

from our viewpoint...

## Bill would restrict tax paid lobbying

A bill filed this year with the Kansas Senate raises some interesting questions about how your tax money is spent. The bill would restrict local governments from spending taxpayers' money on lobbyists. As you'd expect, lobbyists for local governments have come out against the measure.

Imagine that. Backers claim cities, counties and school boards sometimes spend tax money to push causes that their voters don't like and wouldn't back. One example they give is a bill to limit government's power to take private land for redevelopment, a controversy which is raging across the nation. A lot of voters want to restrict "eminent domain" powers, they say, but cities and their lobbyists aren't supporting the cause.

The bill isn't aimed at cities' power to condemn land for roads or power lines, but at the ability, which has grown in recent years, to take land and turn it over to private developers for a "higher use."

"They're not real helpful," Sen Tim Huelskamp, chairman of the Local Government committee, was quoted as saying after a hearing on the bill. "On one hand, there's a high percentage of people wanting eminent domain reform, and on the other hand, lobbyists are up here saying something else."

It's not fair, backers say, for government to take tax money from people and spend it on something they oppose. Don Moler, executive director of the League of Kansas Municipalities, and a lobbyist for the group, sees it differently. He says cities and counties need to have a voice in Topeka.

"Without public interest lobbyists, who represent local governments and their citizens," he said, "the field would be left completely open to monied private interests who employ numbers lobbyists to advance their private agendas."

While that's partly true, it's not the whole story. Citizens can and do affect the process by lobbying their representatives themselves. Anyone can call, talk to a legislator, get on the witness list for a bill.

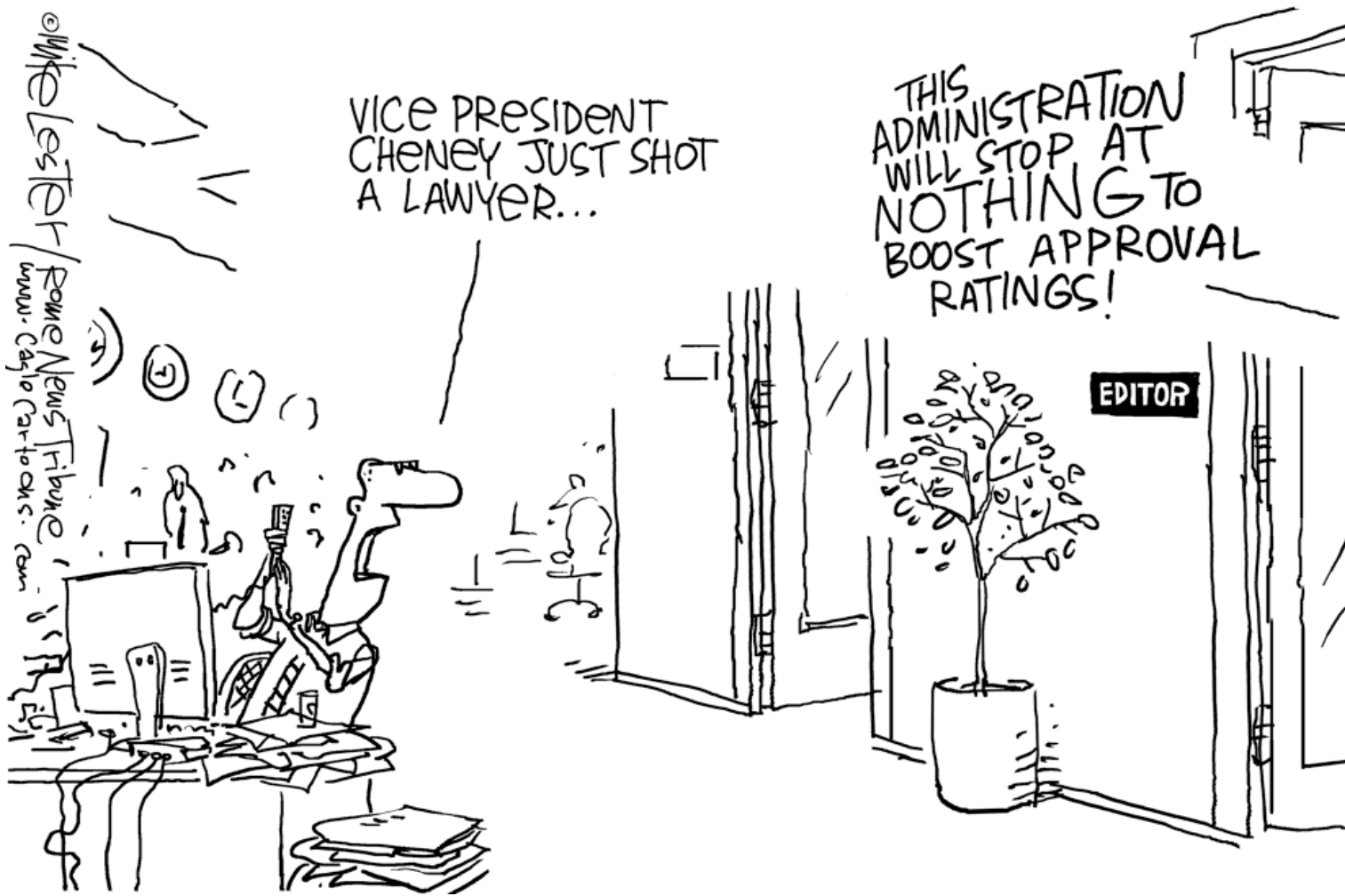
Some days, there's nothing more noble about government lobbyists than there is about big-oil representatives. Both are capable of arguing against the public good.

The bill wouldn't affect associations like the municipal league, anyway, says its sponsor, Sen. Kay O'Connor of Olathe. That's too bad, because the league, the Association of Counties and the school boards are some of the most powerful lobbies in the state.

All run on public money donated by member governments, but they seldom ask ordinary people how they should vote.

O'Connor says she mainly wants to keep local governments from lobbying for more money, but that's only part of the problem. There's a host of issues where government lobbyists often take positions counter to good government. Issues of secrecy and public information, tax changes, government powers — all sometimes pit cities and counties against their citizens.

It's unlikely that real reform will come anytime soon. The only defense we have — and it's not always easy or cheap — is to keep an eye on the people in Topeka ourselves. And cry foul when they get out of line. — *Steve Haynes*



## Stopping the fleecing of America

NBC Nightly News has a popular segment called "Fleecing of America" where they feature outrageous abuses of taxpayer dollars. Recently, one use of taxpayer dollars — earmarks — has been under much scrutiny.

Earmarks — often called pork — are funding requests made by lawmakers for pet projects in their home states. Some earmarks are necessary and practical, like those used for economic development, health care facilities and access to clean drinking water. Unfortunately, some are not. In the last 10 years, the number of earmark projects has skyrocketed from 1,200 up to 15,000 per year. The cost to taxpayers for these projects was \$27 billion last year.

These alarming numbers can be attributed to the way earmarks are added to legislation. It has become commonplace for earmarks to be attached to large spending bills in closed-door, late-night sessions. This lack of transparency gives lobbyists and a select group of Members



**jerry moran**

• in congress

of Congress too much power over the process. Following these closed-door sessions, an entire spending bill is presented to Congress, and lawmakers are forced to simply vote yes or no without the ability to review and challenge these projects. Funding for these earmarks is then used to entice legislators to pass bills that spend too much money.

I have sponsored legislation to put accountability back in the spending process. The American people deserve to know how their money is being spent, and elected representatives deserve the opportunity to advocate for responsible uses of taxpayer dollars. For years,

earmark projects have been included in attached reports. Since Members of Congress are only able to amend the actual text of a bill, not what is attached in reports, they are left without any ability to judge the worthiness of these projects.

The legislation I have sponsored forces earmarks to be included in the actual text of a spending bill. This provides legislators with an opportunity to evaluate and remove frivolous earmarks, which will reduce bloated spending bills and allow legislation to be passed based on merit rather than arm twisting. This also diminishes the ability of lobbyists to get earmarks that serve special interests at the public's expense.

It is time to change the way we do business in our nation's capital. Being good stewards of taxpayer dollars requires transparency in the spending process. We must stop this fleecing of the American taxpayer.

## 2005's greatest hits

The Middle East, partisan politics, big government, freedom, energy, media bias — those debatable perennials were the big issues of 2005. What follows are highlights from Q&A's with some of the top pundits, professors, experts, and politicos we interviewed this year.

### The Middle East

The U.N. not being on our side had nothing to do with Iraq. It was a function of the French position on Iraq. Period. The French were opposed to our position on Iraq, start to finish. And that had everything to do with France's economic interest and its long-standing, tight relationships with Saddam Hussein.... — *Jeanne J. Kirkpatrick, former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations*

I don't trust the post office to deliver the mail and all of a sudden you get conservatives trusting government to create a brand new society in a place that has remained unchanged for thousands of years. — *Tucker Carlson, MSNBC pundit*

Certainly there's not a mass movement in favor of American imperialism. But whether you call it an empire or not, that's the reality for the American role in the world today. — *Max Boot, columnist*

I don't think there is any doubt that we will see a weapon of mass destruction used by the bad guys. It could be tomorrow, it could be five years from now, but it's bound to happen. — *Arnaud de Borchgrave, journalist*

### Politics

Grass-roots citizen involvement is the only way to get really large-scale change in Washington. — *Newt Gingrich, author of "Winning the Future"*

I'm not pleased at the direction our party is headed on fiscal responsibility. We don't look very conservative at all. — *Jeff Flake, Republican congressman from Arizona*

In the long run, it's the ideas, it's the great figures, it's the inspirational figures who define a political party and shape in people's mind an image of what that party is and what it stands for. — *Tony Snow, Fox News Radio*

The instinct of some conservatives has been



**bill steigerwald**

• newsmakers

to dismiss some of these people. For example, to think of MoveOn as crazy hippies, or to think of Michael Moore as a kook, or to think of George Soros as an eccentric billionaire. But these people created something pretty powerful, and they have a long-term plan. — *Byron York, author of "The Vast Left-Wing Conspiracy"*

The traditional black leadership that came up out of the Civil Rights Movement — every single one — are on the wrong side of history for black Americans. They want socialism. This is a capitalistic society. In order to be successful here, you better get into the capitalistic end of things. — *Star Parker, columnist*

I'm really impressed with the public. The electorate really sees through all this crap. They understand free trade. They understand low, flat-rate taxes. They understand sound money. The electorate is really cool. I'm superbly impressed by democracy — and I'm not natively that way inclined. — *Arthur Laffer, economist and father of supply side economics*

### Media

It used to be a lot of the major executives and stars were open, unapologetic Republicans. John Wayne, Jimmy Stewart, Clark Gable were open campaigners for the GOP. Today, it is extremely rare to find people in Hollywood who will have anything to do with the Republicans. — *Michael Medved, talk show host*

"South Park" is unlike anything that precedes it in the history of popular culture.... Its politics are very strange and atypical of what you would find coming from Hollywood. It's a show that has mocked hate-crime legislation, environmentalism, multiculturalism, even abortion rights, and a host of liberal celebrities.... — *Brian Anderson, author of "South Park Conservatives"*

### Energy

It really is an issue of national security and national competitiveness more than it is a desire by major oil companies to go into ANWR. They can produce energy in any place in the world. They are not the strong proponents of opening ANWR. It's people like me who want to see \$1.5 billion every month stay here in the United States instead of being sent overseas to buy oil in the future. — *Gale Norton, secretary of the interior*

High prices are in a way their own solution. The high crude oil prices are inspiring new projects to extract known reserves of petroleum that were too expensive to extract economically in the past at lower prices. — *Trilby Lundberg, gasoline guru and publisher of the Lundberg Survey*

### Freedom

All authority ... should be challenged, should be questioned. Because government is the negation of freedom, when it does anything, it shouldn't be presumed valid. It should be presumed invalid. — *Judge Andrew Napolitano, author of "Constitutional Chaos"*

Historians have certain presidents they like — and you can tell the presidents they like because they are always the presidents that centralize power and increase the power of the federal government. — *Thomas Woods, author of "The Politically Incorrect Guide to American History"*

The Patriot Act actually increases rather than decreases the protection of constitutional rights, because it has more requirements for judges to issue warrants or subpoenas, so there is more inter-positioning of judicial authority than there was before the Patriot Act. — *Edwin Meese III, former Attorney General of the United States*

I'm a libertarian. But that's kind of an easy stance to be if you're a humor columnist, because you're tending to make fun of the government and the powerful. — *Dave Barry, humorist*

Bill Steigerwald is a columnist at the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review. E-mail Bill at [bsteigerwald@tribweb.com](mailto:bsteigerwald@tribweb.com).

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e-mail: [star-news@nwkanssas.com](mailto:star-news@nwkanssas.com)

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**nwkansas.com**

N.T. Betz, Director of Internet Services

([ntbetz@nwkanssas.com](mailto:ntbetz@nwkanssas.com))

Evan Barnum, Systems Admin.([support@nwkanssas.com](mailto:support@nwkanssas.com))

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