

## Mid-size school districts using our money to sue us

Though they claim they don't have enough money to educate their children, greedy mid-size school districts have spent more than \$2 million in tax money suing the state in the last few years.

And they're not done yet. Now these districts, led by Salina and Dodge City, are demanding that the state Supreme Court take over the school system and pump an extra billion dollars into public education. No one is saying where this money will come from, but that is pretty easy to figure out. In effect, these districts are using our money to sue us for more.

The Legislature really needs to put a stop to this. If people in these school districts want to sue, they ought to raise the money.

It shouldn't be legal to spend state tax money to sue the state.

It's hard to see why this kind of behavior has been allowed at all.

At the core of the problem is the belief that, if you don't like the way things turn out, it's OK to sue.

Under our system, the governor proposes a budget. The Legislature is supposed to decide how to spend state money. The Legislature is supposed to decide how much to tax us.

Not the courts. Not a handful of school districts that feel slighted because their neighbors get more per pupil under the complicated state

funding formula. And the Legislature is supposed to decide what school districts can and cannot do with state tax money. Courts are supposed to interpret the law, not make it.

It's a safe bet that taxpayers didn't intend for school districts to be able to use their money to sue the Legislature. We sort of thought that money was for teachers, classrooms, books and the like.

When it became OK to use tax money to sue the state, we're not sure. It's something the Legislature can and should change, though.

There are other, similar abuses of tax money. School districts, counties, cities, elected officials all use tax money to pay groups that hire lobbyists.

These groups try to influence the Legislature to do what public officials want, and that's not necessarily what taxpayers want. Often, it just costs us money.

Tax money shouldn't be spent to influence decisions in Topeka. Those should be decided by legislators, taking into account the wishes of their bosses — the taxpayers — and no one else.

Public officials should not be allowed to take our money and sue our state or influence our Legislature.

It's time for this stuff to stop.

— Steve Haynes



## Truth no longer the bottom line?

Going to press meetings over the years, we've gotten to hear and meet some interesting people — cartoonists like Lynn Johnson (For Better or Worse), politicians like Bob Dole and celebrities like Erin Brockovich.

This year at the Kansas Press Association, we heard Carl Bernstein. People my age remember Bernstein as one of a pair of young reporters who uncovered the Watergate scandal and eventually brought down the Nixon administration. That, however, was 30 years ago.

When I first heard that Mr. Bernstein was speaking, I sort of yawned. I thought it was OK, but wasn't it a little late? Carl Bernstein was old news.

Where does a man go who brings down a president? Is there any up from there?

Actually, it was more sideways. Over the last 30 years, as a reporter and author, he has uncovered a secret agreement between the U.S., Egypt, China and Pakistan to supply arms to Afghan rebels, been tossed out of Iraq by Saddam Hussein and uncovered a secret alliance between Ronald Reagan and Pope John Paul II that helped hasten the fall of communism in Europe.

His talk was a mixture of fear that the big conglomerate news organizations are more interested in profits than the common good and a cry for journalists to seek the truth and not just the sensational.

He sees so much of what is reported today as celebrity seeking, sensationalism and manufactured controversy. And he did that without once mentioning the trials of Martha Stewart or Michael Jackson.

Mr. Bernstein decried what he called "Idiot Culture." This is not seeking the truth or greater good but pandering to the masses, he said,



## Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes  
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sort of fast food for the mind.

Instead of reporting on what people do and think in Iraq and how their lives have been changed, the networks are counting bodies and reporting the bombings and terrorism of a few.

Ah well, bread and circuses have been with us for a long time. Some whose names are revered today — publishers like Hurst and Pulitzer — were not above manufacturing a little war in some faraway place in order to sell papers.

Of course, we should be better than we are. We need preachers like Mr. Bernstein to keep us on the straight and narrow.

Personally, I think all the hubbub over electing the new pope falls in the same category. We can't make one bit of difference in the process, and all the reporting in the world is not going to change anything.

So, after checking the paper and finding a great dearth of "Idiot Culture" — we didn't have one celebrity trial story, one lowest-common-denominator piece or even a pseudoscience story on breast implants — I decided to add a little Idiot Humor.

At church in Emporia on Sunday, the priest handed out copies of the "Sweet Sistine" bracket.

Set up to look like the basketball playoffs, it gave the names of 15 cardinals of the church the media has named as front runners to be the

next pontiff.

From Italy we have Dionigi Tettamanzi, Giovanni Battista, Oscar Andres and Angelo Scol. From Latin America, there is Jorge Mario Bergoglio, Argentina; Claudio Hummes, Brazil; Nicolas de Jesus Lopez Rodriguez, Dominican Republic; Rodriguez Maradiaga (Honduras); and Dario Castrillon Hoyos, Columbia.

On the other side of the chart from Europe there is Christoph Schoenborn, Austria; Ted Crilly, Craggy Island, Ireland; Godfried Danneels, Belgium; and Joseph Ratzinger, Germany. And from Africa and Asia we have Wilfrid Fox Napier, South Africa; Ivan Dias, India, Francis Arinze, Nigeria; and Duke. Oh, that's a basketball team.

Italy goes against Latin America and Europe against Africa and Asia in the bracket.

The winners play (pray) for the chair of St. Peter and the right to be the Supreme Pontiff of the Universal Church.

(Thank the Lord the pope changes his name. Can you imagine the television reporters saying His Holiness Pope Godfried Andres Rodriguez de Jesus Arinze?)

And, there, folks is your Idiot Culture for the day. For us Catholics, if we can't laugh at ourselves, everyone else will be snickering without us.

## Recipe shortcut worked out

Some cooks follow the recipe precisely.

They measure exactly, using a flat edge to level off flour and sugar. Liquid ingredients are measured right down to the last drop. They even measure the depth of the dough when rolling out biscuits or bread. And, heaven forbid, not having exactly the right ingredients or following the directions to the letter.

I wish I were a little more that way. But, alas, I tend to be more of a "slap-dash" kind of cook.

Jim was going to a men's prayer breakfast this morning and wanted to take biscuits and gravy. I stay out of his way when he's making gravy, first because he likes to do it, and secondly he, quite frankly, makes better gravy than I do.

We got home late last night, but I wanted to get a head start for this morning. So I found my new biscuit recipe, glanced through it and cut the butter into the dry ingredients, covered the bowl and let it set on the counter. I set out the rolling pin, another bowl for the liquid ingredients and a cookie sheet, so I would be ready to go this morning.

It was a very early breakfast and we had to allow for drive time, so we set the alarm for 5 a.m. While I was waiting for the coffee to brew, I decided to read the recipe more thoroughly. Wait, I didn't see this last night. Buttermilk. I didn't have buttermilk. And what's this? Chill the dough for two hours before baking. I was going to be doing good just to get done in 30 minutes, let alone two hours.

Too late to worry about it now. The biscuits were made with plain old milk and they barely cooled to room temperature before they were popped into the oven. But, you know



## Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts  
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what? They were pretty good biscuits anyway. I'll have to try them "the right way" sometime, and see if I can improve on them.

—ob—

We took a mini-vacation this weekend. We drove to Lawrence on Saturday, attended a newspaper event, then spent the evening with Jim and Linda. Of course, we stayed up too late talking and lingered too long over breakfast the next morning. That made us about 10 minutes late getting to church with Bill and Betty in Junction City, but they were still singing when we slid into a pew. Not too many noticed. I hope.

Their church is between ministers right now, so they had a guest preacher from out of town deliver the message. He talked about how the congregation would conduct themselves in "the meantime," un-

til their new preacher arrives in town, ultimately tying the analogy to what we (all of us) will do in "the meantime" before Christ comes again.

Good sermon. Any sermon I remember more than a day is a good sermon. Hopefully, that's one I won't forget. The best sermons, however, are lived, not preached.

## From the Bible

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone. Ephesians 2: 19, 20

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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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## Springtime special in the hills

As some return to the sea, or the mountain, for renewal, I go to the hills.

I grew up on the edge of the Flint Hills west of Emporia, and spent hours driving the back roads and pastures of Chase County.

We hunted quail in the fall, hiked in the winter and picnicked in the summer. We explored down into Greenwood County and came back over the unfenced pastures to the valley of the South Fork of the Cottonwood.

I know the hills, and they know me.

I don't have to go home. I can be happy in the Red Hills down south, the Gyp Hills, the Smoky Hills around Salina. Set me down in the rolling country along the Sappa Creek, and I'm happy.

Just let me walk.

But springtime is special in the Flint Hills. It's when they burn the pastures, a rite as old as the ranch houses and stone fences that dot the tallgrass region.

We only had a day after a meeting in Lawrence, and we were late. The first half of the month is prime time for pasture burning.

But the farther north you go, the later the burn. And we were in luck Saturday night.

A pall hung over eastern Kansas. We spotted our first flames just out-



## Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes  
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side of Lawrence. There were dozens more fires in Shawnee and Waunsee counties.

A tallgrass fire is awe inspiring. The grass can be six feet tall, and the flames can jump twice that high, maybe more.

An orange glow lights the sky for miles around a prairie fire. Up close, the blaze can be frightening. Like a forest fire, it creates its own draft, drawing the wind into it, and sending up clouds of dense black smoke.

Down around Admire, they had a really big fire going, a couple of sections or more.

My brother and Bill Sneed, the photographer from Lawrence, had told us we would be too late down in Chase County, and for the most part, that was the case.

The cattle are due in this week, Bill said. There won't be any fires.

And from the top of the divide between the Neosho and the Cottonwood, you could see only a couple of pastures that had not burned.

Everywhere, green shoots of new grass pushed up from the ashes, as they have for centuries. Before man came, they say, lightning set the fires and the wind fanned them.

From the high ridge, smoke from a thousand smoldering logs and stumps rose to obscure the sun and dim the view. The orange-yellow light in late afternoon made a surreal scene.

Walking that night, my eyes stung and burned from the smoke, such acrid perfume.

The next morning, we had to be up and away. We went into town for church and lunch, then headed west.

Out west of Cottonwood Falls, we saw the last fire, 12-foot flames leaping up the side of the bluff, glowing hot and orange. Even in the daylight, the sight was incredible.

Too soon, we were out of the hills and away from the new green of burned fields. But it was worth the side trip, well worth the time.

## Honor Roll

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