

from our viewpoint...

Court decision invites more suits

The good news is the state Supreme Court finally let go of the 7-year-old school finance lawsuit. Kansas schools will have more money and superintendents can get on with writing their budgets just as classes begin.

The bad news is the court all but issued an engraved invitation for yet another suit over the school finance law.

Ruling last week, the court said efforts by the Legislature to put \$831 million more into schools over the last two years had met its order requiring legislative action. It declared an end to a 1999 lawsuit filed by medium-size districts led by Salina, Hays and Dodge City.

In a way, the 4-2 decision represented an about-face by a court that had been tough and uncompromising earlier this year. Since then, the justices have had their noses bloodied by the revelation that one of their number was meeting with senators to talk about the case.

The court noted that is wasn't ruling on the constitutionality of the latest version of the school finance law, which depends more heavily on local property taxes. In the past, lawyers have argued that rich districts get richer while children in poor districts get a poor education.

A decision on that wasn't before the court in this suit, the justices said, and "must wait for another day."

Anyone willing to bet the aggrieved school districts won't take up that challenge?

By the time the next lawsuit is done, school finance will have been in court for more than a decade. The lawsuits are corrupting the legislative process and tilting the state's budget toward public schools and away from higher education.

The state's colleges now get less than a quarter of their revenue from state money. They have raised tuition every year, banking on students taking out more loans with easy federal-guaranteed credit.

That's leaving the next generation saddled with huge debt to get an education since, increasingly, a high school degree is not enough.

Other state programs, from highways to prisons, have suffered as well, since the Legislature has held the line on taxes.

The truth is, the court should never have become so deeply involved in spending decisions. The justices' job is to review the law to see whether it meets constitutional standards for fairness, but they shouldn't judge the amount the Legislature sees fit to put into schools.

Dividing up the tax pie is the Legislature's responsibility and duty under the Constitution.

In retreating to the issue of how the money is distributed, though, the court may be getting back to its own back yard. That's good. It's willingness to perpetuate school lawsuits is not.

This needs to stop somewhere. — *Steve Haynes*



Embarrassed by that running water

You can't die of mortal embarrassment, but you can sure wish you could disappear along with all that water.

It's been a long hot summer and we've been trying to make sure the garden, grass, trees and bushes all get a drink. But, because it's so hot and so dry, Oberlin is under water restrictions.

We can water from midnight to 9 a.m. and from 8 p.m. to midnight on Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays.

This is a reasonable and workable schedule. It's also very confusing.

Luckily, Steve has a more logical mind than mine. His brain seems to be programmed with when we can and can't water. It always seems to me that if we begin watering at 8 p.m., then move the water at 10 p.m., we should be able to move it one more time at midnight and put it on the timer to go off at 2 a.m. At that point we're in bed and so that's it for the day.

No, he tells me, after midnight is someone else's day.

Oh, right.

The timer is a big help. Each section of lawn gets two hours before the water turns itself off. Unfortunately, we can't use the timer on the



cynthia haynes
● open season

soaker hoses. We have soakers on some bushes behind the garage and on a flower bed at the far side of the house, areas that don't get watered by the sprinklers.

The bushes behind the garage are only a couple of years old and I'm still babying them. I noticed a couple of weeks ago that they were getting a little yellow.

Now many bushes can and should turn yellow. Spirea is not one of those. I've been around spirea for most of my 58 years, and it's supposed to be dark green.

So I asked my Extension agent for help. He looked at the plants and advised a good dose of iron.

I went to the hardware and bought some liquid iron. The package said water plants, apply two tablespoons solution in one gallon of water and then water the plants again.

I watered, applied and turned the soaker on for another 30 minutes of watering before the midnight deadline.

Steve offered to turn the water off when he went to bed. I was dubious. He looked beat and I wasn't seeing very straight myself. I hit the hay.

I was up before the phone call from the city telling me there was water running down our street. I was up before the phone call from a friend saying she had turned the water off for us at 7 a.m.

But, there was nothing I could do about the water running down our alley, into the street and down the block — probably taking all the iron with it.

Steve said it was still running at 10 o'clock when the police chief stopped by to see where it was coming from. All he could do was hang his head in shame.

That was more than a week ago. I need to water and feed my bushes again.

Maybe I'll do it earlier this time. Now let's see, I can start at 9 a.m. to midnight, no that's 8 p.m. to 9 a.m., no that's — Steve, HELP!

Editor's Note: And you're gonna trust me with this?

Thanks for the wonderful treatment

To the Editor:

Last week, Goodland was our first overnight stop on our way to Yellowstone National Park. We enjoyed a fine meal at your new diner near the Interstate and settled into our motel. Then I discovered the frames of my glasses had broken.

The motel staff helped me locate an optometrist's office, which I called first thing in the morning. I was invited to come right by. While they were unable to fix the frames themselves, they referred me to Mann's Jewelry, where the glasses were repaired within an hour.

Realizing I needed a sturdier case, I returned to Drs. Morrison and Wahlmeier's office, where they simply gave me what I needed — no charge!

We were on our way by mid-morning. Such courtesy and consideration often is in short supply these days, so I thank the good folks of your community who were so helpful, including the young couple at Wal-Mart who ushered me ahead of them in the check-out line as I had only a couple of items and they had a cartfull.



from our readers
● to the editor

What nice memories we shall have of Goodland. I sincerely hope that we in Emporia treat visitors with equal thoughtfulness.

Jan Borst
Emporia

To the Editor:

On Friday, July 28, this paper ran an editorial on the Help America Vote Act that Congress passed four years ago. This legislation was written in response to problems with Florida voters' ballots in the 2000 presidential election.

During my time in Congress, I have come to realize that when a specific problem or crisis captures America's attention, the government tends to overreact and implement overreaching legislation without regard to the unintended consequences. I did anticipate what would happen to small-town voters and was one of the 48 members in the House of Representatives to vote "no" on this legislation.

This law is another example of the federal government dictating burdensome requirements to state and local authorities. I agree with Mr. Haynes that this is "one more nail in the coffin of rural America." I do not believe in "one-size-fits-all" legislation and continue working hard to be the voice for rural America and, most importantly, Kansas.

U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran
Hays

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