

from our viewpoint...

State should decide who spends money

The Kansas Legislature will have to decide next year what, if anything, to do about the state Supreme Court. The court way overreached its powers when it ordered the Legislature to spend specific amounts on schools.

The issue is not how much money schools need, but who decides how much is enough.

The court says it will decide, but that's bad for democracy. Unelected judges are supposed to decide our disputes and interpret the laws, not spend money.

The court based its decision on a phrase in the state Constitution which says the Legislature shall make "suitable" provision for schools. The court defined suitable as it was outlined in a consultants' report the Legislature itself had ordered.

The Legislature later decided that the consultants' figures were a little more than suitable.

"Never mind," the court said. "Get more money."

On the death penalty, too, the court has been out of step with Kansans. The court went out of its way to make certain that a troop of murderers escaped lethal injection.

If the Legislature decided that the death penalty was proper, and several juries agreed to apply it, what place has the court to make its own rules here?

Good question.

In the old days, we used to elect Supreme Court judges in this state. The good government movement saw that as a political nightmare, dragging the courts into places they ought not to go.

Maybe the do-gooders were right, but the present system, where the governor picks judges from a list provided by a nominating panel, has let the court get way out of tune with the people.

What to do?

Well, electing district judges, as most Kansas counties still do, seems to work pretty well. It's rare for a judge to lose his job, but it can happen if one becomes out of touch.

We'd go for that.

A plan to have the state Senate pass on judicial appointments, much as the U.S. Senate does, seems a half measure, but it would be better than no action.

Whatever it decides on the court, though, the Legislature needs to take back control of the school budget and start making decisions about how to spend state money.

That's the Legislature's job, after all. The members cannot afford to default on it again. — Steve Haynes

NEWS ITEM: CATEGORY 5 BUDGET CRISIS LOOMS OVER THE NATIONAL HURRICANE CENTER.



This traveling is getting ridiculous

I realized that I haven't been home for six Fridays in a row.

I like to travel, but this is getting ridiculous.

I'm blaming the whole thing on Steve's National Newspaper Association job. That's probably not true but, hey, it's good enough for me.

We started out at the Lake of the Ozarks for the Missouri Press Convention. The next week it was the National Newspaper Convention in Milwaukee. Then we were in Lincoln, Neb., to honor a couple of friends being inducted into the Nebraska Newspaper Hall of Fame. From there, we went to Emporia for the reopening of William Allen White's home as a museum and then we go to Washington for a National Newspaper Association board meeting.

Right now, I'm in Creede, Colo. This one I can't blame on any newspaper, friend, association or even my husband. We are here to enjoy the mountains for a few days and close up our house.

As winter approaches, we have to remove every bit of liquid, drain the pipes and have someone put antifreeze in the toilets.

We need to clean the place, shut off the electricity and take home all food in the refrigerator and anything in the cupboard that might attract mice or insects.



cynthia haynes

• open season

The shutdown takes us most of a day, but don't tell my staff that. I've been telling them it takes most of a week for 10 years now and they're still falling for it.

The trees have mostly shed their leaves here in Creede, so we took off for a day in Taos, N.M., and for a ride on the Cumbres and Toltec Scenic Railroad on Sunday. It was the last trip of the year and we were hoping to see some leaves.

The mountains were spectacular on the train trip, even though the cottonwoods close to Taos have still not turned to the golden yellow that is so pretty. Maybe next week, but we'll be in Washington.

Taos is a funny old town. The pueblo has been there for centuries. You can go and visit it, but they charge you \$10 to get in. It's the only town I know of that charges admission.

The town of Taos itself grew up near the pueblo as a Spanish settlement, an outpost of the fron-

tier and later as an art colony where you can find everything from the worst paintings in the world to classic Santa Clara pottery and Georgia O'Keefe prints.

We were meeting a friend, Guy Wood, for dinner. Guy and his wife Marcia owned a newspaper in Colorado back when we lived here. They left, buying the paper in Angel Fire, N.M., more than 20 years ago. We see them occasionally at press meetings over the years and our friendship has remained.

Marcia was in Santa Fe at a sorority reunion, but Guy drove over the mountain to have dinner with us. It was a mellow evening as a rare rain-storm gently showered the town and ruined my hairdo.

I didn't care. Taos, like most of New Mexico, is in the desert. All rain is welcome here.

Before long, we'll be heading back home for our first weekend there in weeks and weeks. It will be a long time before I see Creede, Taos or the Woods again, but I'm anxious to work in my yard and deal with the piles of junk collecting in the corners of my house.

Maybe if I click my heels together three times...

Empty promises are the new black

Raging Moderate

By Will Durst

It didn't matter how great was the ovation that greeted the brooding Michael Chertoff as he expanded his line of carefully embroidered denials, or how intricately the chiseled John Roberts fashioned his impenetrable suit of murky conviction, or how darkly were woven Donald Rumsfeld's comfortably reliable patchwork deceptions.

It was abundantly obvious that everyone in the known universe (Washington) was waiting for the Big Pump to drop. That the balloons signaling the end of Fashion Week at the White House wouldn't fall until Himself, the DUBYAH, unveiled his Gulf Coast rhetoric onslaught. To say Karl Rove, the creative director at House of Bush, didn't disappoint, is akin to inferring that Karl Lagerfeld has an impish sense of humor.

Commandeering an oppressively desolate Jackson Square as a backdrop, President Bush swaggered briskly to his podium resplendent in a starched blue work shirt echoing his watery theme in the middle of a breathtakingly beautiful Big Easy night.

As a dramatically staged response to critics who had heaped derision on the House's slapdash and untailored response to Hurricane Katrina, the results were nothing less than stunning. The work shirt was a masterly touch, featuring sleeves impeccably rolled up, undoubtedly the result of one of the many master sleeve rollers Rove reportedly has on call from the fabric slums of Milan.

Introducing a new line of fresh nonsense can be an exceedingly tricky business, but the commander in chief was up to the task as he deftly paid homage to the classic material and traditional patterns of past designers such as Johnson and Roosevelt, offering up the simple and timeless elegance of the promise of government help.



will durst

• raging moderate

He even playfully dipped into the trademarked "Emperor's New Clothes" family line, doling out rustic — albeit purely ornamental — anecdotes and one-liners. From his first crooked smile to his halting farewell, this was an exercise in white space and a triumphant return of the empty but well constructed suit we've come to know and love during times of crisis.

Liquid and pliable and fluid and inexact, the sludge coming out of his mouth cleverly matched the toxic moat surrounding the Ninth Ward. If one color stood out, it could be called ochre, auburn, burnt sienna, or as it is probably referred to in the House of Bush: good ol' brown. But not "Brownie." You could see it in his speech. Although his breeding and discretion kept him from describing the river of hu-

man feces that floated past former parade routes, his verbal weave was oddly reminiscent of it.

Perhaps in an attempt to play off George's Wild West heritage, Messrs. Bush and Rove consciously manufactured audio reverberations of the litterings of a bullpen. His target audience, a group of well-screened and thoroughly devoted fascististas, was simultaneously stunned and dazed by the audacity and humility of it all.

It was a night of fusion; a celebration of the sober alongside the frivolous, and if anybody could pull off this attempt at a return to business as usual by way of ridiculous theater, it was George W. Bush.

Whether this season's line can catapult his fortunes back from his last disastrous attempt is of intense interest to the House of Bush's comrades and competitors. Has he introduced a new era of nostalgic deficit spending, or is the runway smoke machine set on "11"? Still your beating heart: time will tell.

Political Comic Will Durst thinks the runway smoke machine is set on "11." E-mail Will at willdurst@sbcglobal.net.

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