

Farm lease ought to stay; lake should be preserved

Farmer Jim Abbey was down at the City Council, protesting that he was being picked on by people who want to do away with his lease on much of the farm ground at Sappa Park.

You can't blame him, really. He and his wife have been farming the land for at least 15 years, and before the lake, her family lived there.

But the city has got to think about more than one family here, especially when you consider that the farm lease has been none too lucrative for all concerned in recent years.

Should the city and a group of people interested in developing uses for the park be studying alternatives?

Sure. This is a public park we're talking about, after all. It was built as a state fishing lake by the Works Progress Administration during the Depression, so it's somewhat historic as well.

It belongs to the people of Oberlin, not to the lessee or anyone else. The state gave it to us. What should the goal be?

To improve recreational use of the park. That could include hiking and nature trails, a recreational vehicle park, other uses compatible with farming, as Mr. Abbey suggests.

But the goal should remain, as it has been for the city and park supporters for nearly two decades, to restore the lake for fishing, swimming and recreation. That's the big thing Oberlin lacks in the park department.

We won't go back through the sad tale of how the state abandoned the lake when it silted in, or how the city abandoned the water rights needed to refill it.

But just look over at Atwood, and how much good — and business — that town gets from its restored lake. That's got to be the goal.

And, yes, a lake would take the heart of the farm ground out of production, but the greater good would be served. That's a long ways off, though.

Meantime, there's a lot of development that could take place that would be compatible with the farm lease. Trails, an RV park, more picnic and play area could all be accommodated. The area with restrooms along the entry road would make a good RV park. The island could be opened up for park use, and fenced off, without really hampering farm production.

But whatever happens, the dam should be preserved. There's no way the city should allow it to be cut or compromised. Without the dam, the lake would be all but dead, and the mayor said as much the other day.

Meantime, should the city evict its long-time tenant?

No. No purpose would be served. Let him farm, at least until it's time to build a lake.

But remember who owns the park, and why. The farm lease is just that, a lease. There's no long-term right to farm implied or promised.

— Steve Haynes

City Council has its own mind

It was one of the shorter editorials of the year, tucked down under a piece lauding the City Council for buying land and a well south of town.

We took after the council for doubling the city's year-end bonuses. The piece seems to have created something of a stir, at least if you judge by the anonymous hate mail generated.

And — we're not taking credit for this — last week, the council slashed employees' raises from a planned 3 percent to just 1 percent.

The writer, a city employee, was steamed. We're not going to run the letter — we don't run anonymous letters — but the sentiment is interesting.

"Well, Mr. Haynes, you finally succeeded in writing a column in your paper that the City Council headed," he/she wrote.

Heck, we didn't tell the council to cut raises. Never mentioned that, in fact. But the council did cut back to 1 percent, giving a few employees more (as usual) as a merit raise.

We said we would have given employees (not council members) a bonus. We said the council shouldn't have doubled the bonus when it has raised the property tax by more than 18 percent. And for sure, the council did not show wisdom in taking the larger bonus itself.

While city employees may be upset about the cutback, compared to many in Oberlin and across Kansas, they're lucky. They got a raise, and they have jobs.

A lot of people have not done so well through the recession and drought. Government workers are about the last to feel it, but it's



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
shaynes@nwkansas.com

worked its way up to them.

In our company, no one got a raise in 2001. This year, we had some, but not nearly as big as in a normal year.

Times are tough. People don't have much money to spare. Many private firms have frozen hiring or wages, and more than a few have had layoffs. It's not just here.

The state is in a budget squeeze, cities and counties are being cut, and schools likely are next, no matter what the new governor promised. Taxpayers don't have any money.

There is a limit to what people can pay. If you have no job, you can't pay income taxes, and it's darned tough to pay property taxes.

This doesn't seem to occur to our anonymous city employee.

"A 1 percent raise is an insult," he/she wrote. "A 1 percent raise says that you didn't want to give us any-

thing, but you thought this would satisfy us."

The writer goes on to say that he/she would quit, but, well, jobs are hard to find. Join the real world.

Government is used to raising taxes when it wants something, but there is a limit. That may have been reached in Oberlin this year. And the problem is not going to go away; the state's budget crunch seems likely to last two-three more years.

I wish I could take credit for the council's decision, but I think a lot of taxpayers have told the members what they think. Not just us.

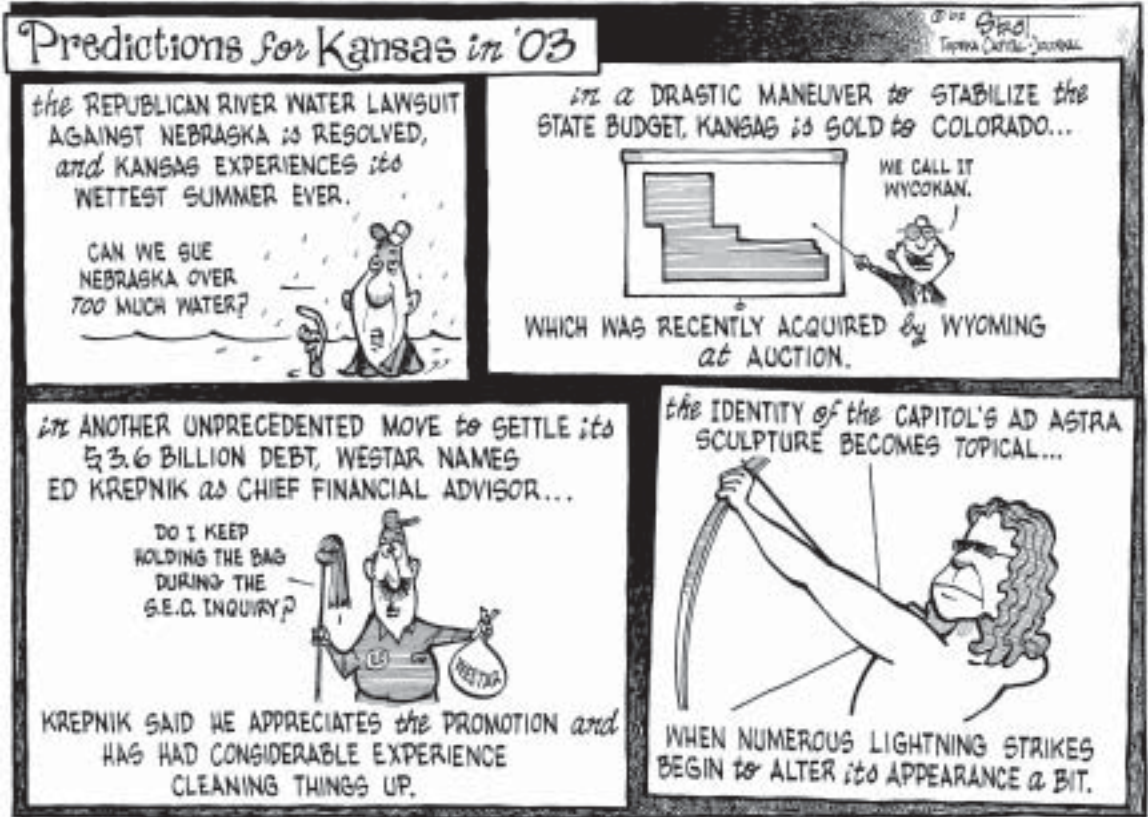
It's going to be tough out here the next couple of years, so don't expect the problem to just go away.

And if you want your letter in the paper, you have to come in an sign it. I don't think you'd be fired by the city for complaining.

From the Bible

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore

afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. Luke 2:8-11



Is the government out to get her?

The government makes running a business soooo much fun.

Why just this fall I had a rousing game of "YOU-OWE." with the Infernal Revenue Service. The only amazing thing about it was — I won! Of course, I was right all along.

It all started out with a notice in early September that we had not paid state unemployment taxes in Colorado in 2000.

They were right. We hadn't.

Steve and I sold our papers in southern Colorado in the spring of 1993. We purchased *The Oberlin Herald*, *The Saint Francis Herald* and *Bird City Times* on Sept. 1, 1993.

That year, 1993, was the last year we paid unemployment taxes to the state of Colorado. From 1993 to 2002, I've faithfully paid all employment taxes we owed in the state of Kansas.

The letter said that we had to send written proof to the federal government if they had been some mistake.

I called the number given and after several days of getting the run around on voice mail and being hung up on, I was told to write a letter and send it off to Ogden, Utah.

This was not exactly right, as it turned out. I did write a letter and



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
chaynes@nwkansas.com

enclosed copies of forms I had sent both the state and federal government.

Time passed.

In early November, we received another letter.

We had not paid our taxes to Colorado and we owed the federal government a penalty because of it. I don't know how not paying the state makes us owe the feds, but that's what they said.

I called again. This time I got someone else. This person said that I had to call the state of Kansas and get a form 940-C. With this and a letter, I could get off the hook.

I called Kansas. The man said sure, we were all paid up and he would send it right out.

Two weeks later I was still waiting for the 940-C. (No, you can't get this one off the Internet.)

At this point I got another letter from Uncle Sam. He was not happy or nice. He had been at his calculator. For failure to pay taxes plus penalty and interest, we owned \$21,181.85 and we'd better pay *now* if we knew what was good for us.

I called Kansas again and all but went into hysterics.

The man I talked to this time had the form 940-C on my FAX machine in under 30 minutes, bless him.

I had it plus a letter in the 4:30 mail.

We got a letter from the Internal Revenue Service the other day.

Dang, you don't owe us anything this time. Never did. All just a computer mistake.

But we'll get you, my pretty. You and your little cat, too.

I just can't wait.

Now she's back on the farm

Christmas dinner at our house turned out to be quite a production.

Jim's dad, brother and sister-in-law, an out-of-town cousin and a special friend of ours joined us, so the table was full.

Since we were about "turkeyed out," Jim picked up a nice ham for our dinner. Now, maybe you know how to make ham gravy, but I opted to serve scalloped potatoes so we wouldn't need any gravy and almost had a disaster.

Guests were arriving and I had the oven stacked full. Both shelves were loaded. I was giving everything the once-over when it dawned on me; I hadn't added milk to the potatoes. Egads! Quick, pull it out of the oven; lift the foil; pour in the milk; recover; and pray everything gets done. Let's just say they weren't the best scalloped potatoes I ever made, but they were passable.

Time management is the area of my life that really needs work. Jim complains that I am always late. He's one of those people who thinks that if they're not 15 minutes early, they're late. My theory is if I'm on time, I'm early.

Before the 25th, Jim kept leaving



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
Out-Back@webtv.net

broad hints about one of my Christmas presents. He would say things like, "Bet you'll be on time after you open my present."

To which I would ask, "Did you get me a wristwatch?"

Then he would chuckle and answer, "You could wear it on your wrist if you want to." Followed by more laughter.

I finally "got it" when I opened my present. He had purchased, for me, a full-sized hourglass. You know, "Like sands through the hourglass, so are the days of our lives." He thinks it's a riot. I'm not so sure.

My side of the family had a little get-together planned for Saturday after Christmas. It was decided that we would all gather at Kevin and

Debbie's home a few miles from Topeka, probably because it's the only house big enough to hold us all. Everyone was there except for Don and Kathryn.

Since this would be my first visit with my family since my "big night" in Washington, I had determined to play it to the hilt. My plan was to enter the house holding the picture of me and The First Couple like a bouquet of flowers, giving everyone my "homecoming queen wave."

My brothers were way ahead of me, though. As soon as we walked in the door, they each thrust pens and paper toward me, begging for my autograph. It was a set-up. We all had a good laugh from it anyway.

"Oh, Lord. It's hard to be humble...."

Not all would get big federal raise

To the Editor:

I always get concerned when I read material that is untrue or misleading. The case in point here is the editor's opinion on federal pay raises in the Dec. 4 issue of *The Herald*.

I am a federal employee with the Bureau of Land Management, a subscriber to *The Herald*, and I love the Oberlin area. Counter to what was said, most federal workers were not eligible for an 18.6 percent pay raise in 2003. The 18.6 percent pay raise was a locality pay raise for federal employees working in the Houston-Galveston, Texas, area. All other federal employees, except those in the San Francisco, California area, who were going to receive a 19.04 percent locality pay raise, were going to receive less than 18.6 percent.

What President Bush did in reality was "freeze" the locality pay rate adjustments for 2003, keeping them at the same percent increases they were in 2002. So, what this means is that I will receive a 3.1 percent base pay raise for 2003 (which all federal employees will receive), and because I work in the Denver area, my Denver area locality pay rate adjustment will remain the same as

it was in 2002, which was 13.34 percent.

I feel President Bush, in these tight economic times, did the right thing in not raising our locality pay rate adjustments any higher. But the opinion of the editor muddled this issue and made it sound like every federal employee in 2003 was going to get a fat 18.6 percent pay raise greater than their 2002 salary. Untrue.

I also take exception to the statement "There just is no shortage of federal employees." This depends on the federal agency one is talking about. The Bureau of Land Management, for example, manages 262 million acres of public land in the U.S., more than any other federal agency, most of it in the West, and we have a total of about 10,000 employees. If one was to pencil that out, it comes out to about one employee for every 26,200 acres of land.

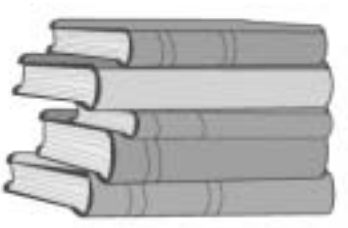
The bureau administers public land livestock grazing, recreation users, manages wildlife habitat, practices some forms of law en-

forcement, control of noxious weeds, and many other things. While 10,000 employees might appear to be a lot, for that much acreage it is not. We are having great difficulty keeping your public lands in good shape for you, partly because of congressional budgets limiting our employee base.

Lastly, the editor made the statement, "it's just not fair to expect taxpayers to ante up that kind of money, not when they are hurting as bad as they are this year." I pay taxes too. For some reason, some people forget that federal employees aren't exempt from paying taxes.

Thank you for letting me try to clarify this important issue.

Mike Karl
Henderson, Colo.



THE OBERLIN HERALD

Serving Oberlin and Decatur County since 1879

USPS 401-600

170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749-2243

Phone: (785) 475-2206 Fax (785) 475-2800

E-mail: obherald@nwkansas.com

Nor'West Newspapers

STAFF

Steve Haynes editor
Kimberly Brandt news editor
Mary Lou Olson society editor
Judy Jordan proofreader
Carolyn Kelley-Plotts columnist
Cynthia Haynes business manager
David Bergling advertising manager
Sherry Bergling advertising
Pat Cozad want ads/circulation
Karla Jones, Doris Miller advertising production
Steve Smith photo/page technician
Della Klima, Marsha Morford mailing
Jake Robinson page makeup/web design



Published each Wednesday by Haynes Publishing Co., 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749. Periodicals mail postage paid at Oberlin, Kan. 67749.

Steve and Cynthia Haynes, publishers
Official newspaper of Oberlin, Jennings, Norcatur, Dresden and Decatur County. Member of the Kansas Press Association, National Newspaper Association, Colorado Press Association, Nebraska Press Association and Inland Press Association.

Subscriptions: One year, \$28 (tax included) in Decatur, Norton, Rawlins, Sheridan, Thomas and Red Willow counties; \$32 (tax included) elsewhere in Kansas; \$35 elsewhere in the U.S. Foreign subscriptions, \$20 extra per year (except APO/FPO). POSTMASTER: Send change of address to 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749-2243.

Office hours: 8:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. Mon.-Fri.
(Also open most Saturdays when someone is in.)