

from our viewpoint...

Courts should let schools settle down

It's time for the Kansas courts to step out of the school finance controversy and let things settle down.

The Kansas Supreme Court has scheduled arguments later this month on the latest round in the school-money fiasco. No decision is likely until July, leaving school districts unable to draw up their budgets.

This just can't go on every year.

The Legislature has thrown pretty much every dollar it has at the school finance "crisis." There isn't any more to give, not without robbing other state programs or the taxpayers.

It's not possible to draw up a school finance plan that will please every parent, every district and every administrator. Someone will be unhappy, whatever the Legislature does.

And someone will sue, even after the current lawsuit is settled. They always do, because in recent years, the courts have encouraged them.

It gives the judges more power and increases their influence when they take on cases like this. It's not what courts were intended for, though.

Under the state Constitution, the Legislature is supposed to set taxes and raise money. The Legislature is supposed to decide how that money is spent.

That's because we elect the Legislature, and its members are responsible to us, the voters. Judges are not. They are in office under what amounts to life appointments.

There's a reason the framers wanted those with the power to tax and spend under the people's thumb: When you split that power from the vote, it quickly becomes abusive.

Kansans have shown again and again that they do not want higher taxes, yet state spending has more than quadrupled (in real dollars, adjusted for inflation) in 40 years.

Without a tax increase, there is only so much money. Every surplus penny in recent years has gone to schools, leaving colleges, roads and other programs to starve. Parents are forced to pay the price in higher tuition, while drivers find more bumps and fewer new roads.

The courts need to remember their place. Even though some groups may not be happy with the way the state's pie is divided, the Legislature has the power to tax, and the right and the responsibility to divide the income.

If some groups — a few school districts, or a few parents — don't like the result, they can go the Legislature and push for more. They can campaign for candidates who promise more. That's our system.

Even if you believe schools deserve more, though, it's wrong for the unelected courts to take power and make that decision.

It's time to put our system back in order. If the courts won't let that happen, then we need to change the way judges are chosen and retained.

The taxpayers can't raise more money just because an elite few, even an elite few judges, want it done. We have to go out and earn it.

— Steve Haynes

Letter Policy

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The Goodland Star-News

(USPS No. 222-460. ISSN 0893-0562)

Member: Kansas Press Association

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Published every Tuesday and Friday except the days observed for New Year's Day and Christmas Day, at 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735. Periodicals postage paid at Goodland, Kan. 67735; entered at the Goodland, Kan., Post Office under the Act of Congress of March 8, 1878.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Goodland Star-News, 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

TELEPHONE: (785) 899-2338. Editorial e-mail: star-news@nwkans.com. Advertising questions can be sent to: goodlandads@nwkans.com

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SUBSCRIPTIONS: In Sherman County and adjacent counties: three months, \$24; six months, \$42; 12 months, \$76. Out of area, weekly mailing of two issues: three months, \$34; six months, \$49; 12 months, \$84. Mailed individually each day: 12 months, \$119. (All tax included.)

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China's legendary history, future dreams

Darin and Kati (Amos) Curts are WorldTeach volunteers in the People's Republic of China. The group, affiliated with Harvard University, places volunteer English teachers with the Human Department of Education and Foreign Affairs. Darin and Kati are teaching at Yueyang Ba Zhong (Yueyang No. 8 Middle School) for a year.

June, 2006

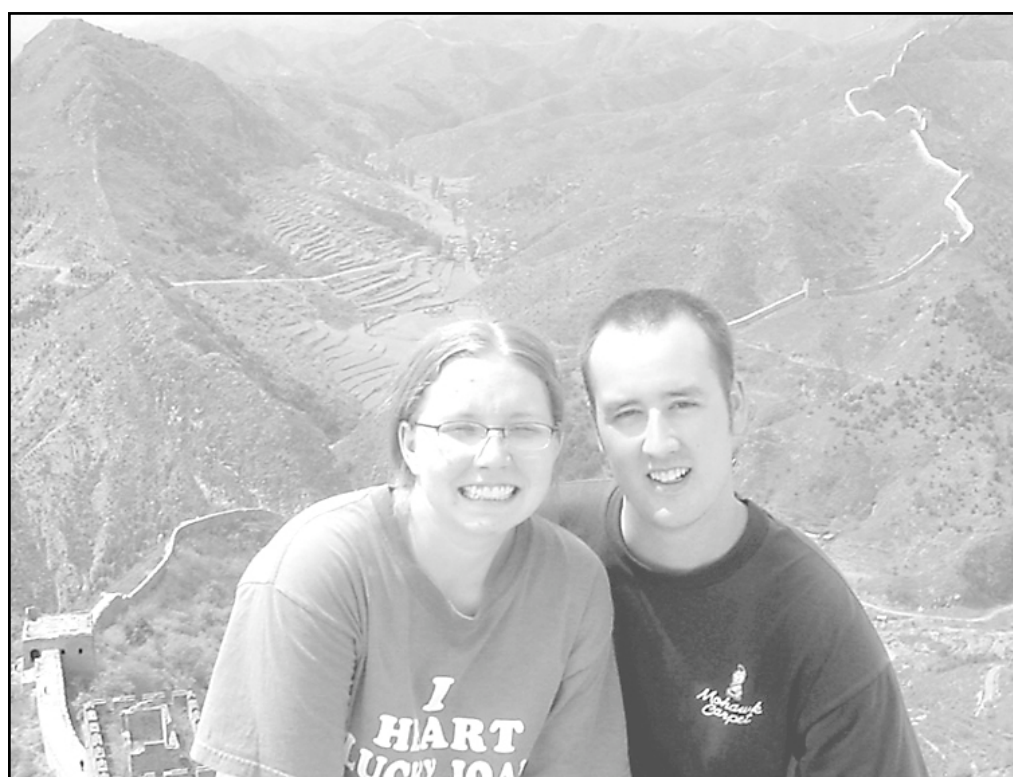
Nimen Hao!
Old and new. Then and now. History and hope.

Our 10th month living in the People's Republic of China was a whirlwind journey through the country's lengthy and legendary past and visions of its lofty dreams for the future. May 1 is China's Labor Day and the start of a week-long national holiday. With a two-week vacation from teaching, we set off for the country's must-see destinations.

Often claimed to be the world's oldest civilization, China has an extensive and intriguing history. Years of dynastic rule, war with the mighty Genghis Khan, trade of silk and tea, turbulent relations with the powerful empires of the West, and the communist revolution and its ideology have left their mark on this most-populous of countries. We visited pages of this living Chinese textbook as we took in China's most prized sites.

In Beijing, we visited the sprawling complex of the Forbidden City, wandered the beautifully manicured grounds of the Summer Palace, and admired colorful views of the Temple of Heaven. In the vast openness of Tiananmen Square, we watched children flying kites with long, flowing tails as stern-faced guards strode briskly across the pavement. We filed past the well-preserved, if a bit creepy, body of the infamous Chairman Mao resting peacefully in his mausoleum, while the devoted placed red carnations near a statue of his likeness.

Outside the capital, we clambered up and



Darin and Kati Curts recently visited the Great Wall of China. The couple visited a section of the wall named Simatai, which is located about 70 miles from Beijing. Simatai is known for its intense inclines, precarious plunges, and numerous watchtowers.

down the steep inclines of the impressive and formidable Great Wall of China. In Xi'an, we gazed at the stunningly well-preserved, 2000-year-old Army of Terracotta Warriors and wandered the streets of the city's Muslim Quarter, home to one of China's ethnic minorities, the Hui. While in Shanghai, we found ourselves among colonial-style buildings on the Bund and along picturesque streets in the French Concession. In the city's Old Town, we sampled xiaolongbao, Shanghai's famously sumptuous meat dumplings. Truly, the past comes alive in China like no other place in the world.

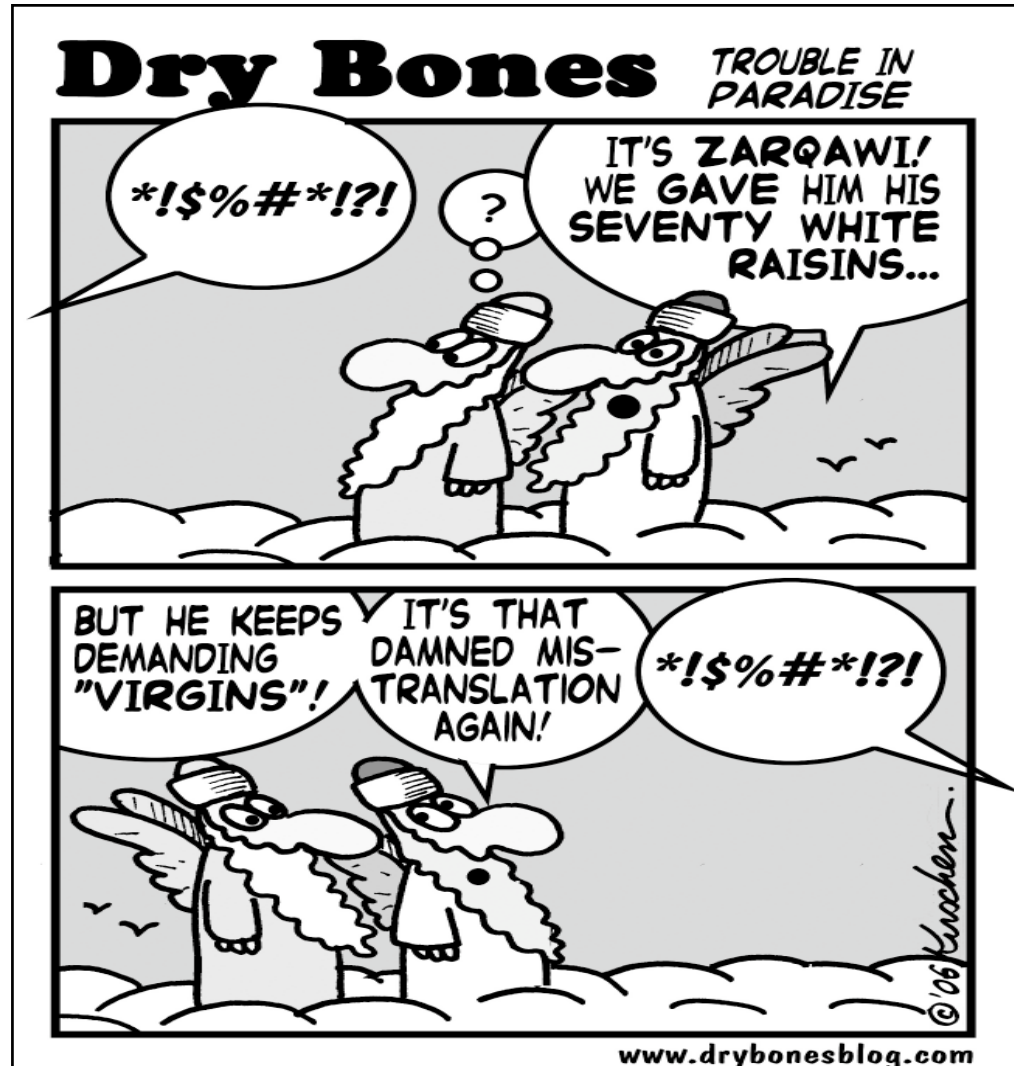
Still, the magnificence of the country doesn't stop at history's door. As an increasingly large player in the global community, China is moving at warp speed toward its future. With an imposing economy and the recent appreciation of the Chinese yuan, the rest of the world has taken notice of this ancient country. Traveling to some of China's largest, wealthiest, and most powerful cities reminded us of how determined the country is to meet tomorrow today.

The opium trade may have introduced Shanghai to the western world, but today this Paris of the East stands as a proud symbol of China's hope for the future. The city abounds with designer boutiques and high-end retailers. As budget travelers, we eyed the luxury condominiums, chic restaurants and trendy clubs catering to Shanghai's nouveau riche from afar. Our visit to the Shanghai Art Museum introduced us to the city's love of fashion, as massive crowds swarmed a temporary exhibit of Armani garments. Shanghai is decades ahead of most of the country, and while admiring the views of the Pearl Tower and Jinmao Tower in the Pudong Business District, we felt as if we were watching the future of China unfold before us.

However, the future of the country isn't held solely in Shanghai's able hands; Beijing, too, has a firm grasp on the promise of tomorrow. Construction is omnipresent in the capital city, which will be the host of the 2008 Olympic Games. The transformation process is intense. The sound of jackhammers banged in our ears as our nostrils burned with the smell of asphalt and exhaust. As we traversed the congested streets of the capital, a horizon of construction cranes assured us that the skyline would be different even a few months later. China seems destined not only to embrace the future but also to shape it.

For two weeks, we traveled through time and space. China's past and its future are both fantastic and inspiring. However, our return to the present was a welcomed respite. Back in Yueyang, we breathed a sigh of relief. We're just happy to be a part of China's present.

Until next month,
Darin and Kati Curts



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