

from our viewpoint...

School funding flap may derail all plans

The mood was optimistic when the Legislature opened its session this year.

A new study of education costs suggested a slightly lower figure than one done a couple of years ago. House and Senate leaders and the governor worked together to craft a compromise everyone thought might please the Supreme Court, which had ordered millions in new spending for public schools.

Everything looked rosy until politics in the Senate blocked action on any of the pending proposals. Democrats weren't buying either plan put forth by the Republicans — \$633 million from the House and \$724 million in the Senate — and conservative Republicans weren't buying the leadership's plan.

The third plan, a \$495 million design by Sen. Jim Barnett of Emporia, a candidate for governor, met with objections from Democrats, who of course have their own candidate, and from the more liberal leadership.

So when the Legislature went home, it had done nothing on schools, despite the threat of action from the high court.

How could that happen when everyone agreed on the plan? Word was even a Supreme Court judge sat in on some of those talks, but who could believe that?

Except, apparently, it was true. When a reporter asked, one of the judges 'fessed up.

Friday, the court's spokesman announced that Judge Lawton Nuss, a Salinan who is a recent court appointee and once represented the Salina School District, had withdrawn from the school case. The judge admitted having lunch with two senators, including the president and top Republican leader, Steve Morris of Hugoton.

The judge further admitted they had talked about school finance, though he said — and the senators agreed — that he had only asked for information about various school proposals. There was no admission of any deal making.

"Nuss said, 'I think the court should know this conversation occurred,'" spokesman Ron Keefover said. "He decided to rescue himself, and the court agreed."

"I guess he wanted to be above any appearance of impropriety," said Sen. Pete Brungardt of Salina, one of the two senators, "but there was none there."

Whatever. Everyone agreed the incident was a shocking breach of judicial ethics. That a Supreme Court member would allow himself to be so compromised seemed incredible. That senators would involve themselves in such a discussion was remarkable indeed, considering the Legislature was the main target of the school lawsuit.

The repercussions from Judge Nuss' admission have yet to be felt. The scandal throws the school debate into an uproar. Legislators are supposed to settle the issue this week. That may not happen.

Beyond that, it's even money that Judge Nuss will be out of a job before the summer is out. The situation calls for judicial discipline, and it will be interesting to see how the other judges handle the case.

Someone needs to ask if Nuss just bumped into this mess, or if he was representing the rest of the court in an attempt to broker a deal, a theory that Topeka rumors a week or two ago would support.

In the end, the court, which had seized power over budget-making in Topeka, may find itself in a much diminished role. The court's enemies will jump on it with all fours. For a court that was on a roll, the result might be devastating.

Tsk, ts, your honors.

Even the high and mighty can take a fall. — Steve Haynes

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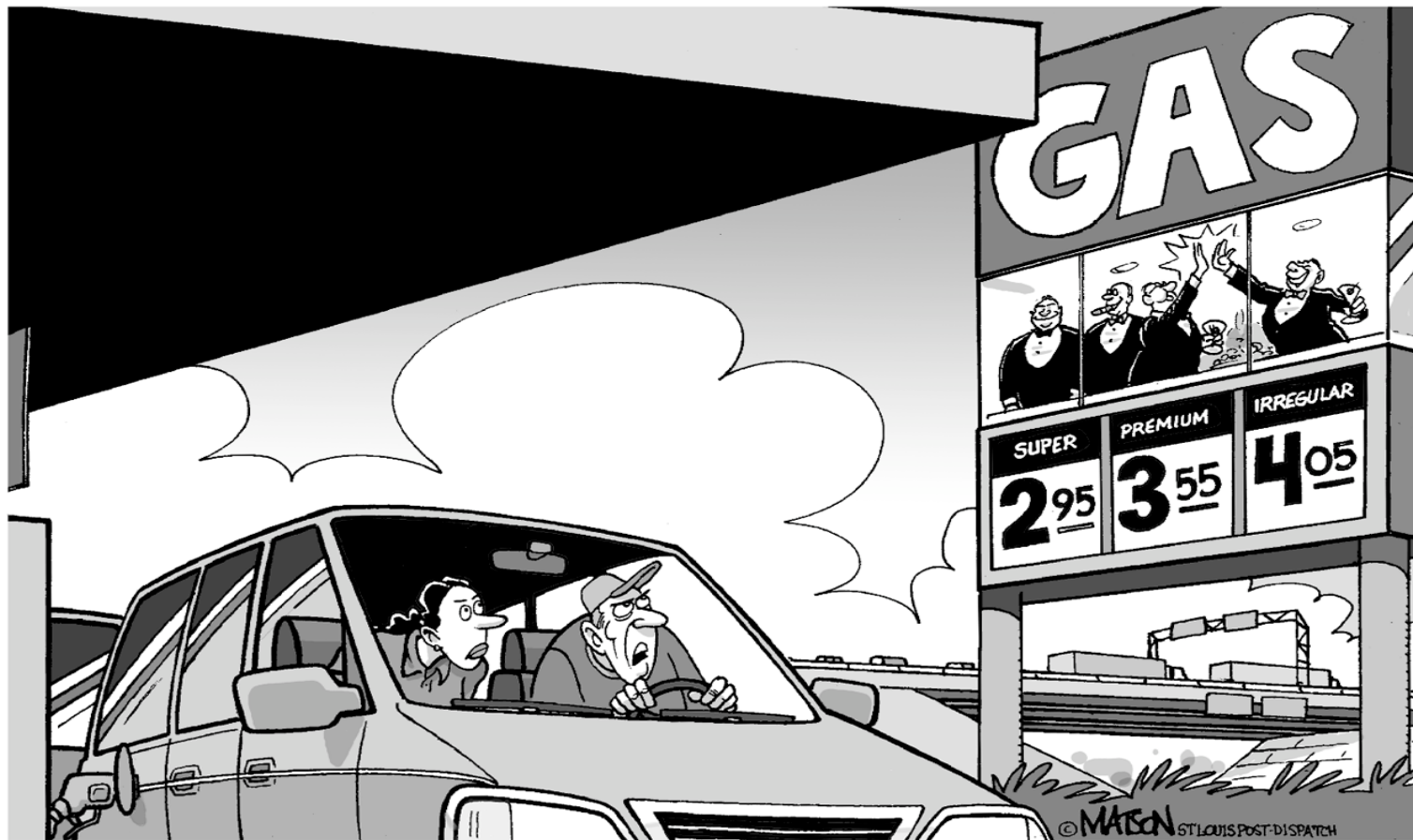
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Mexico and the U.S. immigration debate

In its debate over how to change the U.S. immigration system, Washington neglected the impact on Mexico — which faces a crossroads election this summer.

And Mexico's choice could not be more important to the United States.

On July 2, the Mexican people will decide whether to elect ultra-leftist Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (known as AMLO) as their next president.

Rumors have abounded for months that Lopez Obrador's campaign is getting major funding from Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. And last month, Rep. Jim Kolbe (R-Ariz.), a moderate Republican, told several Mexican legislators that he had intelligence reports detailing revealing support from Hugo Chavez to AMLO's Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD).

Chavez is a firm ally of Cuba's Fidel Castro. Lopez Obrador could be the final piece in their grand plan to bring the United States to its knees before the newly resurgent Latin left.

Between them, Venezuela and Mexico export about 4 million barrels of oil each day to the United States, more than one-third of our oil imports. With both countries in the hands of leftist leaders, the opportunity to hold the U.S. hostage will be extraordinary.

Think we have security problems now, with Vicente Fox leading Mexico? Just wait until we have a 2,000-mile border with a chum of Chavez and Castro.



dick morris

• commentary

Lopez Obrador is not inevitable. Recent polls show the candidate of Fox's National Action Party (PAN), Felipe Calderon, closing in. But much will hinge on the resolution of the immigration debate now roiling Congress.

Lopez Obrador has attacked U.S. attempts to restrict Mexican immigration and will benefit tremendously if Congress alienates the Mexican electorate. A recent survey by John Zogby found that two-thirds of Mexicans feel Americans are racist and biased against them. A harsh shift in U.S. immigration policies could fuel a leftist victory in Mexico.

Mexicans are deeply offended by the idea of a wall designed to keep them out. Building a wall on the boarder without also starting a guest-worker program will play badly in Mexico. A wall with a guest-worker program might go down better, particularly if the legislation didn't include punitive provisions making illegal immigration a felony.

I have worked as a consultant for Fox and PAN, so I appreciate the delicacy of the political situation in Mexico. Fox's election in 2000 ended the 71-year authoritarian rule of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), heavily

dominated by old corrupt leaders linked to the drug traffic. Now PAN has nominated Calderon, once Fox's energy minister, to run for president.

The PRI's candidate this year, Roberto Madrazo, is widely expected to finish third — the party is still identified in the popular mind with the corruption of the past.

Most observers feel the race will be between Lopez Obrador and Calderon. While the PAN candidate would be no puppet of the United States, he is fully committed to free market economics and wants a close relationship with our country. Lopez Obrador would be part of the Latin America's new, anti-U.S. left in.

That Latin Left includes Bolivia's President Evo Morales, who won as a pro-cocoa-cultivation candidate. And in Peru, Ollanta Humala, a Chavez ally, is likely to finish first in this month's election and probably will win the runoff.

But Mexico, with its vast oil resources and its long border and free-trade agreement with the United States, would be the crown jewel for America's enemies. We have only to hope that Congress won't pass legislation that alienates the Mexican electorate and delivers the country into AMLO's hands.

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

Cheney's Iraq war

To the Editor:

When Vice President Cheney and his gang of neocons, Wolfowitz, Perle and others, recklessly, without thinking of the consequences, rushed our country to war in Iraq, they created massive problems for our country.

With Kansas National Guard equipment in Iraq, we cannot train our troops well or deal with disasters

Cheney's unwise war in Iraq is costing our country a terrible price. By the end of March, 2,359 of our sons and daughters had died in Iraq, and 17,281 U.S. soldiers have been wounded.

Many of our troops have been so badly crippled they can never lead a normal life. I



from our readers

• to the editor

regularly make donations to Paralyzed American Veterans.

Cheney's Iraq war has cost U.S. taxpayers \$244.7 billion so far. The cost for every U.S. household is \$2,250. Your family and mine could have spent that money much more wisely.

However, Cheney's former company, from which he still receives benefits, is getting rich

from his Iraq war. Halliburton has received \$10 billion dollars of no-bid contracts from his war in Iraq.

Cheney's Iraq war:

- Has caused the Arab countries of the Middle East to hate the United States.
- Has made United States military forces to be viewed not as liberators but as occupation forces.
- Has made it easier for radical Islamic groups to recruit suicide bombers and saboteurs.
- Has thrown Iraq into civil war.

Gene M Tromble
Goodland

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