

from our viewpoint...

# Gambling vultures circling in Topeka

As the pressure mounts in Topeka to scrape up more money for schools, the vultures are circling.

Gambling supporters, backed by big casino operators, want to open up state-owned operations in Kansas City and southeast Kansas. Slot machines would be allowed at dog tracks in Wyandotte, Sedgwick and Crawford counties, plus Dodge City if anyone wants to build at track there.

This is a bad idea and a poor way to finance schools, for a lot of reasons:

- Gambling turns out to be a tax on people who can least afford it. It's not rich folks pulling the levers at prairie casinos. The high rollers are in Las Vegas, where the glitz is.

- No, it'll be the poor, the needy and the addicted who finance Kansas gambling.

- Gambling sets a poor example for our kids. How can we tell them it's bad to gamble to excess, then — with a straight face — use gambling money to pay for their schools?

Maybe we should tax drug sales to support schools. There's more money in drugs, and the dealers would like an "in" with the kids.

- Gambling would set our squeaky-clean state government up for major corruption.

Under the plan about to surface, a casino operator would pay \$35 million up front and at least \$200 million to develop the resort. A quarter of the state's take goes into a fund for property tax relief. The state's 75 percent — estimated at \$300 million — would go into the general fund for schools.

Tracks would pay the state \$15,000 per machine up front for 7,000 slots, but owners could deduct that from future taxes.

State officials would have to decide which companies get these lucrative contracts. If the casinos can afford this kind of taxation, there will be millions bet and millions lost.

And those millions make for a shaky situation when a few officials make the decisions. The potential for corruption is great; operators in this industry have a long history of corruption.

- Someone has to lose half a billion to a billion dollars a year to make this scheme work. It won't, for the most part, be tourists.

It'll be us losing that money. Most likely, it'll be a disproportionate share of those Kansans who can least afford it who pay this tax.

This is, as one legislator described it, "a lose-lose" deal for our state. It benefits a few people owning the casinos, but not the bulk of the population.

Well, maybe we could give school kids free field trips to the casinos.

They could see where the money comes to pay their teachers, put a few nickels into the slots and pull the lever.

The results should be a lesson to them — but we doubt it.

Let's not gamble with our state's future. Legislators, vote no. — *Steve Haynes*

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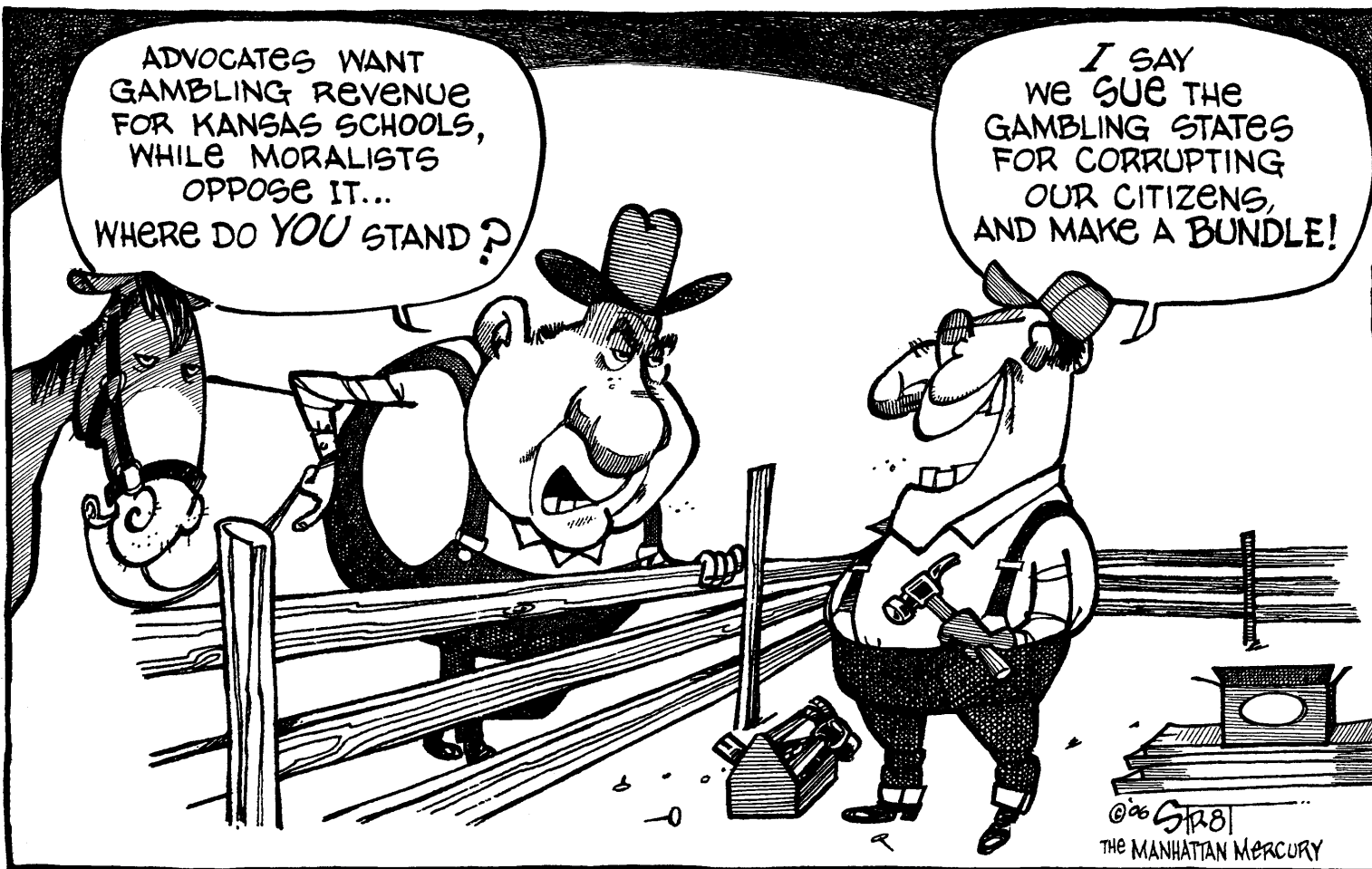
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## Riding toward a fall



michael  
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- making sense

After Jimmy Carter gave away the Panama Canal, my father, Ronald Reagan, grabbed hold of the issue and never let go. He rode that horse all the way into the White House.

President Bush needs to think about that because if he fails to back down and at least give the opponents of the Dubai ports deal a chance to be heard, the Democrats are going to mount this gift horse and ride it into the White House just as my Dad did with an issue Jimmy Carter handed to him.

The way the Bush people have handled this matter from the very beginning is simply appalling. And coming on the heels of the vice president's inept handling of the Harry Whittington accidental shooting — which gave impetus to charges that the administration plays its cards too close to its chest - the Dubai deal gives even more validity to the charges. Because it was done behind closed doors, with nary a word to the leadership on Capitol Hill, it comes out looking like a bumbled attempt to put one over on the American people.

The deal would allow Dubai Ports World of the United Arab Emirates to run ports in New York, New Jersey, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New Orleans and Miami. Last week the Dubai government-owned company bought the London-based Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Co., which had been managing the six ports.

It may well be the arrangement has great merit and could prove beneficial to the U.S., but as a political matter it is an unmitigated disaster — and one which could cost the GOP dearly

in both the 2006 and 2008 elections.

Here we have an issue — national security — that is uppermost in the minds of the American people, largely because the president has hammered away at it and used it brilliantly to portray the Democrats as weak-kneed in the war on terror and on matters involving national security. In one fell swoop the president throws it away, and even worse allows the Democrats to appear stronger in defending the American people than he and the Republicans have been.

It's worse than stupid — it's suicidal.

The great majority of Republican leaders on the Hill recognize this. They find themselves surrounded by such anti-war Democrats as the appalling Sen. Charles Schumer suddenly waving the flag and asserting his shock over the president's apparent willingness to risk the nation's security by allowing Dubai, with its alleged ties to al Qaeda, to run some of the nation's biggest and most important seaports.

South Carolina Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham recognized the deal as a political disaster, calling it "tone-deaf politically at this point in our history" and added that "we certainly should investigate it. I'm not so sure it's the wisest political move we could have made.

Most Americans are scratching their head wondering why this company, from this region, now. I don't think now is the time to out source major port security to a foreign-based company."

The Democrats may be crazy, but they are not stupid. They recognize that the President has handed them the reins and boosted them into the saddle of the Dubai horse, and they know that at the very least they can use it to ditch an issue that has plagued them. They now look stronger on the national security issue than the president and his party.

New York's Rep. Peter T. King, chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, told the Associated Press that the takeover terms are insufficient to guard against terrorist infiltration.

"I'm aware of the conditions, and they relate entirely to how the company carries out its procedures, but it doesn't go to who they hire, or how they hire people," he said. "They're better than nothing, but to me they don't address the underlying conditions, which is how are they going to guard against things like infiltration by al Qaeda or someone else? How are they going to guard against corruption?"

The president has been given 45 days to step in and either kill this deal or hold it in abeyance until Congress has a chance to check it out. He better get moving.

Mike Reagan, the eldest son of the late President Ronald Reagan, is heard on talk radio stations. Email Comments to [mereagan@hotmail.com](mailto:mereagan@hotmail.com).

## When night is no longer dark

If we lift our eyes to the heavens at night, most of us see a hellish glow. The night sky of our cities is no longer dark, but rather a fiery, diffuse dome.

Even in the country, the horizon is smeared pale orange, the mark of towns and cities as much as 100 miles away. Astronomers call this "sky glow," a euphemism for light pollution, the artificial light that escapes and trespasses the heavens.

Two-thirds of the world's population no longer experience truly dark skies, including 99 percent of people in the continental United States and Western Europe, according to a study published by the Royal Astronomical Society. For many, the Milky Way has simply disappeared.

Satellite photos show the East Coast lit up at night from Boston to Washington. The Great Lakes are outlined in lights — you could draw their shorelines. Interstate highways are traceable dotted lines, each dot a floodlit exit.

Many people fear the dark and think light protects them, but an Australian study found that outdoor lighting does not deter crime. Instead, it points to doors, lights the way and creates deep shadows for hiding. Naturally dark places actually can be safer.

Even so, we floodlight empty parking lots — that's "flood" light, an overflow. The International Dark-Sky Association calculates that wasted lighting equates to 45 million barrels of oil in the United States per year.

If bulbs aren't recessed or shielded, light trespasses. When you see your neighbor's yard



prairie  
writers circle

- janet kauffman

light, the bulb hanging like a head, or see rows of cobra-head street lights with protruding lenses, that's unshielded light — light trespass.

Light pollution isn't just wasteful and ugly. It's not just a loss to astronomers and those who love to lie on their backs to watch meteor showers, the Milky Way or Venus rising.

Light pollution causes real harm. It can disorient animals and disrupt complex ecosystems, affecting behaviors of many species — their foraging, reproduction, communication.

Baby sea turtles hatching at night from beach nests move toward light. Under natural dark skies, that's the ocean. But beach front buildings turn light and dark around. The hatchlings, disastrously, walk the wrong way.

Recent studies show artificial light even affects water quality. Many aquatic invertebrates feed only in the dark, at night rising to graze on algae. With even slight increases in artificial light, fewer individuals rise and feed. Algae populations explode and water quality degrades.

Some efforts are under way to reduce light pollution. A few cities have begun dimming lights on high-rises during fall bird migration — Toronto, New York and Chicago, where a Field Museum study showed bird mortality was reduced by 80 percent. That's one step, for

one part of the problem.

In southern Michigan, Lake Hudson Recreation Area was declared the nation's first Dark Sky Preserve in 1993. All park lights are fully shielded and run on motion sensors. But a small preserve can't protect the night sky's full arc. A glow from nearby towns spreads like bright jam along the horizon. A gas station down the road uses banks of unshielded mercury vapor lights. They send a blistering white cone into the sky all night.

In 2001, Flagstaff, Ariz. — with its Lowell Observatory and eight telescopes — became the first "Dark-Sky City," with fully shielded municipal lighting. Other towns have followed with lighting ordinances to protect dark skies.

We all need to start turning off, and turning down, artificial light. Put an off-switch on yard lights. Use motion sensors. Insist on lighting that shields, recesses, aims, dims.

We can protect and recapture the heavenly dark of night skies. Remember the pleasures of starry nights? Think back ...

Many years ago, I went ice-skating with my sons on a dark Christmas Eve. It was new moon, no moon, but the stars were brilliant, and the ice on the pond was glassy. We skimmed on black ice, and within it were tiny sparks — the reflection of stars! For hours that night, we skated the sky.

Janet Kauffman lives in Hudson, Mich., and works with Environmentally Concerned Citizens of South Central Michigan. She wrote this for the Land Institute's Prairie Writers Circle, Salina.

