

District needs to let everyone have their say on bond issue

Oberlin schools need renovation which requires a major bond issue. It's as simple as that.

The Oberlin School Board is made up of hard-working, well-meaning people who want to do the right thing.

That's a given. But if the board does not straighten out the political mess the district is in over the bond issue, it probably won't pass.

That's too bad. The kids need it and the board and superintendent have worked too hard to let it go.

The board needs to start with the way it treats citizens who show up at its meetings. Kicking them out in the hall while the board holds an illegal closed-door meeting won't win any votes.

Not allowing them to comment when the board discusses the bond issue won't help much either. The board can't point to a rigid agenda and squeeze all comments into the first of a meeting, not on this issue, not if the members want the bond vote to pass.

Board members may not like to hear this, but they need to listen if they want to win. It's your friends talking, folks.

At this point, even the board is less than unified on the size and direction of the bond issue. The first thing that has to happen is for the board, its Blue Ribbon Committee and all the citizens who want

to have a say to talk things out.

Bend the rules so everyone can talk, if necessary, and get all the feelings out. Bend over backward to make people feel they have been heard, because every person who does not will get 10 people to vote against the bonds.

It'd help to be sure the figures are right this time. Then, the committee and the board need to make some decisions about the bond issue. It needs to be smaller than what was once proposed, probably under \$6 million, if they want it to pass.

That would keep it about the same cost, in real, inflation adjusted dollars, as the last issue in 1965.

Once most everyone is behind the plan, the campaign can begin. It isn't realistic to expect unanimous support, but a bond issue can be passed if it's reasonable and all the board and committee back it. Oberlin people support their schools.

There is no point in anyone getting mad about what has happened so far. Mistakes were made. They can be corrected. There is plenty of blame to go around, but no need to focus on it.

If we can all work together, we just might get the schools we need.

Oberlin will be around for a long time, and we'll need good schools. Enrollment declines are almost at an end. We need to invest in the district.

Let's get with it.

— Steve Haynes

Sitters take 10-hour drive to job

This is a first. Trying to write with a 2-year-old on my lap. I see a lot of "typos" coming my way.

Our favorite son-in-law, Adam, is about to start a career with a new company. But before that happened, he and Kara wanted to get away for a few days. Just the two of them. The call went out, "Would you guys like to watch Taylor for the weekend?" Would we! Grab a bag, throw in some clothes and we were on the way to Dallas.

Jim and I have the same attitude about traveling. Don't waste a night sleeping when you can drive straight through and be there by morning. We each take a two-hour stint behind the wheel, napping in between. With a steady supply of sunflower seeds and outrageous, late-night talk radio to keep us entertained, the 10-hour drive went by very quickly. The kids left the front door unlocked so we could let ourselves in. Six a.m. found us fast asleep for a couple hours of rest. We were going to need it, because Taylor, who announces to anyone who will listen, "The 2," was well-rested and ready to go. She talks, she counts, she dances,



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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she gives hugs and kisses, she's funny, she's really somethin'. I thought my kids were bright, but she's way ahead of them.

We took her to church and during the sermon, someone was moved to say, "Amen!" Her little echo "Amen," was loud and clear. After the service, when the congregation was shaking hands and welcoming us as visitors, Taylor had to shake everyone's hand too. We advised Adam and Kara that if they ever attend that church, to be sure and introduce themselves as Taylor's parents. She made a good impression on everyone.

—ob—
My mother-in-law's health is still

fragile since her last hospitalization. Another trip to the hospital revealed an irregular heartbeat. Unfortunately, we had left town without giving Kara and Adam's unlisted phone number to anyone. Jim's poor sister, Mary, tried to notify us by any method available.

Friends, neighbors, family were all enlisted to track us down. Eventually, a Texas police officer came to the door with the message. At this writing, Margie is being watched carefully, and is much improved.

—ob—
A phone call to the *Herald* office revealed we have missed one of the biggest snows of the season. Our timing was great.

Photo Policy

The *Oberlin Herald* wants to emphasize photos of people doing things in the community. If you know of an event or news happening that we should attend, please call 475-2206.

Please be sure to allow a couple of days' notice so we can arrange to be there.

Space in the paper is limited and so is the time of our staff, so we may not be able to get to every event, but we will try.

Because space is so limited, we can not run team or group photos, any pictures of people lined up or of people passing checks, certificates and the like. (We will always try to make room for a story about any of these events, however.)

We do run wedding and engagement

pictures and "mug" shots with stories and obituaries, when they are provided to us. Please remember that we need a clear, sharp picture. Dark or fuzzy prints will not work.

We cannot return photos unless you submit a self-addressed, stamped envelope with clear instructions for return. Other photos submitted may be picked up at our office within two weeks. After that, they will be disposed of.

Laser proofs of photos which have run in *The Herald* are available for 50 cents each, first come, first served. Special-order laser prints of photos will be available at \$3 each for about two weeks after publication.

We can take passport photos if you provide a roll of color film. ASA 200, 12 exposure works fine. The charge is \$8.50 per person.

From the Bible

He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. Psalm 24:3-4.

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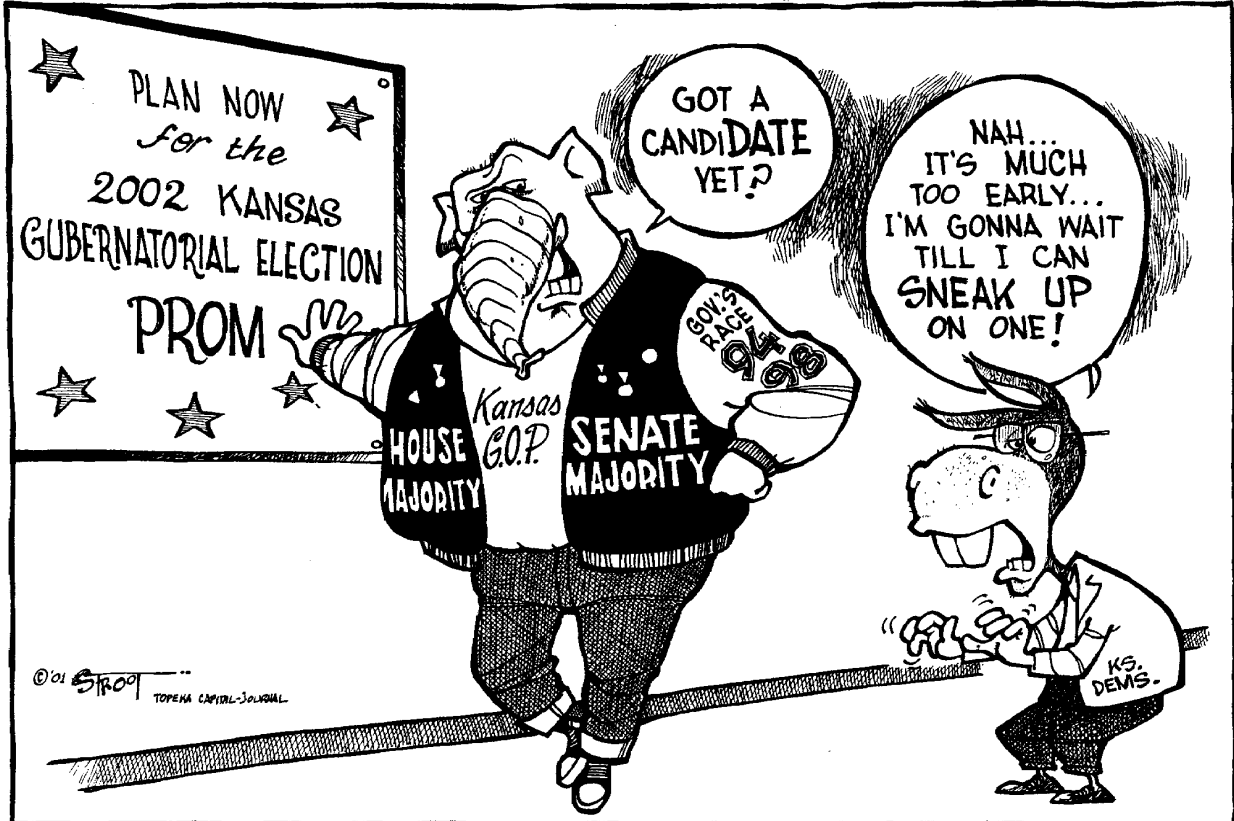
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Cats and lizards enliven vacation

Vacation — the opportunity to get away from it all on the sunny shores of Mexico while all our neighbors are enjoying unseasonably warm weather.

Darn. Why couldn't it have snowed while I was gone?

Several lifetimes ago, we were suckered into buying a timeshare at a little resort in Mexico. Since then we have taken our vacation in January to enjoy the beauty of the ocean and the warmth of semitropical climate when it is most likely to be nasty at home. Having blown most of our cash just getting to the resort, we tend to sit around on the beach, sip margaritas and read. The timeshare has a kitchen and most of our meals are home cooked.

Although the dog was at the vet's and the cats were being cared for, we weren't allowed to get lonely for our pets. The resort was full of animals this year, although pets are forbidden.

Soon after getting settled in our second-story villa we discovered that three cats lived amongst the palm-thatch-covered roofs of the buildings around us.

These were not pets. They're wild cats — pretty, house-size wild cats — but wild cats, nonetheless.

The staff said that they have been trying to get rid of the cats by using "humane" raccoon traps. The cats appar-



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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ently are a lot smarter than either raccoons or those setting the traps, however. A salesman said they can go into the traps, steal the bait and get back out without tripping the triggers. They won't go near anyone with a uniform on, or anyone else, for that matter.

While they wouldn't come to us, they would enter an opened door to check the kitchen for any scraps we might have left. We left scraps, of course. You know how I feel about cats.

Then there were the lizards, or geckos. We saw three of them.

The first showed up on the wall outside our door on the first night we were there. He was a big-eyed little thing and soon scampered away.

The second met with an accident and had to be escorted from the premises.

I moved a planter off an outdoor table to set it for supper and saw a spot where the planter had been. Thinking it was a

leaf or piece of bark, I tried to brush it off.

As lizard and tail separated from each other, I learned my mistake.

The family accused me of being a lizard-hater. The tail sat twitching for several minutes and the lizard just looked scared. One of the kids finally moved it off the table and disposed of the inch-long detached tail.

The third gecko came out that next night. He was twice as big as the tail-less one and I told everyone it was his big brother come to get me. Still, at almost four inches long, he wasn't much of a threat. He soon disappeared into the shrubbery.

We got back home in time to pick up the dog and baby the cats and enjoy the snowstorm.

I like being home, but I do miss having lizards with my lunch.

Board violated open meeting law

It seems pretty clear that the Oberlin School Board violated the state's Open Meetings Act when it went behind closed doors last Monday to talk about the district's bond issue.

The board cited "financial" as the reason for the closed meeting, but the board appeared to be focused on the school district's finances. That is not a topic which can be discussed behind closed doors. Neither is the performance of other elected officials or of contractors and agents hired by the school board.

The Open Meetings exemption for financial information applies only to financial information and trade secrets of a private business which might be given to the board. No such items were on the table last week that I can tell. If there was, I wish someone would let the rest of us in on it.

The board was trying to work its way out of a sticky situation. The school district had given out information about the \$7.38 million dollar bond proposal that was based on misinformation. The county clerk admitted to the board that she gave the wrong figure for the district's assessed valuation to a bond consultant, who used it to figure the cost of the program.

That embarrassed the board and harmed the credibility of the bond issue, to be sure, but it's not a topic that the law allows the board to talk about in closed session. People at the meeting who were asked to leave had a pretty good idea that was the case, too.

School boards spend an inordinate amount of time worrying about whether they are following the myriad of state and federal laws that apply to their business. The Open Meetings Law is just one of those, but it's an important one.

A school board is charged with running a multi-million-dollar business.



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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It's the taxpayers' money that they are spending, and the taxpayers' children they are educating. We all have a right to know what goes on at board meetings.

The Open Meetings Act makes it the policy of the state that all public meetings should be open to the public. There are only a few, limited exemptions, and they are well defined.

Board members may sometimes wish they could talk "off the record" about a touchy subject, but that's not enough reason to kick 20 citizens out of a meeting. They wouldn't have been there if they didn't care about what the board was doing.

The ironic thing to me is that, by closing the session and forcing all those

people to cool their heels out in the hall, the board probably hurt its cause more than it helped it.

The Open Meetings Act has teeth. It includes \$500 personal fines for board members involved in a violation. Actions taken in or after an illegal meeting can be voided by the court. But it should never come to that. Our school board members are good people, trying hard to do the right thing. It's a tough job at best.

But this time, it looks like the board was wrong. You'd think at least the board owes those people at the meeting, and all taxpayers who were short-changed by the closed session, an apology. And more to the point, a promise that it won't happen again.

Write

The *Oberlin Herald* encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of public interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

Mail letters to 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan., 67749, or by E-mail to obherald@nwkansas.com.

We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise.

We do not publish form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area. Thank-yous from this area should be submitted to the Want Ad desk.

Letters will not be censored, but will be read and edited for form and style, clarity, length and legality. We will not publish attacks on private individuals or businesses which do not pertain to a public issue.

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