

from our viewpoint...

## Are the boys, girls listening in Topeka?

What did Kansas voters tell the boys, and girls, in Topeka? For the most part, we think, they seem pretty happy with the way things are going in this state.

Except for our neighbors to the east, where the Republicans lost a Senate seat when a cute redistricting ploy backfired, incumbents fared well.

So the message, first of all, seems to be, "stay the course." Most major changes came in the primaries, when a couple of liberal Republicans were beaten by conservative challengers. Conservative groups put thousands of dollars into some races, and they had some successes.

If there was any message, it was not a pro-growth, raise-taxes message.

There was no demand for a tax increase, for schools or other state programs. It was anti-tax conservative Republicans who made the gains. Democrats and liberals in the GOP lost ground.

The Republican leadership did not fare well in a well-financed drive to unseat young Josh Svaty, a Democrat who took a House seat south of Salina two years ago. Their guy lost badly after a sometimes contentious race marked by dirty tricks.

As the state's economy gains steam, there will be a blizzard of requests for more money from nearly every state program. From social services to schools, highways and law enforcement, there is tremendous pent-up demand for more money.

While state income is on the rise again, and exceeding official estimates, there isn't nearly enough to go around.

Schools will continue to get priority for money, but colleges and other agencies are positioning themselves with hands out.

Everyone has legitimate needs. Every agency has a lobby to support it. Every program thinks it should get the spare change.

It will be a long spring as legislators try to sort through the requests and demands. No one knows what the courts will do with a lawsuit over school finance. A district judge estimated that the state should put another \$1 billion into the school budget, but of course, had no suggestions as to where to get the money.

It ought to be clear that the taxpayers whose pockets would be tapped are in no mood to pay. If anyone — school supporters, the judge, school boards or superintendents — thinks otherwise, it'd be interesting to put the issue to a statewide vote.

That's not how Kansas works, though. The voters have already spoken, and our guess is their voice will be heard. There'll be no massive tax increase next year, and state programs will have to fight over the scraps that fall to the budget room floor.

We will survive, and so will most state programs. — *Steve Haynes*

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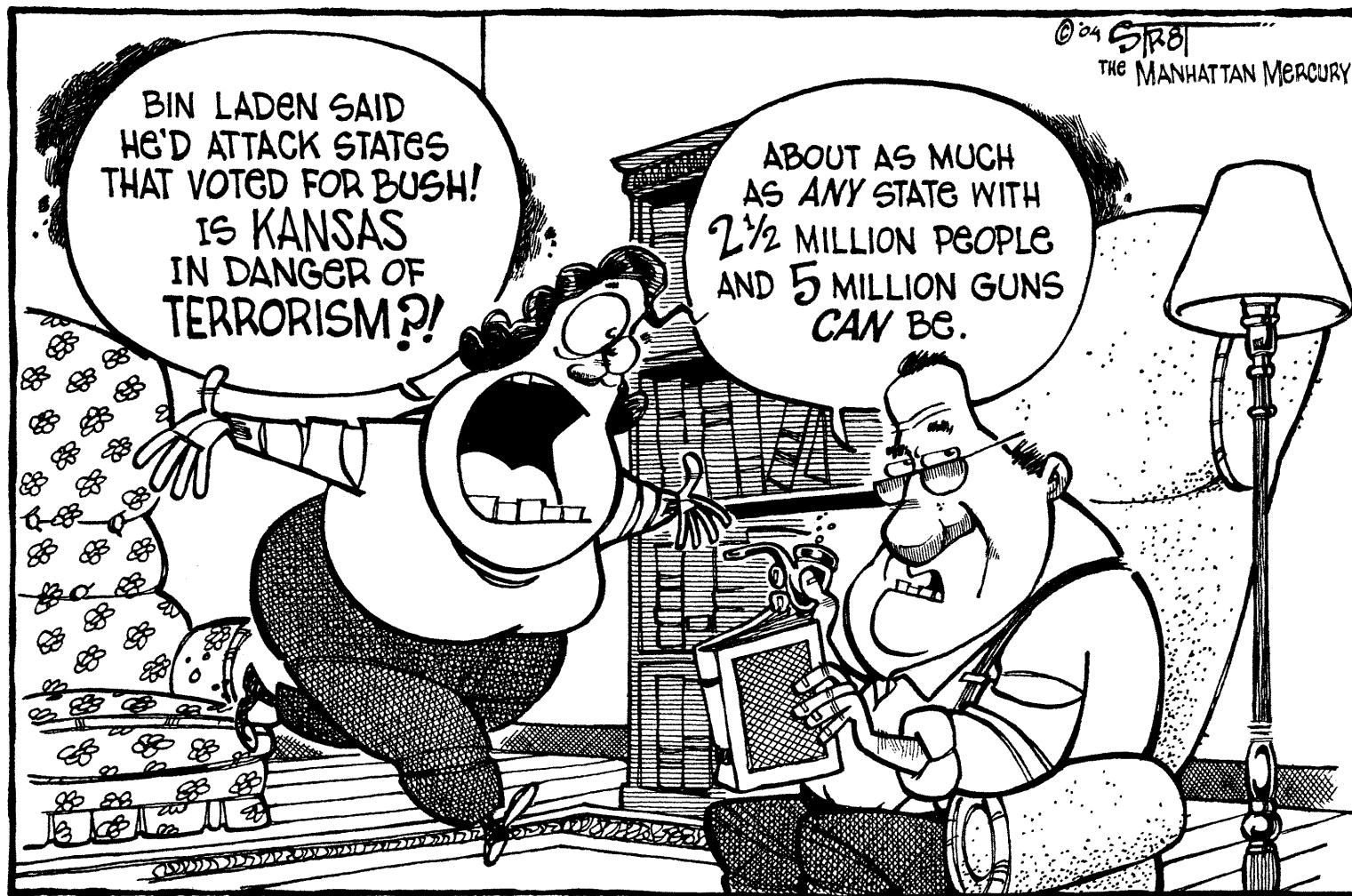
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## I had a nice visit with my son in Germany

I don't know about you, but I just returned from a vacation in Germany.

A son and his family live there. Since it was late in the fall, I was concerned it would be pretty cold, but it wasn't. Cloudy and rainy, yes, but not unbearably cold.

We had a great time together. Spent one night in a castle, enjoyed a five-course dinner and a unique breakfast. It's always an adventure when you eat food in a foreign country, isn't it?

Thank goodness my son has picked up enough German to communicate. He may not always say it right, but he can make himself understood. We probably should admit it is often due to the graciousness of the German people.

Whenever I travel out of the United States, it is so much fun to see how different cultures live. And I always wonder why Americans seem to think that we have to change them so they will be more like us. We just can't seem to grasp the concept they enjoy who they are — just as they are. They are proud of their heritages — as we are of ours.

We are the ones who are consuming most of the earth's resources. We are the ones dependent on oil. We are the ones who buy pre-packaged foods instead of more wholesome prepare-at-home meals. On trash day in Germany, you can tell where the Americans live — just by the number of trashcans on the curb!

On previous trips to Frankfurt Airport, I was intimidated by guards carrying semi-automatic weapons, and I secretly thanked God such things were unnecessary in our country. This trip was different. I saw more armed guards in our airports than I did at Frankfurt. That made me sad.

It was interesting to be there over the time of our presidential elections. The American dollar only buys 3/4ths of what the Euro buys. The rate of exchange is terrible. Some people blame it on George W. Bush's unpopularity in Europe. His re-election probably won't help. Most of the grumbling, of course, centers on



**lorna  
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• commentary

the war in Iraq.

Germany will not send troops to Iraq. But they are helping us in one way. They have their troops guarding our bases in Germany, so our personnel can be released for service in Iraq. It was quite a shock to pull up to our American bases to find guards checking our ID's and speaking German. All sorts of mental images flood in for anyone who can remember World War II.

I'm always struck by how much people of different countries are alike, and I always wonder how we can mistrust each other so much. God is God of all.

We should celebrate our differences, instead of trying to make the whole world like America. Traveling in Europe, Asia or Africa wouldn't be much fun if we found it was just like Wichita, Cincinnati or Atlanta.

And God is good in so many ways.

The day after I flew out of Germany, it began to snow. The first day it snowed eight inches and was supposed to snow for two more days. Thank you God, at this Thanksgiving time, for all the blessings you've given me — including holding winter off until my trip was ended.

## Beyond organic: Making wise food choices

Imagine you're standing in the produce section of your local grocery faced with a variety of apples. You want to make the best choice, for the good of your family, farm workers and the environment.

Do you buy the organic Galas shipped from across the country or the Granny Smiths grown conventionally but nearby?

The decision is not easy.

First, consider organic. Organic farming, because it shuns synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, is friendlier to the environment than conventional practices. And evidence is increasing that organic food is better for you.

Organic produce on average contains about twice the essential minerals of conventionally grown food, according to a study published in the Journal of Applied Nutrition. And a University of Washington study found that children eating conventional food had six to nine times the pesticide exposure of children who ate an organic diet.

It is no wonder we have made organic food the fastest growing sector of agriculture. Sales of organic food are rising by 20 percent a year.

But organic is not without problems. As organic sales have grown, organic farming has moved away from its small family-farm roots and is becoming industrialized. The organic carrots I buy at Wal-Mart were probably grown on a large scale, in a system which depends on fossil-fuel mechanization, underpaid farm labor and imported organic fertilizers. How sustainable over the long run is the diesel tractor plowing up the soil? How fair are the labor practices? And the chicken litter fertilizer might be organic, but how far was it shipped before it was spread on the field?

This distance question highlights a problem of our entire food system, including organic: our love affair with airlifted, railroaded, tractor-trailored grapes in December or tomatoes



**prairie  
writers circle**

• jim minick

in February. Often this produce comes from Mexico or Chile or some other faraway place, and its cheap price belies the waste of energy used to transport it to our tables.

"Eaters might begin to question the sanity of eating food more traveled than they are," quips Joan Dye Gussow, author of "This Organic Life." Noting that a calorie is a unit of energy, she says: "It costs 435 fossil fuel calories to fly a 5-calorie strawberry from California to New York."

The burning of fossil fuel to move food means more globe-warming greenhouse gases. My organic carrots from Wal-Mart might do my body good, but in eating them, I'm harming the larger body of our earth, and that ultimately circles back to everyone's health.

Now consider locally grown food. It solves the problem of shipping food long distances. The Granny Smith from your nearby orchard only has to travel a few miles, in contrast with the 1,000 to 2,000 miles that most of our food travels from field to plate. And because of this short commute, local food — organic or conventional — is naturally fresher and tastier.

Another advantage of buying locally is food security. Today's centralized system processes food in huge factories and moves products in large quantities, creating attractive targets for terrorists looking to contaminate as much food as possible. A decentralized system of small local farms and processors would be much harder to disrupt.

Finally, buying local food means keeping our dollars circulating in our own communi-

ties.

So next time you are in the supermarket pondering the organic Gala or the local Granny Smith, consider how you might help create a food system that is both organic and local. Seek out a farmers market or vegetable subscription service that provides a weekly bag of produce. Meet your local farmers this way. Encourage them to use organic methods and local sources of compost and other soil amendments. And seek out the small growers, who don't have to exploit labor to gather their harvests.

If you enjoy quality food and a healthy planet, consider what you eat, where it was grown and how. Let's choose both organic and local if possible, so we can begin moving our food economy in ways that benefit our health and the earth's.

*Jim Minick teaches at Radford University in Virginia and also farms. A poet and essayist, his latest work, "Finding a Clear Path," will be published in 2005. Minick is a member of the Land Institute's Prairie Writers Circle, Salina.*

## Letter Policy

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## garfield

