

from our viewpoint...

A 'Yes' vote for good roads

The time has arrived for Sherman County voters to decide whether we are going to fix our bumpy streets and roads.

Early voting has begun at the county clerk's office, and Tuesday the polls will open at 7 a.m. at the Veterans of Foreign Wars hall, 824 Main. Voters are being asked to pass a one-cent sales tax to pay for a \$13 million city-county road rebuilding program.

Planning began in May, and city and county commissioners identified about 42 miles of streets and roads in serious need of repair. The biggest piece of the project is the 33 miles of old U.S. 24 that bisects the county.

In 1998 when the county asked voters to approve a one-quarter cent sales tax to repair Old 24, the county hoped a chip seal would preserve the existing road. That effort lasted through at least two rounds of sealing, and cost about \$800,000. The tax went off in 2001 when the bonds were paid off.

Today that road needs more repair, and plans are to mill off three inches, and apply a three-inch asphalt overlay on all 33 miles. The estimated cost is \$5.2 million. County officials believe there are a couple of section near Edson and Kanorado that may take more subbase work or deeper milling.

The city has identified Caldwell Avenue as a prime project, especially the intersection at Eighth. We agree this intersection is in terrible shape. When we approach it, we look for a way to minimize bouncing from the deep ripples in the pavement.

Replacing this intersection with concrete will make it safer and smoother for traffic from all directions. New pavement will extend on Caldwell all the way north to the airport.

Recognizing its importance for commercial use as a main entrance to downtown, the city targeted 17th Street from the railroad crossing to Main. Replacing the sections of bricks, concrete patches and asphalt with a concrete road will give the city a street to compliment the Cherry Avenue entrance from Pioneer Park.

Investing in streets and roads, with the passage of the sales tax by Sherman County voters, would compliment investments the state and federal government have made in the major highways that traverse the county.

Over the past five years, the state and federal government have invested of over \$30 million to rebuild K-27 north and south of the city. The south portion is entering the second construction phase, costing over \$17 million on the 11 miles of highway to the county line. Add to this cost the over \$3 million to replace the old bridge south of town across the North Fork of the Smoky Hill River.

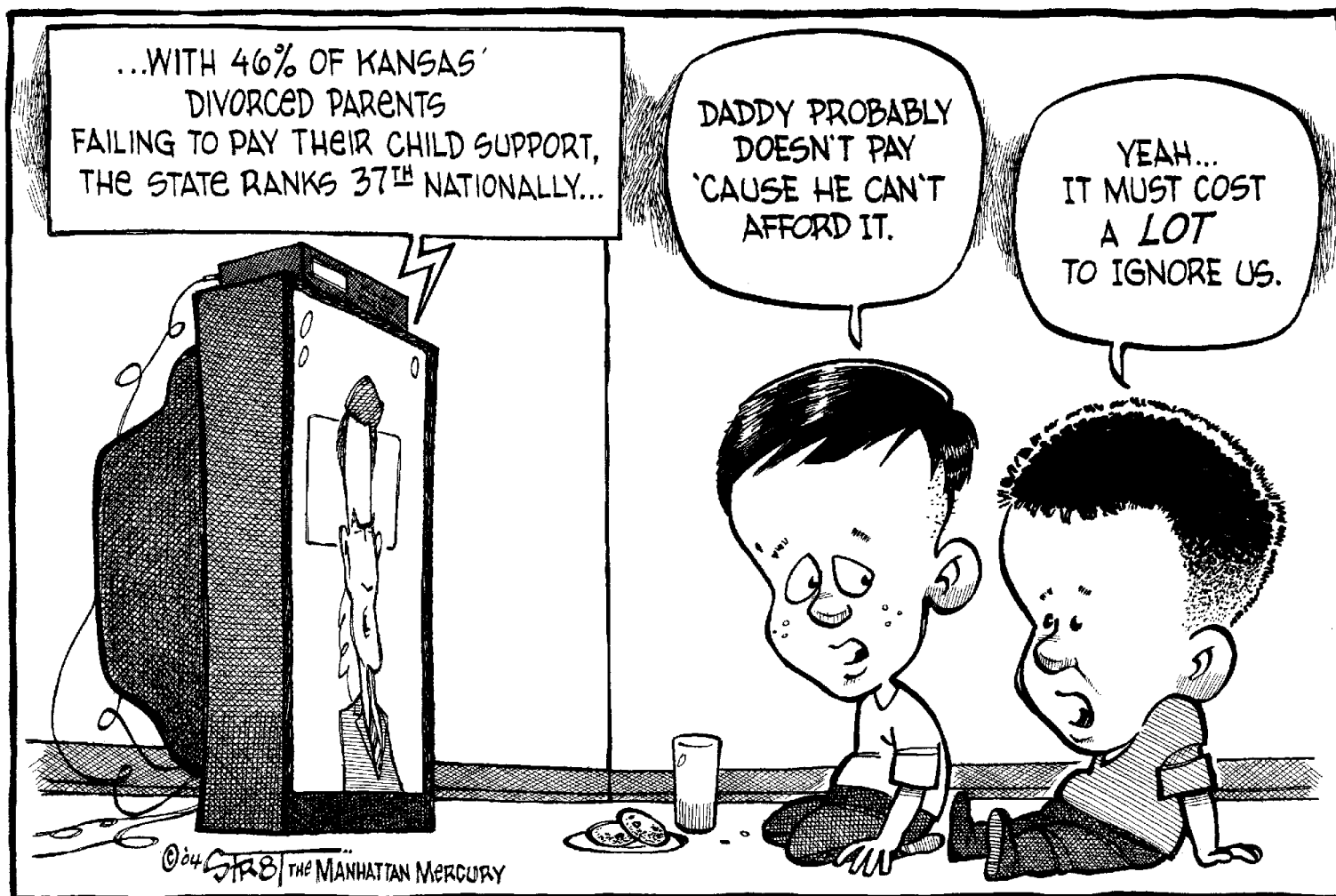
Other projects included replacement of 10 miles of I-70 from Goodland to Edson at a cost of over \$20 million, and this year the state will do a mill and overlay of the 17 miles I-70 from Goodland to the Colorado line.

Having good roads is a necessity to the future development of the city and county. The development of the Goodland Energy Center and other signs of an improving economy make the timing right for this joint road improvement project.

Glenn Burk, a farmer who spoke at the public forum last Monday, said he was not a golfer, but felt all the roads in the project need fixing, even the stretch of gravel past the country club. (Which, at \$321,000, is a minor part of the whole project.)

"I ask myself, 'If I am in favor, how can I let this (Road 16) kill the good things we will get from this project?'" he said. "I can't justify voting against for the 3 percent of the project. A good road is an asset to anything."

We agree, and ask people to vote 'Yes' to repair the roads and take advantage of the timing to help pay for the roads. — *Tom Betz*



House handles hot button issues

A bunch of hot-button issues came before the House last week as we neared the end of our regular session.

Committees wrapped up on Tuesday, with the product of many weeks of hearings and debates advanced to the full House for review.

Tax reduction (I supported), workers comp changes (voted against), concealed carry (supported) and appropriations (supported with amendments) were among bills considered by the House last week.

The House paused to remember Gordon Parks, who passed away last week, and had a ceremony to recognize a few of the members of the task force participating in identification and capture of the BTK killer. Photos of the ceremony and other Legislative activities are available at www.morrisonfamily.com/legislative_photos_2006.htm.

Sales Tax on Rebates

We see commercials every day advertising incentives to entice us to buy a new vehicle. Among these is the cash-back incentive offering a "factory rebate" of several thousand dollars when you purchase a new vehicle that is normally deducted from the purchase price. Currently, if you were to buy a \$20,000 car and be offered a \$3,000 rebate, even though you only pay \$17,000 for the car, you are charged sales tax on the full \$20,000. In essence, you are paying sales tax on \$3,000 you never spent. House Bill 2640 eliminates this tax. It was passed Monday by a wide margin and now is in the Senate. I supported this bill.

Workman's Compensation

Contentious debate surrounded the workers' compensation bill (SB 461) when it reached the House floor. Supporters argued it was not a



Jim Morrison

capitol review

"disposable worker" bill as many have suggested, but that it helps to protect employers from paying for injuries sustained by workers prior to their employment with their current company or for an injury that didn't occur at the workplace.

Major parts of the bill remained unchanged and the existing law still protects workers injured on the job. However, the old high school football injury or the weekend water skiing accident shouldn't be the responsibility of the employer, proponents argued.

Opponents suggested the bill was unfriendly to injured workers, would not reduce fraud and would likely result in more, not less, litigation, in order to determine any pre-existing conditions a worker may have had. After the vote was taken, a Call of the House was issued. Several members changed their votes during the call, but when the final tally was read the bill passed 67-56. I voted against the bill, supporting the current law on Work Comp.

Concealed Carry

By a vote of 90-33, the House passed a bill (SB 418) to allow licensed Kansans to carry concealed firearms (I supported). The Senate followed the House lead by voting 30-10 to adopt the bill with changes suggested by the House.

The changes included additions to the list of places where you are prohibited from carry-

ing a concealed weapon. The bill requires a training course for licensing from the attorney general's office. With 90 votes for passage in the House, and 30 in the Senate, this bill was sent to the governor with a veto-proof majority in both chambers. She has until March 31 (maybe 'till midnight?) to veto, sign or let the bill become law without her signature.

In a related matter, the House passed HB 2577 which removes from the law a citizens "duty to retreat" by establishing a "justified use of force" provision. The proposed law allows you to defend yourself if you have a "reasonable fear of imminent death or great bodily harm to (your) self or another" (I also supported this legislation).

Franchise Tax

The House voted Thursday 92-30 to phase out the franchise tax in Kansas (I supported). HB 2548 would reduce the rate of the corporation franchise tax from the current 0.125 percent of shareholder equity or net worth to 0.083 percent for tax year 2007, and to 0.41 percent for tax year 2008. The tax would be repealed altogether in 2009. The intent of the removal of this tax is to encourage existing businesses to remain in Kansas and other businesses to establish operations here.

Additional Information

If you have any information or if you would like to offer your opinions or suggestions regarding these issues or any others that may be coming before the Kansas House, I want to hear from you. Please contact my office by phone at (785) 296-7676, by mail at 300 SW 10th Street, State Capitol Building, Room 143-N, Topeka, Kan. 66612 or by email at jmorrison@ink.org during the session.

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You should know importance of agriculture

To the Editor:

Where does your food come from?

If you're like many Americans, the answer is the grocery store. And frankly, that disturbs me. The grocery store isn't where food comes from — it's just from where it's distributed.

In reality, far too many people are unaware of the role of American agriculture in their daily lives, and what it really takes to have food on their dinner table.

Just a few generations ago, most people were a part of — and had friends or relatives involved with — farming. Today, that's no longer the case.

That's why I'm writing. Agriculture is responsible for providing the necessities of life — food, fiber, clothing, and shelter. And it's about time Americans recognize that contribution.

American farmers are working harder than ever, and it shows. Today, each American farmer feeds more than 129 people. And the need for food produced in the United States is dramatic. Agriculture is this nation's No. 1 export, vital to a healthy economy.

And it's not just the farmer who makes our food possible. Each segment of the agriculture industry, all the way to the grocery store, is a vital link in a chain that brings food to all of us



from our readers

to the editor

— and millions of people abroad.

Frankly, it's easy to take agriculture for granted in America. Our food is readily accessible and safe. For this, we're unbelievably fortunate, but that doesn't mean we don't have

an obligation to recognize how it's made possible.

This is National Agriculture Week, hosted by the Agriculture Council of America. This week is a good time to reflect on — and be grateful for — American agriculture, and to share that message with others.

Learn more about National Ag Week and Ag Day at www.agday.org.

Kendal Frazier
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Overland Park

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