

from our viewpoint...

Legislature caught in partisan ploys

The Kansas Legislature ground to a halt Sunday, nine days overtime and leaving a couple of pieces of important business undone.

The House and Senate did manage to pass a \$14.3 billion state budget which includes tax cuts, a 3 percent cut in overall state spending for the first time in years, and a \$464 million cushion, or ending balance, as required by law.

Another accomplishment was passing a plan to reform the Kansas Public Employees Retirement System, which covers state workers, teachers and educators, and many city and county employees as well. Existing pensions would be protected with new revenue sources, and new employees would go under a different, less expensive plan.

Left undone was the biggest job of the year, drawing new boundaries for all House, Senate and congressional districts as required by federal court rulings and the Constitution. This must be done every 10 years after the federal census so districts have roughly equal population.

The redistricting could and should have been done if a spirit of compromise has prevailed among conservative and "moderate" Republicans and the Democrats, but that was not about to happen.

Halfway through the session, conservative groups announced plans to file candidates against seven or eight more liberal Republican senators in a bid to break the moderate faction's hold on the Senate leadership. Many were popular incumbent House members.

Senate leaders countered by drawing a Senate map that put many challengers outside the districts they'd filed in. Conservatives, such as Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer representing northwest Kansas, were given no say in their districts.

And the fight was on.

Another major failing was to pass a tax-cut plan that even conservative leaders admitted may have been too aggressive. Instead of phasing income-tax cuts in over a decade, the bill which passed both houses would cut everything right away.

Many project the need for big cuts in state spending down the road, though some would see that as a good thing. It's an issue the next Legislature likely will have to revisit.

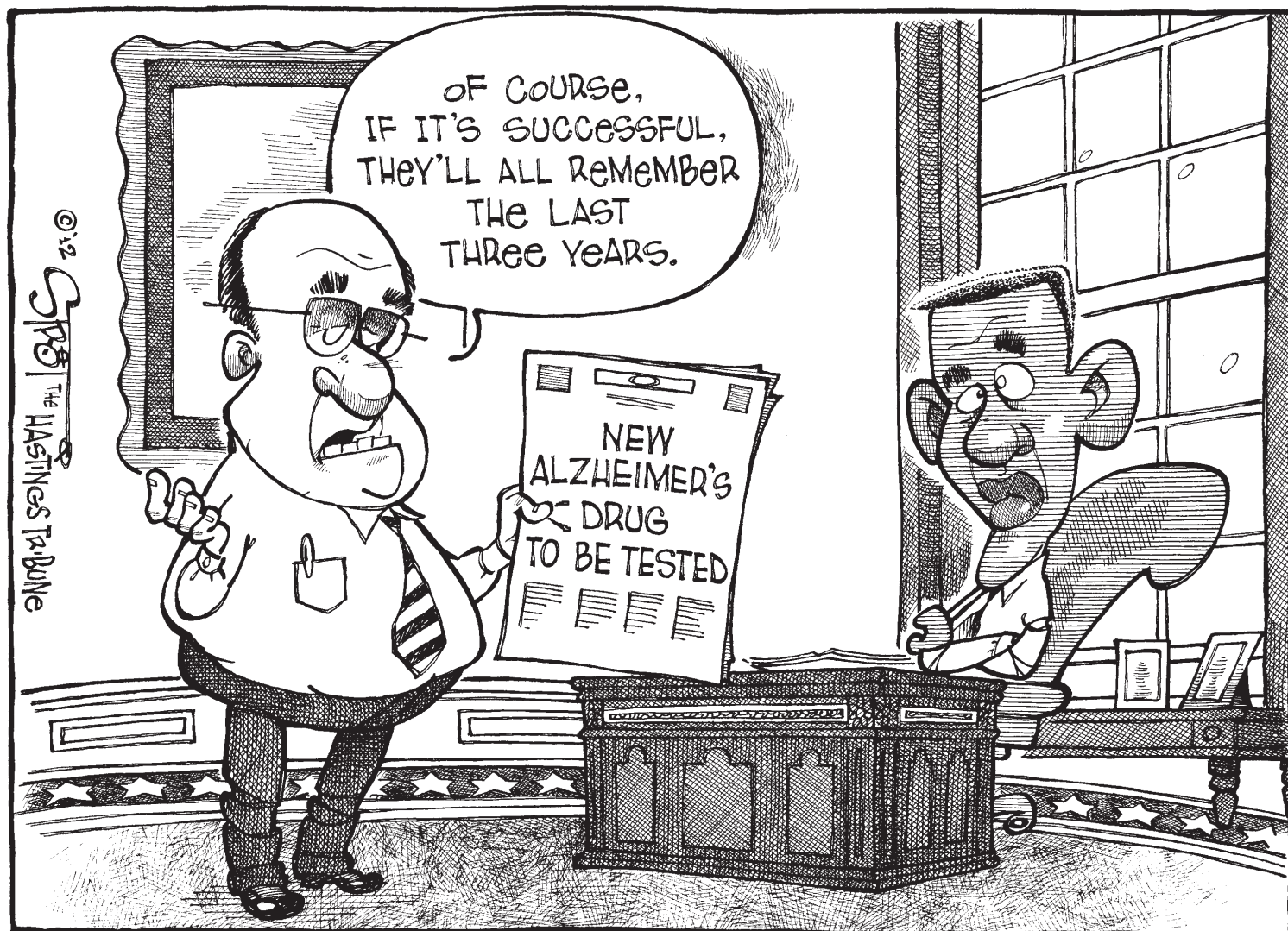
The redistricting now apparently will fall to the U.S. District Court, where a three-judge panel could wind up drawing the lines. The only other alternative would be a special session but that might only delay the inevitable.

As it is, the August primary may have to be put off, no matter who draws the districts, since the June 15 deadline to file for state and local office is fast approaching.

Who will wind up in control of the Senate is anybody's guess, but voters in some districts may not cotton to what will be seen as a power play by business—the challengers were recruited by a group tied to the state Chamber of Commerce—and the governor.

How the new district will affect the outcome is anybody's guess at this point. Legislators on both sides may wish they'd gotten along better.

While the session undoubtedly produced some accomplishments, failing to handle the big issues is not a point of pride. Voters and citizens should not be pleased with either side for that. — Steve Haynes



Farm bill affects everyone

As Congress writes the upcoming farm bill, Kansas farmers and their contemporaries across our country will tell you that maintaining an efficient, effective and affordable crop insurance system is their No. 1 priority.

You'll hear the same story throughout the Midwest and much of the country, where farmers believe federal crop insurance provides them with an effective risk management tool — especially when they are facing losses beyond their control.

Federal crop insurance reduces taxpayer risk, makes hedging possible to help relieve market volatility and provides lenders with greater certainty that loans made to producers will be repaid.

Farmer-stockman Keith Miller of Barton County recently attended a farm bill hearing in Dodge City held by U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp. More than 200 people gathered in southwestern Kansas, where Miller was one of 10 panelists who described what they would like to see in the next farm bill.

"Protection and enhancement of crop insurance programs ranks as the No. 1 priority for a long list of farm organizations in the 2012 farm bill process," Miller testified.

The longtime Kansas farmer said he be-



Insight this week

• john schlageck

lieves agriculture is a highly erratic industry influenced by variables beyond the producer's control. Farmers can use top-quality seed, fertilizer, chemicals and the best management practices and still not be able to control the weather and the markets. Profit margins make it critical that farmers have access to a strong, viable and flexible risk management program.

The U.S. Senate Agriculture Committee recently approved its version of the 2012 farm bill. Sen. Pat Roberts helped spearhead the bipartisan effort that would strengthen and preserve the crop insurance program.

"I'm proud, because we've worked hard to produce not the best possible bill, but the best bill possible under difficult circumstances," Roberts says. "We've performed our duty to taxpayers by cutting deficit spending while at the same time strengthening and preserving the programs so important to agriculture and

rural America."

The Senate plan would reduce this nation's debt by an estimated \$23 billion. Few if any other committees in Washington have made the same kind of cuts during this difficult budget climate.

Even though the farm bill's commodity title receives the lion's share of news coverage, the conservation section is equally important to the future of this nation. Everyone must do his or her share to protect and preserve this country's natural resources or there will not be enough land to farm.

Conservation impacts everyone. We all eat, drink water and breathe air. With the ever-increasing world population, keeping our food engine operating at peak performance has never been more essential.

While most believe the next farm bill is most important to agriculture, it impacts everyone in this country — rural and urban. There is a limited window of opportunity before the current farm bill expires. It's key for work on this vital piece of legislation to continue. Each and every organization with a vested interest must continue to work to accomplish its priorities and move this 2012 farm bill forward.

Grandpa's babysitting adventure

We did not eat barbecue while we where in Georgia.

We played with the baby, went shopping with the girls, went out for sandwiches, for fine dining for the eldest daughter's birthday, and Cynthia and the girls went to book club, which claims to include dinner, but seems to me to mostly involve wine.

I don't know much about book club. Since Lindsay was at the meeting and Brad was refereeing a soccer match, I was babysitting. And I was kinda busy.

Taylor is 2 plus two months, and she goes to a daycare/preschool place most days. She loves playing with the other kids and learning a little, and she loves to be picked up by mom. They have a routine: mom brings a sippy cup of juice and a snack, or else.

That Sunday, we'd all spent the day at her Aunt Felicia's pool, where she had a breakthrough of sorts: After more than a year of not liking water, she played in the pool all evening. We all did. We all had a great time. But this would be the first time I'd been left along with Taylor.

Anyway, we picked Taylor up and brought her back home before time for book club. The girls went off, leaving me in charge, with instructions to take Taylor to gymnastics. I had juice, snacks and her ducky blanket, just in case. She whined a bit when Mom left, but then we were fine.

On the way over, I realized later that I hadn't been issued a spare diaper, but that worked out OK.

Now gymnastics class for 2-year-olds is not for the faint of heart. It takes place in a sort



steve haynes

• along the sappa

of a zoo presided over by Miss Carol and a couple of teenage keepers. Every half hour or so, they get a new crop of kids, different ages and skills.

The place has trampolines, mats, pads, balance beams, all sorts of gymnastics stuff. The kids have to wait until time for their class, then run in and gather round for some stretching and games. Then they cut 'em loose.

Miss Carol tries to work with each child during the half hour, and a few of them do walk the beam or do something with her. Most just run around and jump and do whatever they want. It's pretty wild, but at least when I was there, no one got hurt.

Taylor did a lot of bouncing and tumbling and running. I think she liked it.

On the way home, I gave her her juice and something called a Grammy Sammy, an organic prepared graham-cracker-yogurt-and-fruit snack. She was properly restrained in the back seat a few minutes later when I noticed the sammy was gone. I figured she'd dropped it.

"Where's your sammige?" I asked. "Where'd it go."

"Mouth," was her reply. I guess she was hungry.

When we got home, we played a little, then it was time for bed. Or at least, I was authorized to get her ready for bed and try to get her to go to sleep. That, I was told, was getting harder and harder to accomplish. Just getting her to put pajamas on was next to impossible.

I got here to lay still, or relatively so, the same we we'd gotten our girls to lay still for diapers and pjs at that age: I gave her her evening bottle of warm milk.

This is a LOT easier today, since you can just pop the bottle in the microwave for one minute, not heating water on the stove, and the temp is always just right.

The, we read a book — "Eggs and Ham, Papa, Eggs and Ham" — and tried to get her to go to sleep. She got up, moved things around, played with stuff, then started to escape. I was about to put her back to bed when mom and grandma arrived back from Book Club.

Mom gave the kid another bottle, and that put her to sleep.

All in all, I think I did pretty well for a first-time grandpa sitting with a 2-year-old. I survived, anyway.

About Book Club, I never heard much. I'm told it involved a certain sexy best seller that neither President Obama nor I knows anything about. And we're sticking to our story.

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