

from our viewpoint...

Session begins without answers

The 2006 Kansas Legislature opened Monday without answers to any of the big questions:

How much money will the state have to spend?

How much will schools need?

How much will the Supreme Court force the state to spend on schools?

How much should schools cost, anyway?

And how much of the \$125 million legislators borrowed from the road fund will they put back this year?

Will it take a tax increase to pay for schools without losing part of the road program?

It'll be a couple of months before leaders know exactly how much money the state should have this year, but tax collections are running ahead of projection by the millions.

It sounds like a big pie, but a lot of people are lined up to eat it. Schools stand first in line, but they'll have to fight for whatever they get. Other groups are just too hungry after years of recession and, well, schools getting all the money.

No one knows exactly how much schools need, but they want it all. Schools have pressured the Legislature with lawsuits, which led to a Supreme Court victory. Last year, they got more than \$290 million extra. This year, they'll move to grab whatever money shows up.

Monday, the Legislature received a report on questions it asked about how much it costs to run schools and why. No one believed the report would result in less school spending.

How much money will schools need?

More.

How much money will the courts give schools?

Even more.

Yet there will be great pressure against a tax increase. Some business groups, in fact, are pushing for tax cuts. That is going to make it hard to find cash for other spending, including social programs and highways.

With the secretary of transportation touring the state, threatening to ice projects in all areas unless she gets the money she needs, it's going to be tough to resist refilling the highway fund. Our guess, though, is the Legislature will juggle the books again and hope an improving economy will give it even more to spend next year.

Kansas got so far behind during the recession, without making the cuts the state should have, that it'll take years to get out of the hole.

And by that time, there may be another recession.

Once again, there's not much support for a tax hike, especially not in an election year. That means the Legislature will scrape and squeeze to get by, hauling out the smoke and mirrors as required.

No matter how much comes in, it'll all go out. And once again, state spending will grow, as will our record debt. It's not a pretty forecast, and not much improvement over recent years, but there you have it. — *Steve Haynes*

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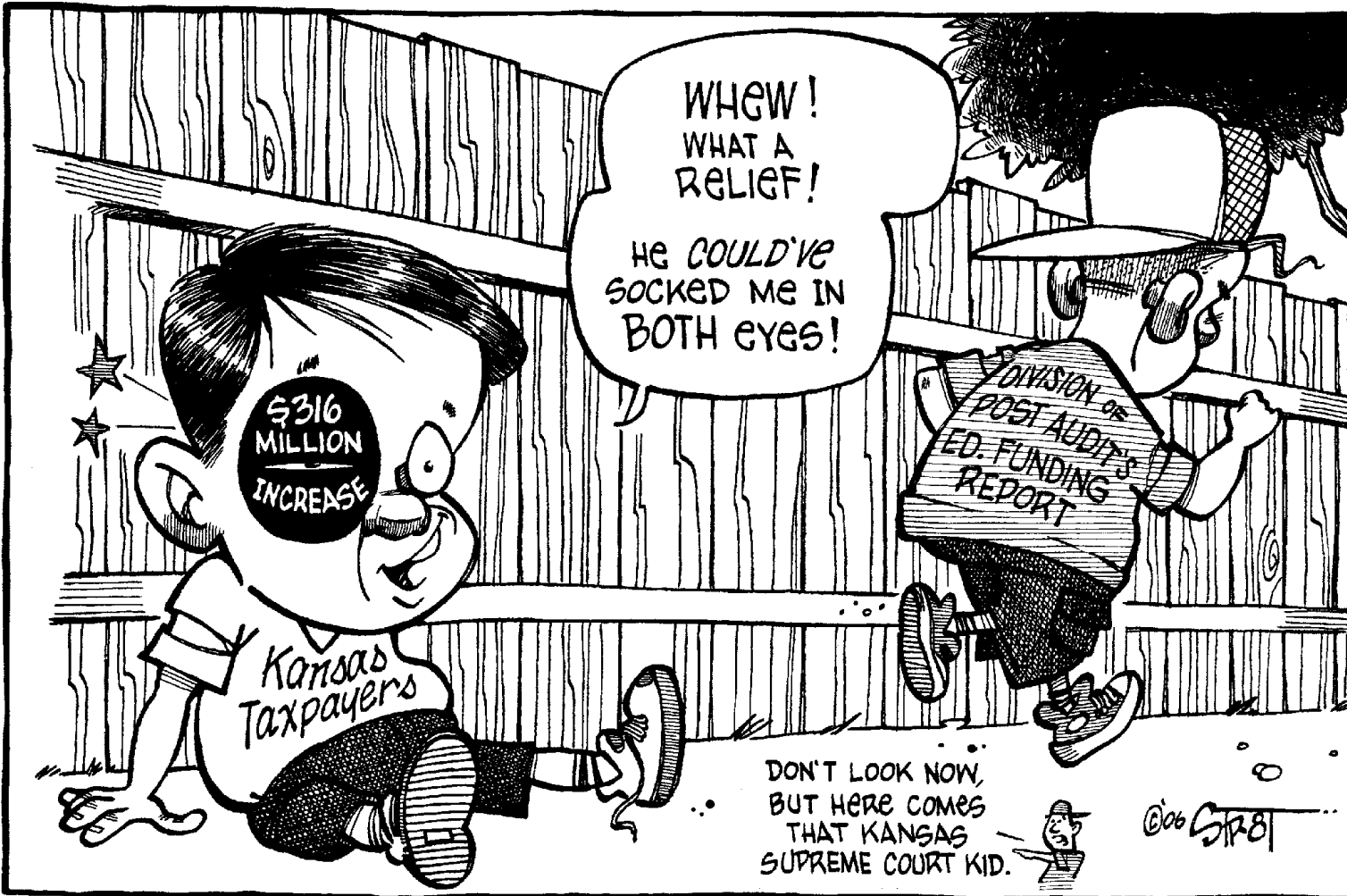
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Notices could help fill community needs

Sometimes a news story or a magazine article tells you about a wonderful idea.

The *Denver Post* had one of those last month.

It was on the inside — really on the inside, Page 24A jumping to Page 27A. But it struck me as a great idea and that could be modified for northwest Kansas.

The story told how the food bank in Boulder posts a little white sign on its door telling people what it needs the most.

“The little white sign sitting modestly in front of the Emergency Family Assistance Association’s office is like a catalog of community need,” the story says. “Corn. Toothpaste. Toilet paper.”

What a great idea. Just a little notice telling people what people need.

People in this country are incredibly generous. They give to help hurricane victims, terrorist targets, cancer sufferers, sick children and homeless cats and dogs. They give food,



cynthia haynes

- open season

money, bedding and support, whatever someone asks for.

But, they have to know there is a problem and what is needed.

Now, it probably wouldn’t do much good out here to put a note on the food pantry’s door. Most of them are run by churches and a note on the door will only reach a small congregation.

However, if the people who run the food pantries and the people who run the groceries got together, they could help each other and lots of others.

How about if the food pantry organizers gave the grocers a list of their most-needed items

First term completed; reflect on past year

Darin and Kati (Amos) Curts are serving as WorldTeach volunteers in the People’s Republic of China. WorldTeach, affiliated with Harvard University, has an agreement with the Hunan Provincial Department of Education and Foreign Affairs to place volunteers as English teachers throughout the province. Darin and Kati are teaching in Yueyang, Hunan, PRC, at Yueyang Ba Zhong (Yueyang #8 Middle School) for a year.

January 1, 2006

Xin nian hao (Happy New Year)!

We have completed the first term of our school year and are one vacation month away from the halfway point of our stay here in China. As we pass into 2006, we used the holiday the same way our friends and family at home did. We reflected on the past year, how we’ve gotten to this point and what has changed.

Focusing on China, we remember how excited we were when we found out we had been accepted into the program to teach abroad. Then came the fear and anxiety that came as departure time neared and with the realization of just what we were getting into. When we reached our destination, curiosity and amazement eclipsed anything else, and we found ourselves stimulated by the new sights, sounds and smells.

Since then, we have tried to constantly push the envelope, exploring farther each time we begin to feel comfortable. The first sight of our squat-toilet was unnerving, and we were reluc-

tant to use such an alien fixture. Now, using one in our home or in public seems no different than using an American toilet back home. The lack of a clothes dryer seemed a terrible inconvenience in the beginning, but it has taught us to plan ahead and wash clothes soon enough to allow drying time. Watching the weather, we now know to do laundry when the sun is out, since cloudy days don’t make for good dryers.

Sterilizing our tap water before we drink is now second nature, and the recent toxic spill contaminating our water supply didn’t change our lives much, since we have become so accustomed to drinking bottled water. The process for heating our shower water with a propane heater has forced us to adapt to occasional cold-water washings, and the need to boil water to wash dishes has forced us to use fewer dishes when cooking and eating.

After reflecting on how well we’ve been able to adapt thus far, we are now looking to the future, to what we would like to accomplish during the remainder of our time here. Whether you believe in “resolutions” or not, we have thought of a few things we’d like to focus on in our time remaining before we leave.

First, learn more Chinese. To this point, we have been content with our basic knowledge of survival Mandarin. We know the characters for “men” and “women” to distinguish restrooms, and we can speak greetings, numbers, some modes of transportation and several destinations. However, before we leave, we would like to be able to hold an entire conversation with a stranger. One of our original

each week? The grocery could put that list on a small table with those items so that people could pick a couple of things up when they do their shopping. Then they could put the purchased items into a box at the store, take them to the pantry or leave them at the newspaper office. We’d be happy to help. Heck, we could even print the list if someone brought it to us.

If the grocery doesn’t have room for a table, a note on the door would help those wanting to help others know what is most needed.

If the grocery wanted to go even further, it could put out bags of needed items with prices on them — \$5, \$10.99, \$17.29 — so that people could just pick up a bag of most-needed products and pay for it with their other purchases.

The stores would benefit from the additional business and the food pantries would get restocked on stuff that go quickly.

It’s a win-win situation, but it will take cooperation and someone making the first move.

goals in coming to China was to establish some friendships and get to know more about a different culture. The best way to do this is through conversation, and that’s what we’re hoping to improve. In doing so, we hope to continue to build friendships with China natives and serve as informal ambassadors for the United States. Plus, the idea of coming back to America and communicating some with non-English speaking Chinese is one thing we’d really like to be able to do.

Our biggest resolution, though, is to maintain our exploring curiosity and continue to see and do new things as long as we have this chance, while we’re here in China and even back home. We’ve been given a great opportunity to see and do things we never would have imagined. The children we work with every day are unique and talented. We’ve been fortunate to help them with their English, while they help us learn more about ourselves every day.

We have seen some beautiful sights and been to amazing places. We want to continue to push ourselves with new adventures. As a testament to our resolution, we’ll begin right away with an exciting, month-long journey to Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia. It is likely to be a nerve-wracking, stressful and absolutely wonderful time!

As we begin our new year, we wish all of you the best in 2006 and encourage you all to take advantage of life as it comes your way!

Zai jian!

Darin and Kati Curts

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