

Legislature should decide how to solve school issues

The Kansas Legislature so far has done nothing to solve the "school problem," and that may not be entirely a bad thing.

The state's schools probably will get some more money, but nothing like the billion dollars recommended in a consultants' report a couple of years ago — and demanded by a Topeka judge's ruling last month.

For one thing, no one can really say how much money Kansas schools need. They already take more than half the state budget

The state Constitution says the Legislature shall make "suitable" provision for the school budget. Half of everything might seem more than suitable to some, but schools are important.

Still, average test scores for Kansas students are high and they seem to do well in college or trade school.

Kansas schools have better equipment and facilities than many, and the money is there for basic education.

There are inequalities.

Schools with shrinking enrollment — which includes most districts in rural Kansas, especially the northwest — are in a pinch, because student count is the biggest component of a district's budget.

Many, like Oberlin, put off the day of reckoning, but with times tight and no extra state money, they are cutting back.

That hurts, but most Kansas businesses have been forced to do the same thing. So has the state.

It's easy to say that people can afford a tax increase, but most voters seem to disagree.

Then there are the growing suburban districts, places like Blue Valley, where wrestling mats retract into the walls of new high schools.

These schools may not be exactly plush, but the evidence — and the copious course offerings — suggest they have more money than they could get by with.

Still other districts are pushed by demands for special education or English as a second language. Immigrants may bring growth and new dollars, but their children can be expensive to teach.

Other districts, eyeing the share of the pie going to neighbors, are unhappy with the way it's divided. That was the genesis of the lawsuit now making its way to the state Supreme Court.

We hope the high court throws the suit out. In our democratic system, it's the Legislature and not the courts that should decide how much to spend on schools. Only our elected representatives should decide what is "suitable."

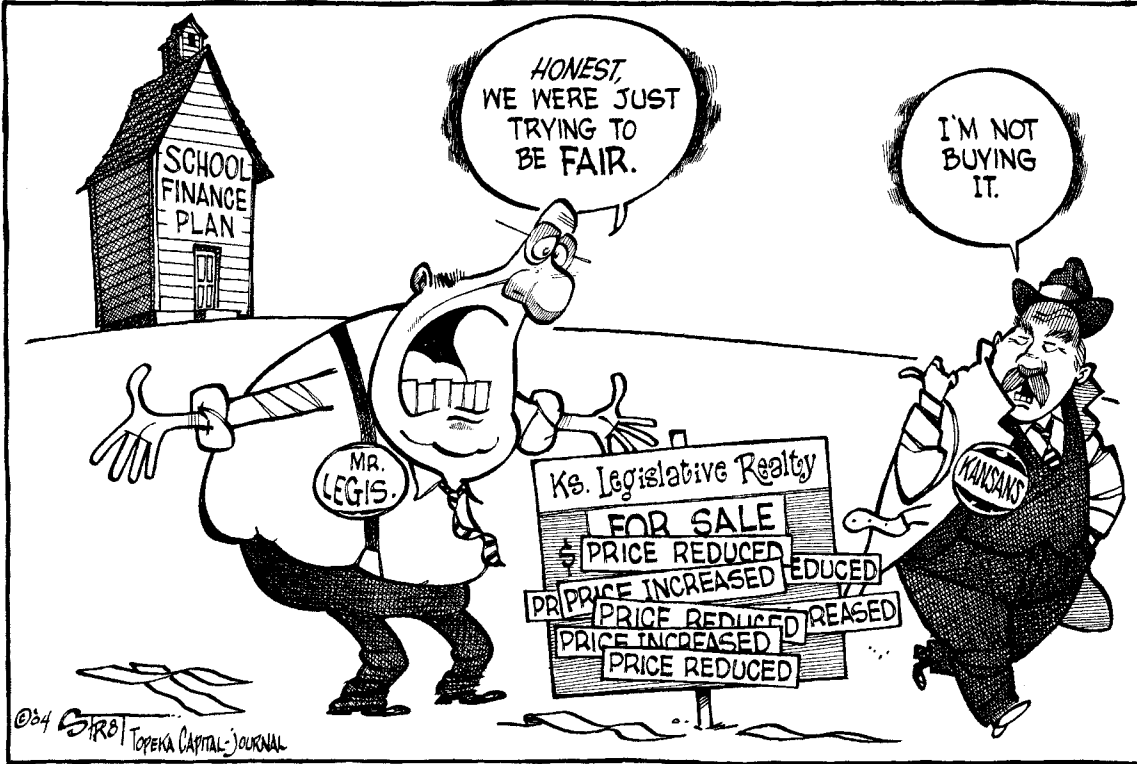
It's true that the state needs to deal with the inequities in the system, but that's no easy task and there is no money to throw at the problem. It'll have to be solved within the current budget, or nearly so. There will be no billion-dollar bonus for public schools. There is no need for one.

But the Legislature does need to apply itself to the task of making the school budget system a little more equal, and it needs to do that before the next session ends.

In the meantime, the courts ought to back off and let the system function, even if that means little or no change until the voters demand one.

In a democracy like ours, that's the way the system is supposed to work. If the Legislature doesn't act, it's made a decision, and the losers should not count on the courts to bail them out.

— Steve Haynes



Graduation is serious business

She did it!

I am now, officially, the mother of a certified, card-carrying, educated, college graduate.

They take graduation ceremonies seriously at the University of Maryland University College. In early March, my daughter, Halley, then referred to as "The Candidate," received a very official-looking document regarding ticket information, cap and gown size, lodging, luncheon and new graduate information.

On graduation day, candidates MUST be in line, at the auditorium, in alphabetical order, by 7:30 a.m. or they would have to be seated in the rear of the auditorium. And they meant it. Halley said several arrived at 7:35 and were not allowed to join the procession.

Each candidate was allowed six (6) tickets for the ceremonies. The ticket MUST NOT be separated from the stub or the ticket would be rendered void. Parking was allowed only in certain places. Guests were expected to stay for the entire ceremony, and so were the candidates.

Further study of the information revealed that over 1,300 graduates and 11,000 guests were expected.

Several long-time friends of my daughter flew to Washington to share the day with her and to celebrate her achievement. Amber is a young woman I have known since she and Halley were in high school together. Kristi is a friend Halley has had for almost that long and Rebekah is a relatively new friend.

That whole concept of friendship is unique. These young women are diverse. One is a programmer for a huge software company, one is a personal fitness trainer, and the other is a financial analyst for a large hospital. They are from different backgrounds, but with one thing in common: they are loyal friends.



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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This week, they were there for Halley. In two weeks, they are all meeting again to help one of them move into a new apartment.

The only way you get loyal friends like that is to be a loyal friend yourself. So, as proud as I am of my daughter for sticking with it and finishing something she started, I am just as proud of her for being the kind of woman she is and such a good friend.

—ob—

We celebrated that night by going out to dinner at a great Italian restaurant on DuPont Circle in the heart of Washington. It was loud and crowded. The aromas in the air made your mouth water. Waiters never wrote down a thing; they remembered your orders and got them all right. The meal was served family-style and Halley got carried away, ordering at least two more courses than we should have. But we brought the extra home, so we'll enjoy Italian food for a few more days.

Today is our tourist day. Halley took the day off and we are heading out to see Arlington National Cemetery and the new World War II Memorial. I want to go back to the Vietnam Memorial and the Roosevelt Memorial. If the Martin Luther King Memorial is completed, I want to see that, too.

Yesterday, Kara had a tour of the West Wing. Halley's friend Lois, who has the security clearance to

take guests through, came in her day off, to escort Kara and Rebekah. (Refer to paragraph eight above). She is the same woman who stayed until 9 p.m. on a Friday night to escort me. We can't thank her enough for her kindness.

—ob—

On Wednesday, I am flying from Washington to Seattle for a mini-reunion with my sister, Kathryn, and her daughters, Patricia and Delight. Kathryn is planning a spa day for all of us as a special treat. This will be something I have never done.

I am told that if you are even the slightest bit claustrophobic, do not do the herbal body wrap. I don't think I'm claustrophobic, but being wrapped in scalding hot towels with a banana leaf over my face doesn't sound like fun. I might pass on the wrap, but I'm looking forward to everything else. Pedicures are my favorite.

—ob—

Jim is handling my extended vacation very well. This whole thing grew from a few days away into a 10-day excursion. And never once did he ever say he didn't want me to go or ask why I thought I had to be gone for so long. He was nothing but encouraging, knowing how important it was for me to do both things.

This, of course, means he is entitled to do the same. Hm-m-m-m, did I hear something about an antique engine and thresher show in Nova Scotia?

Slumber may come slowly to some

Steve is a night person. I am a day person.

I get up early. He stays up late. We meet in the middle.

The middle sometimes gets stretched, however. This means he gets up a lot earlier than he wants and I stay up a lot later than I plan.

This makes us both a little grouchy at times.

Last week, I figured I had it made. Steve would be out of town. I could go to bed early and live at my own pace.

That was before I found out about prom.

Each year, the Oberlin Rotary Club sponsors the after-prom party. It starts at 12:30 a.m. and ends about 3:30 a.m. I was signed up to work the 12:30-1:30 a.m. shift. So much for early to bed.

I also needed to take pictures for the paper, so I got to the party at 11 p.m. and started shooting pictures of the kids dancing and having a great time.

I then got pictures of the crowning of the king and queen and a bunch of shots of the after-prom party, after the kids changed from tuxedos and ball gowns to T-shirts and cutoffs.

I gave up about 2:30 a.m. and headed for the office. I had drunk a couple of cups of diet Pepsi and was wired. I downloaded my pictures, chose the ones I wanted and headed



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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home.

It was 3:30 a.m. and I was still wide awake. A hot bath and a good book got me to sleep as the clock struck 4 a.m. I was glad I had been to church Saturday night. I definitely wasn't planning to get up before noon on Sunday.

At 10 a.m., though, the phone rang. My husband — on the way to New York for a memorial service — was lonely and wanted to talk. I pointed out that I hadn't had enough sleep since I had been up until 4 a.m. He got up at 6 a.m.. He said he would call one of our children and wake them up.

I couldn't get back to sleep, so I got up and fiddled around until it was time to leave for Norton's graduation.

After the graduation, I downloaded pictures and headed for home and the couch. I had no sooner gotten to sleep when the phone rang.

Yep. It was Steve checking in. That was twice in one day.

He'll be home tomorrow and he'll want to sleep in after a long weekend on the road.

Of course, he may have a rude awakening every day for the rest of the week.

From the Bible

O praise the Lord, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people. For his merciful kindness is great toward us: and the truth of the Lord endureth for ever. Praise ye the Lord. Ps. 117



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Clark 'advocates our position'

One of my lessons learned during the years that I have been granted the privilege to serve you is that in the last month of the legislative session, whatever I write about in a newsletter will be wrong before you receive the information.

I have determined that my time is best spent engaged in the negotiation process, ever vigilant advocating and defending your position, with other legislators and members of the governor's staff.

Since negotiations in conference committee are between six legislators (three members of the Senate and three members of the House) and the negotiations are going on simultaneously in many committees, it is important to have developed trust and respect from all members of the Legislature. You might not agree with another legislator on a particular issue, but you have to be able to disagree respectfully without being disagreeable. Most legislators have learned this virtue; some haven't and they always are at a disadvantage.

Generally, the chairman, vice chairman and ranking minority member of a standing committee represent their chamber in the negotiations. Since I am chairman of the Senate Utilities Committee, I was one of the negotiators on all utility legislation. Also, because of my involvement and frequent testimony on Medicaid Reform, I was one of the negotiators on this legislation this year, while last year my role expanded to include emergency 911 cell phone service.

I have learned to keep in contact with the House members who serve all or part of the same district I represent; Jim Morrison on Public Health Issues, Ralph Ostmeyer on Local Government, Gary Hayzlett and John Faber on Transportation, Dan Johnson and Larry Powell on Agriculture. Really, you need to be on a first name basis with all the members, you have to make time to



Letter from Topeka

By State Sen. Stan Clark
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listen to the issues that they really care about, to offer suggestions to solve their problem that also helps the citizens throughout the state, or, at a minimum, does not hurt us.

Integrity and credibility are essential. One member from Lawrence seeks my advice several times a day, and while we seldom agree on direction or when voting, there is mutual respect. Frequently, other legislators direct their constituents in my direction because of my knowledge in a specific area, because my files of information are well organized and easily accessible or because I probably know more of the individuals in the various state agencies than just about any other legislator.

In the Senate, I am the unofficial parliamentarian and several times a day other legislators come to me and ask my advice on how to accomplish one of their goals. Being available for these little favors is necessary, particularly for a rural legislator, to be effective in working for you. Sedgwick and Johnson counties will have negotiators on most of the legislation, and only through being available and working with others on their issues can I effectively represent you and your needs.

The legislature will adjourn for the year on May 27. If you have any questions, I can be reached by calling 785-672-4280, by e-mail at sclark@ink.org, or by writing me at 205 U.S. 83, Oakley, KS 67748

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.

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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.



