions.

**Biggest jobs bill I can remember**

"In addition to how we handled the budget situation, what makes me most proud of the legislature is we not only protected what our ancestors had built, but we passed legislation that moves us into the future. The most significant was the passage of a transportation plan to build roads, maintain existing roads, work on railroad lines and airports all over the state. Not only will this create tens of thousands of jobs during the construction phases, it will create enduring economic development once the projects are complete.

"And just to top it off we passed legislation that created a statewide public smoking ban, passed a bill that takes the first step in expanding insurance coverage to include autism, and ended a dispute that will result in nursing homes across the state receiving additional federal funding.

"It was a great session. As you learn about the incredible struggles most other states are having, I hope you take pride in Kansas we have solved our budget challenge. Under any scenario we need the economy to grow. Without growth even the best laid plans simply won't work. In the meantime let's celebrate a legislative session where Republicans and Democrats came together, solved some difficult problems and actually finished ahead of time."

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