

from our viewpoint...

# Debt quadrupled in a dozen years

Apparently, no one has noticed — or much cares — that Kansas' per capita state debt has quadrupled in just a dozen years.

The tab hit \$4 billion in 2004, or \$1,400 for every man, woman and child in the state. In 1992, the figure was just \$363.

In 12 years, a Wichita State University study says, Kansas went from 43rd in state debt per person to 17th.

Most of the money went into concrete, asphalt and steel for new roads, as the Legislature turned to bond issues to finance new construction. It's faster, and sometimes even cheaper, to build big projects right now with bonds.

You borrow the money and pay for construction at today's prices, not an inflated future price. To a degree, that makes sense, but the more you borrow, the less money there is left in future years.

As payments on that debt come due, it'll be harder to pay for highways in the future. Already, the Legislature has stripped the road fund of sales tax money promised for coming years.

State Budget Director Duane Goossen was quoted as saying he's "not worried" about the debt. Kansas has a strong credit rating and plenty of capacity for more borrowing, he said.

That's good to know, but there remains the fact that someone has to pay this debt off.

Guess who? Worse yet, the Legislature has been using more expensive revenue bonds for state borrowing. That's mostly because they can be issued without a public vote.

General obligation bonds, backed by the "full faith and credit" of the state, would be cheaper, but anything over \$1 million would require a statewide vote.

It's easy to see why the Legislature went with revenue bonds. The state borrowed \$500 million in one bond issue just to stabilize the employees' pension fund.

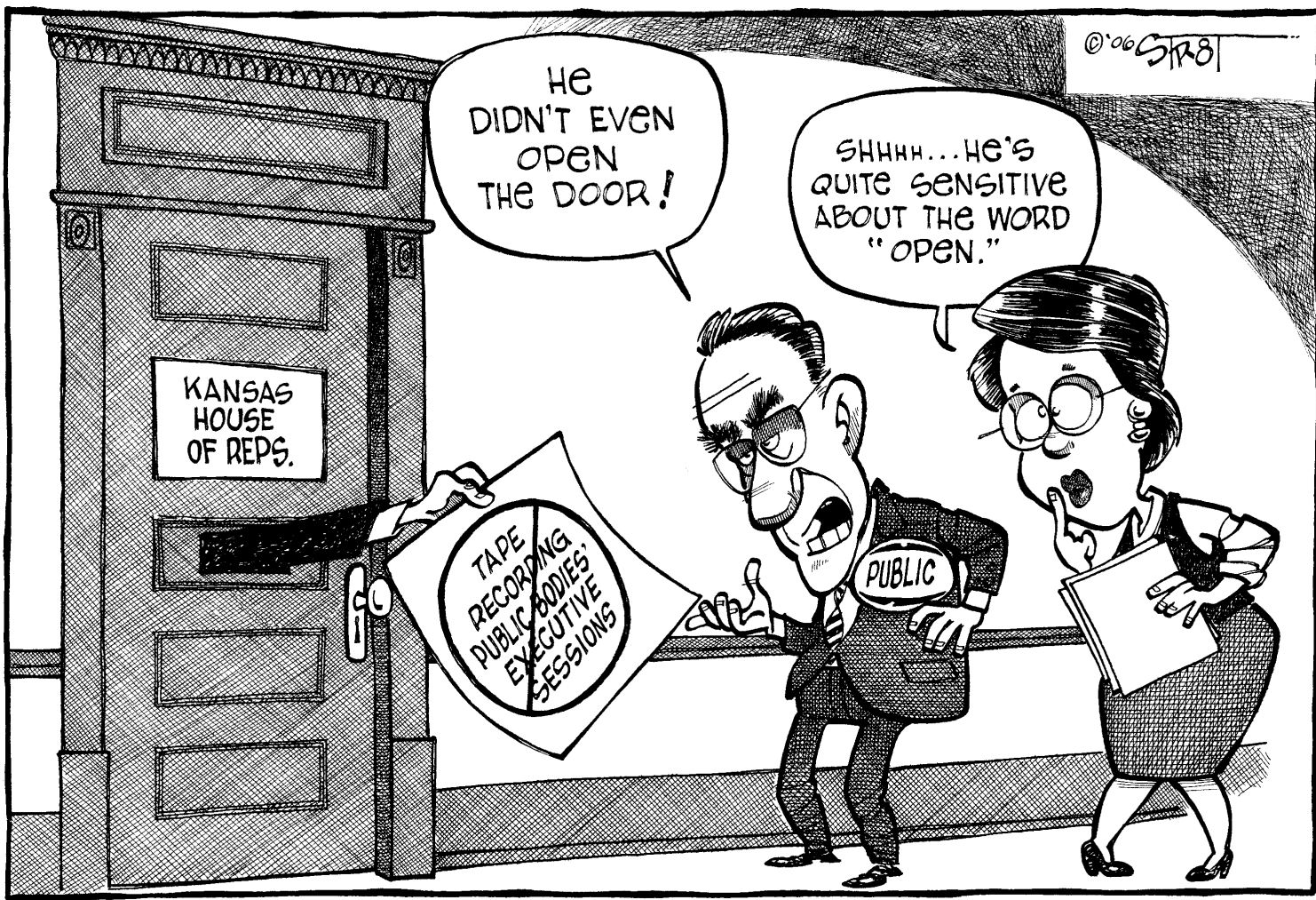
It's unlikely voters would have approved that loan, let alone the several issues for road building. With revenue bonds, once the governor signs the bill, the state can just go ahead and sign for the debt.

Now, though, there's a move afoot to refinance the bonds, or at least part of them. Lowering the interest rate just one point could save \$4 million a year.

The state could issue general obligation bonds, at a lower rate, and call an election to approve the issue. Some legislators think people would vote for that.

"It's like refinancing your house," said Sen. Phil Journey, a Wichita Republican. "You're crazy if you don't do it."

What's crazy is spiraling, ever-more-expensive debt. It remains to be seen whether voters will buy that logic. — Steve Haynes



## Look out, here comes Al

Like a completely refurbished "pre-owned vehicle," Al Gore seems to be positioning himself to Hillary Clinton's left and as greener than John Kerry for a run at the 2008 Democratic nomination for president. His slogan might well read "reelect Al Gore."

The former vice president's slashing attacks on the administration and his stalwart, if misguided, opposition to the Iraq war leave him without the complications and complexes that will devil Clinton as she seeks to appeal to the unforgiving left of the Democratic Party.

And Gore may be a man whose time has come in his party. It was he who warned of climate change and predicted its consequences. Hurricane Katrina was just a fulfillment of the prophecies Gore wrote about in his late-1980s book *Earth in the Balance*. He has been an energy-conservation nut for years, and his obsessions with alternatives to oil will play better and better as we come to realize how our addiction to oil has led us to dependency on the dealers of this particular drug — Iran, the Saudi royal family and Hugo Chavez.

The Democratic base's anger at Gore's defeat in 2000 was assuaged by the worse Kerry defeat of 2004. The idea that he was an incompetent candidate has been replaced in Democratic iconography by the idea that he was cheated out of the presidency. The hiatus has healed his reputation with the base in much the same way that the negative rap on Nixon for losing in 1960 was ameliorated by the Goldwater wipeout of 1964.



**dick morris**

● commentary

History indicates that candidates who won the popular vote but lost in the Electoral College have all come back to win revenge in subsequent elections. Andrew Jackson, cheated in 1824, won in 1828. Grover Cleveland, cheated in 1888, triumphed in 1892. Samuel Tilden, who won the popular vote in 1876, never ran again, but he dealt away the White House in a deal for the withdrawal for federal troops from the South, allowing the Ku Klux Klan to take over. (By the way, for a great history of how this era kindled the racism we have lived with since, read Eric Foner's new book, *Forever Free*.)

For those who ponder the disloyalty of Gore's taking on the wife of the man who plucked him from the ashes of his 1988 defeat to make him vice president, please recall Harry Truman's line that if you want a friend in Washington, buy a dog.

Could Al beat Hillary? If Mrs. Clinton persists in her support of the Iraq war, he could. But never count on Hillary losing an election over a principle. It's a bad bet. If she moves to the left on the war, as she already shows signs of doing, she would preempt Gore and Kerry and use her tremendous lead in fundraising and ex-officio delegates to cruise to the nomination.

Al also has a history of shooting himself as he nears the finish line. In both 1988 and 2000, he repeated the fundamental mistake of not talking about his signature issue: the environment. By backing off global warming and climate change as core issues, he seemed like just another Democrat scaring people about Social Security.

He also lost in 2000 because he vested control over the media in his campaign in his daughter, Karenna Gore Schiff. Supposedly endowed with what the family called "perfect pitch," she had, instead, a tin ear. According to media consultants who I respect highly, she killed ads that would have worked and insisted on running stuff that accomplished nothing.

Having lost the 1988 election by, according to himself, relying on consultants, Gore blew the 2000 election by listening to his daughter. The next time, hopefully, he'll listen to himself. His own instincts aren't half-bad.

But Gore has three things going for him: A perception that he was robbed of the White House and Hillary's possible stubbornness in continuing to back the war.

The third thing? The weather. As the evidence of global climate change impresses everyone who doesn't work at the White House, Gore looks more and more like a man whose time may have come.

Dick Morris was an adviser to Bill Clinton for 20 years. E-mail for Dick Morris is dmredding@aol.com.

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## Questions: Cheney shooting guy in the face

Frequently Asked Questions About Vice President Cheney Shooting A Guy In The Face With A Gun.

Q. Harry Whittington, the man the vice president accidentally shot, suffered a minor heart attack. What exactly is a minor heart attack?

A. Any one where the patient (who isn't you) doesn't die.

Q. Didn't the official statement explain the 17-hour delay before anybody told anybody anything was because they wanted to make sure the statement released to the media was accurate?

A. He shot the guy. In the face. With a gun. How many more facts were needed? The barometric pressure at the time wasn't all that necessary.

Q. Isn't this event illustrative of why they invented the word "accident"?

A. This and the Bush presidency, yes. Besides, who hasn't mistaken a six-foot lawyer wearing a blaze orange vest for a quail?

Q. How many pellets of bird shot did Mr. Whittington get hit with?

A. Doctors estimated between 5 and 200. Nice margin of error there. That's 102 plus or minus 97.

Q. Didn't Cheney call the day of the shooting "one of the worst days of my life"?

A. Yes, he did, although we're pretty sure it's not way up there on Whittington's list either.

Q. Let's straighten this out: Did Cheney drink a beer at lunch or didn't he drink a beer?



**will durst**

● raging moderate

A. According to different reports: yes. And no.

Q. Didn't he also say "you never go hunting with someone who drinks"?

A. Apparently he's never been deer hunting in Northern Wisconsin.

Q. Isn't it true he retired to the Armstrong lodge and ate a "somber roast beef dinner"?

A. Still probably tastier than the hospital food Whittington got during an equally solemn pellet face picking.

Q. Why did the vice president pick Fox News to give his interview to?

A. A simple desire for the interview to be fair and balanced. And to pay off Britt Hume on a Super Bowl bet.

Q. Who was to blame for the accident?

A. According to Mr. Cheney's staff, Mr. Whittington foolishly planted his face between the gun and the bird.

Q. What are some of the more popular conspiracy theories attached to all this?

A. That Cheney was sending a message to the terrorists, and the message is: Look what we do to our FRIENDS."

Q. Anything else?

A. That these guys are really, really serious about tort reform.

Q. If the lawyer happens to die because of the wounds inflicted by the VP, he could be charged with involuntary manslaughter, right?

A. That's true, but because it is Texas, we're most likely looking at a ten dollar fine for shooting a lawyer out of season.

Q. Where's the upside?

A. Our veterans win. The people who are most thankful that Cheney did receive 5 deferments to Vietnam are our troops, especially considering his penchant for shooting his own men.

Q. Any other ramifications?

A. Outside of George Bush noticeably wearing more Kevlar, no.

Q. Don't you think it's time for the liberals to lay off this and move on to more important affairs of state?

A. Point well taken. They should promise not to give Dick Cheney's lack of moral judgment a single second more attention than was given to Bill Clinton's.

The political comic Will Durst has turned into a cheerleader for the vice president. Go, Dick. Go.

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## garfield

