

from other pens...

# Oberlin must stop Gateway losses

*Editor's note: Many people from Goodland have been to the Gateway, and the problems there are similar to others in the area.*

The City of Oberlin has a good chance now to figure out how best to run The Gateway, its beautiful but costly civic center.

The City Council should evaluate the operation and try to figure out why the center has lost so much more money in the last couple of years. This should be done with an eye to easing the burden on taxpayers and electric customers, yes, but with the goal of making the center more efficient and drawing more events to town.

No one, not even the council members who have objected to The Gateway budget over the years, thinks the city should abandon the center. If anything, it needs better marketing, more support from the council and staff and a better focus on how to make things work.

The city has always believed it needs to run the catering operation at the center, but that generates much of the loss. This is a good time to re-examine that premise. Many area towns with similar facilities – none of which can match The Gateway – rely on private caterers who presumably make money and generate jobs from the business.

It's true The Gateway has a reputation for good food service, maybe the best in the region, but with the loss expected to hit \$190,000 next year, can the city afford an operation that brings in about \$53,000 a year?

The council worries the city's electric fund may not hold out if demand for other services increase, and the city's power grid itself needs work. Even if the city spends the rest of the Bremer bequest to prop up operations, that money will run out in a couple of years.

Many people complain the city has accumulated too many user-unfriendly rules at The Gateway, perhaps driving off some business. The city once spent a lot of effort trying to bring in events and shows. Competition from new venues, including the new community and senior center downtown, has drawn off some business, however.

As part of a marketing overhaul, the city can and should review those issues and make the necessary corrections.

The Gateway was seen as an engine of economic growth by visionary leaders who pushed to accept a major gift from an area couple to build the center, but the building and its world have changed in nearly 20 years.

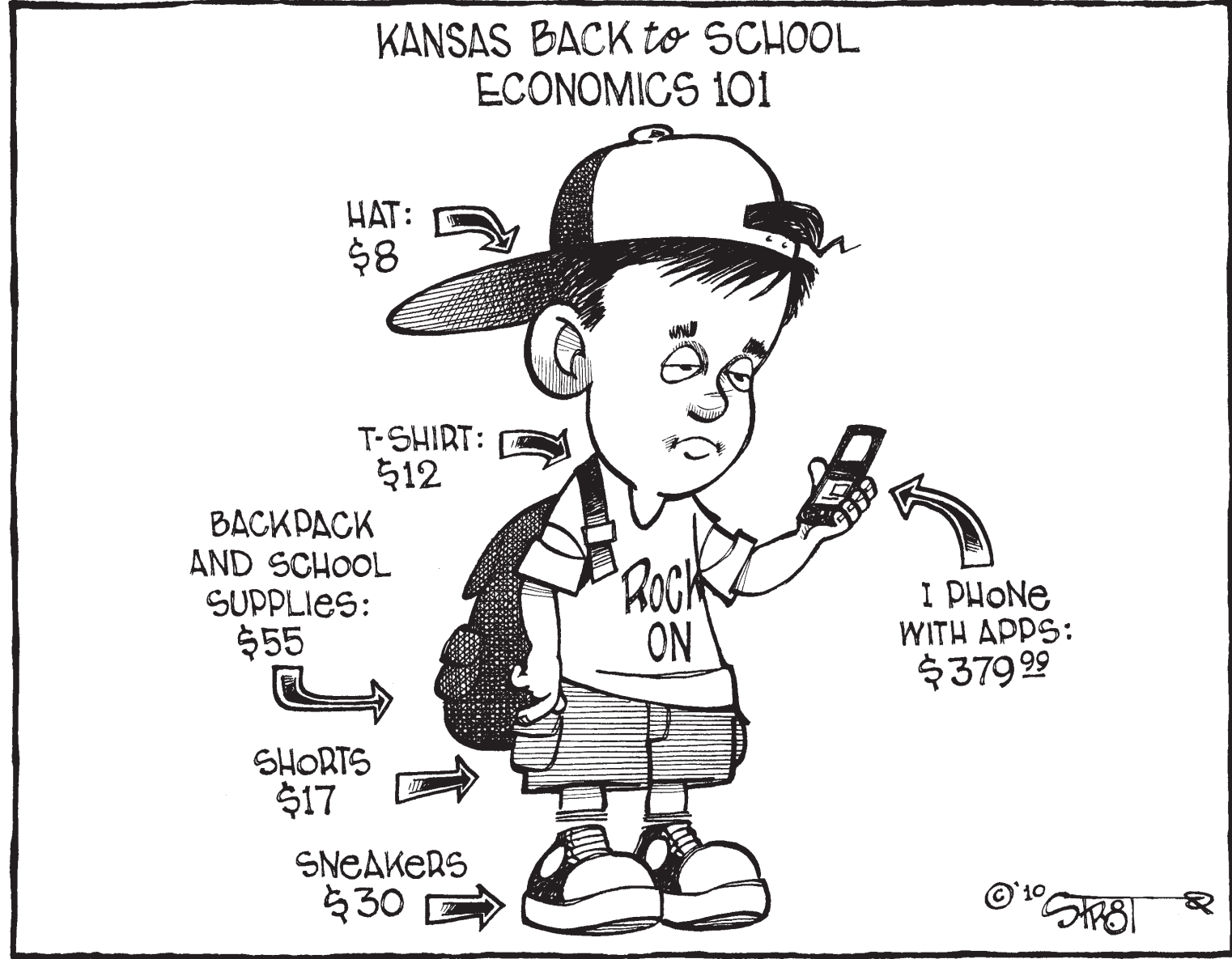
When it was built, the center featured "futuristic" technology, including a room full of computers to connect townspeople with something called the "Internet" and a two-way video communications system billed as state-of-the-art.

Today, people get to the Internet on inexpensive home computers and, with tiny cameras available for little cost, can do video chats around the world from their kitchens. The Gateway has become home to city offices, but the function of a communications portal has disappeared. Who's to say what else will change?

Now is the time for the city to plan that out, even if only for the next five to 10 years of the center's life. As it has from the start, it should focus on bringing as many events to town as possible. If the center needs a new motel to survive, if it really needs the catering service, if there are other ways to make ends meet, this is the opportunity to get it right.

It may be we won't all agree on the answers, but everyone needs to have an idea of what the possibilities are. We'd urge the council to gather the best minds and workers available in the town, form a working group and hash this out, then come up with a plan that will both cut losses and increase the return from one of our finest civic assets.

This opportunity is before us, so why not get with it? – *Steve Haynes*



# Veggiemobile packed, headed west

The veggiemobile headed west last week.

We were starting out on our annual August trip to Creede, Colo., which at elevation 8,800 feet, has a growing season of about six days.

Well, I exaggerate, but I have seen it freeze in July, and by September you can get caught in a snow storm. This is not the place to grow much besides lettuce and spinach, and even those cool-weather crops have to fight like crazy to make a decent season of it.

So when I leave Kansas in August, I gather as much fresh produce as I can to share with my old friends and neighbors.

I started out with my sister. I called ahead and said that, since I was visiting our mother a week before I was scheduled to leave the state, could she please save me some of whatever was growing in her garden, especially half-ripe tomatoes.

She met me on her doorstep with enough zucchini to make about a dozen loaves of bread. We proceeded to the garden and picked every tomato that was even thinking about



**cynthia haynes**  
• open season

turning red. She also sent me off with a cantaloupe and some green peppers.

The cantaloupe didn't make it to Colorado. We ate it for breakfast the next day. But the rest of the stuff did.

Next I hit up friends for cucumbers and yellow tomatoes.

I went out and picked all my yellow squash. For some reason, even though I planted an even number of zucchini and yellow squash plants, only the crook-neck squash made it, but five plants of yellow squash produce is more than enough – especially when I can get my sister to hand over her zucchini or just leave my car unlocked in her yard.

Before we left, I picked green beans, wax

beans, corn, broccoli and yellow squash. I also found a couple more cucumbers, a few ready-to-turn tomatoes and a ton of cherry tomatoes.

We were ready to go.

On the trip, we stopped by a fruit stand in La Junta and picked up onions, a couple more cantaloupe and some Colorado peaches.

We rolled into Creede with a dog, two cats and a car-full of food.

The neighbors were ecstatic, especially with the tomatoes, which never taste as good when they come from the store.

As well as giving a bunch away, I've been trying to cook with as much of my fruit and vegetables as possible. In fact, Steve's turning a little green from all this healthy stuff. I think he's ready to head out for a nice, greasy hamburger.

Come to think of it, that doesn't sound too bad to me, either.

Hold the onion, lettuce and tomato, please. I brought my own.

# ERA: Three state and nothing more

When you're competing against the clock for the Grand Prize, you may not win, but at least you're entitled to your previous winnings.

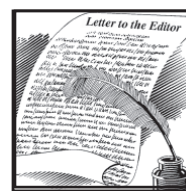
Not so with the Equal Rights Amendment. Congress gave women the nod they were due, but their blessing came with a seven-year hitch. Constitutional Equality was an all-or-nothing proposition to be achieved within seven years. Considering it took 72 years to obtain a right to vote, a time limit for all other rights was doomed to fail.

ERA was first introduced in 1923 by Alice Paul, a Republican, lawyer and courageous suffragist – who was imprisoned, tortured and force-fed to obtain the vote for women. ERA was essential to acquire all other legal, economic, social and political privileges that were customarily the birthright of men only.

"Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex."

Forty-seven years of stagnation prompted 20 courageous Pittsburgh NOW members to disrupt a Senate hearing with homemade signs demanding immediate action on ERA. Civil disobedience could have led to their arrest but ultimately freed ERA from congressional stalemate by an overwhelming majority in 1972.

ERA attracted over 450 organizations. People from all walks of life lobbied, petitioned, raced, marched, rallied, picketed and boycotted for its passage. It was favored by a majority of Americans, scoring an impressive 67 percent in a nationwide survey. Women's groups pressed for an extension but were granted only three more years. Despite 35 states approving ERA, it fell three states short of becoming the 27th Amendment. On June 30, 1982, the campaign launched by Congress was



**from other pens**  
• commentary

ended by Congress.

Does a human's right to equality expire?

My friend's husband told me he supports ERA as long as he doesn't lose his "perks." ERA doesn't apply to the private lives of individuals or business. ERA would eliminate sex discriminatory laws while expanding beneficial laws to both sexes equally. It guarantees the full range of opportunities exist for all individuals based on their talents, capabilities and preferences, and not limited by gender or stereotype. ERA would ensure sex discrimination is guaranteed the same protection as race discrimination. It expands individual freedom by limiting government interference.

Will women earn equal pay for equal work? Will public policies provide greater flexibility for parents struggling to balance work and family? Will government be held accountable to eliminate sex-based hate crimes such as rape and domestic violence? At what point will the Federal Communications Commission and Federal Trade Commission determine that violent, hate-filled images and lyrics directed at women and girls crosses the line of entertainment and free speech to jeopardize peace and security? ERA is the foundation to begin to address these questions.

In exile for 27 years, ERA is finally making a comeback. Congress needs to listen. Citizens did not abandon ERA in 1982 – you suspended our campaign. In case you're unaware, women are working 24/7 both inside

and outside the home. We are making daily sacrifices for our country, our families, our education, our careers and our communities. We simply don't have the freedom to organize in our own interests. We're too busy caring for everyone else's.

In 2009, Illinois, Arkansas, Missouri, Florida and Louisiana reintroduced the federal ERA. All five attempts were defeated. How can a handful of legislators control the interests of 157 million women? Behind closed doors with no media attention.

Article 5 of the Constitution grants Congress the power to amend the ratification process. Will Congress hit the reset button on ERA and require all 38 states again or use its powers to jump start the ratification process for the final three states needed?

With an economy struggling to get back on track – beginning a nationwide ERA campaign requiring 38 states is both unrealistic and unnecessary. Give women a head start and a fighting chance by accepting the 35 states that have already approved ERA and allow us to target the three last states necessary to take that victory lap in 2015. Ready. Get Set. Game On!

*The author is Carolyn Cook, founder of United For Equality, LLC and the DC representative for the ERA Campaign Network. Cook chairs the ERA Taskforce for Montgomery County, MD NOW. She can be reached at (202) 309-1963 (in Washington, DC). The American Forum, a nonprofit, nonpartisan, educational organization, provides the media with the views of experts on major public concerns in order to stimulate informed discussion. American Forum, 1071 National Press Building, Washington, DC 20045*

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