

Control of school budgets should be in local hands

Much is being made of the fact that property taxes have gone up since Kansas changed the school finance formula in 1992.

It's true, but it may not be such a bad thing.

On one hand, property taxes are most unpopular with the voters. On the other hand, it brings control of spending back to a school district's voters, who can approve (or deny) a property tax increase.

Voters have little control over statewide tax increases, except for the legislators they elect. Kansans have elected conservative members who have voted, over the last decade, to reduce state taxes and to give schools more control over their own fate.

People don't seem to mind. In fact, in elections last year, they voted in more conservatives, ousting some liberal members who had pushed for a tax increase.

It's hard to read that election as a cry for higher state taxes, no matter what the needs. From here, it looks like voters want the state to hold the line on spending.

There are some problems with that idea. For one thing, allowing local control means school spending will be less "equal" across the state.

That may create an opening for those who decry difference in spending from one district to another, creating yet another excuse for a lawsuit.

The original school "equalization" plan was crafted to avoid just that problem. It took all taxing decisions out of local hands.

By opening up a route for "rich" districts to spend more on their students, the Legislature may be asking for another round of legal problems.

There is a good argument for letting voters decide on tax increases. All Kansans think schools are important. Most of us think they are the No. 1 job of government. That doesn't mean they have a blank check.

People in one town may think schools are a little more important than the next. Voters may approve a levy increase or bond issue in one district, but not the next. That kind of community decision making is the bedrock of our democracy, but it was missing from the state-run school system for a long time.

Election after election has shown that, if school officials make a compelling case, they'll get a yes vote. And that is as it should be.

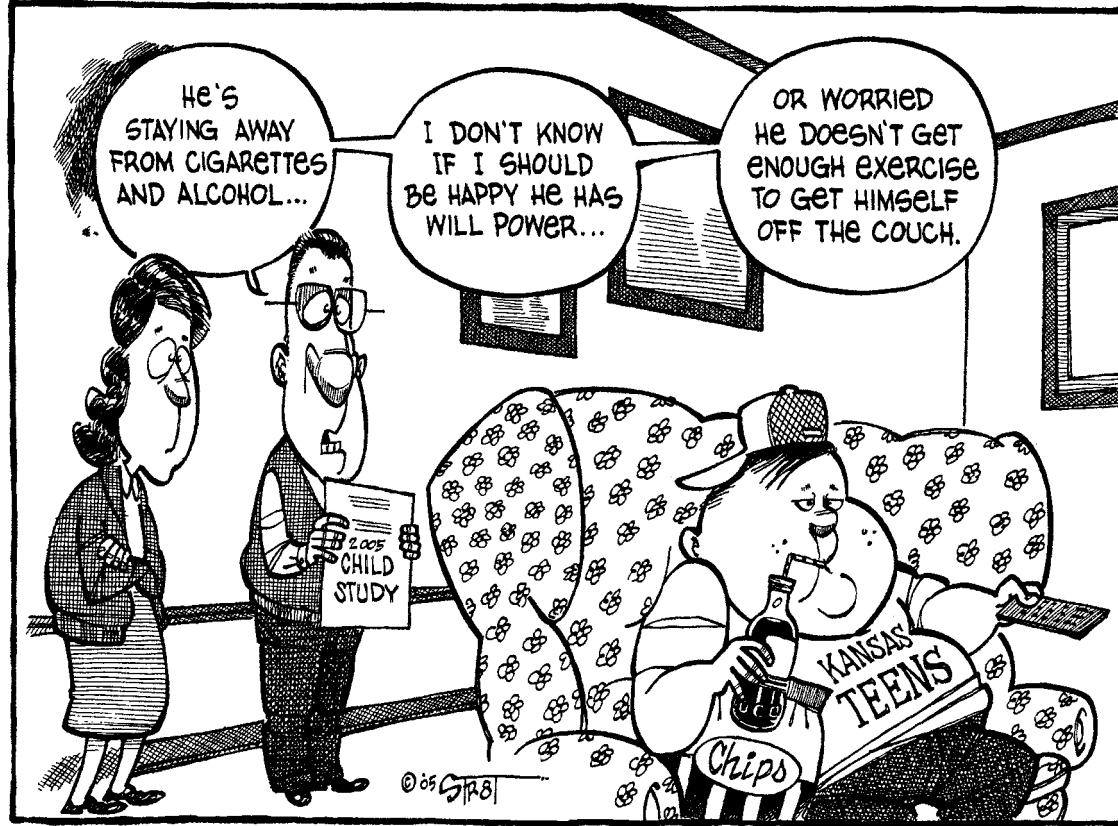
None of this will mean much if the state Supreme Court takes over the schools, however. The court ordered the Legislature to make "suitable" provision for education, without defining suitable.

It could mean the \$173 million the Legislature scraped up this year, or the \$1 billion consultants suggested a couple of years ago. It's hard to imagine the court trying to order a \$1 billion tax increase, but it could happen.

As it is, the Legislature put what it could find into schools and left the rest to local board and local voters. You have to believe that they will do the right thing.

Is local control of schools and school budgets really such a bad thing? It worked for a couple of centuries, and it might just work again.

Why not try? — Steve Haynes



Try these tips for graceful aging

Things are sagging a bit more than they once did, and I'm trying to fight both age and gravity.

Since I've been losing weight, I've spent a lot more time reading magazine and newspaper articles about toning your muscles, keeping in shape and eating the right diet.

I have clipped so many articles from papers and women's magazines that if they tip over on me in the middle of the night, I could be crushed or smothered.

I spend long minutes in the bathroom each day reading all this wonderful advice, then walk out and mostly ignore it.

I did buy some weights. My youngest daughter said I should have some two- and three-pound weights, so I went to the store and found that they had dozens of five-pound weights, one three-pound weight and no two pounders.

I bought one five and one three. I figured I could use the weight on one arm and then on the other. Then I got the bright idea of putting the three-pound weight in my car and pumping iron while driving.

My family and a friendly police officer frowned on this exercise, however, so the weight mostly keeps the ton of papers in the back



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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seat from blowing around.

I bought a big rubber band a couple of months ago, and as soon as I figure out the instructions, which are written in three languages — none of which is English — I will start to use it. Maybe.

I have started to try some of the suggestions, too.

An article in the *Womens Day* suggested that to keep mentally alert, if you are right handed, brush your teeth with your left hand. It's tough, but possible.

Then I picked up some suggestions from a column in *The Denver Post*, which gave nine simple ways to fitness.

Tip No. 3 said balance is important. Many hip and knee injuries are caused by poor balance, it said.

To solve this problem, it suggested that you stand on one foot

while brushing your teeth.

I liked that one. It was easy, simple and required no incomprehensible instructions or extra time.

I tried it. There I was, ready for my shower, balancing on my right foot while making horrible faces at the mirror as I tried to make my left hand brush my teeth.

Steve walked into the bathroom and stopped for just a couple of seconds. He slowly backed back out and softly closed the door. I don't think he even wanted to know what I was doing.

I found another tip in a magazine the other day. It suggested deep breathing. You breath in really deeply through your nose, then you exhale slowly through your mouth.

The article said you could do this while brushing your teeth.

New pope reaches out to world

And so the world pauses to applaud a new pope.

Everyone wonders what will change.

The short answer is, not much. The long answer, everything.

The world's watchers have been studying every paper and speech penned by the man known for 78 years as Joseph Ratzinger. They hope to predict what he'll do.

But when a man becomes pope, he takes on more than a new set of clothes. The job is for life. In that way, it's like being elevated to the Supreme Court.

As Benedict XVI, the pope may look to his fellow cardinals for advice, but he will turn also to God. And God may be less easy to predict.

His final sermon as Cardinal Ratzinger was conservative and orthodox. Yet his first acts as pope have been to reach out to the world — to Jews, Muslims, the Orthodox church and others.

The world's leaders went to Rome, first for the funeral of John Paul II, then for the installation of Benedict. It's amazing, the awe inspired in all the world, and not just Roman Catholics, by the office of pope.

Far from being "just" the leader of a billion Catholics, the pope inspires reverence throughout Western civilization, indeed, throughout the world.

The man who presides over the Holy See stands, tradition tells us, in a direct line from the Apostle Peter as Bishop of Rome. His office



Along the Sappa

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makes him the most prominent Christian leader, though he heads a church that is fractious and, as some see it, ridden with problems.

Don't forget, though, that the 2,000-year-old Roman church is also the world's oldest bureaucracy. Change does not come quickly to such a venerable organization.

But change will come. Only the pope, and his chief adviser, know what it will be.

Here's a guess. I don't expect to see a woman priest in a Catholic pulpit, not in my lifetime. That tradition is too well ingrained.

I think we might see married priests. The celibate clergy is a relatively new rule, only about 900 years.

I think the church will respond more to the need to clean up its own act. The child-sex scandal has cost the American church too much in terms of money, respect and members to ignore.

While the American church is a small part of the whole, the cardinals surely can't condone any of what happened.

Whatever happens won't satisfy

many, and it won't make the church any more perfect that it has been throughout history.

We expect perfection in matters of God, but we forget that the church is made up of men — members, priests, bishops, popes — who are as all of us, sinners, imperfect beings doing their best in the service of the Lord.

Like us all, they struggle on, doing the best they can.

The new pope has a great opportunity, in the next year, or the next decade, to advance the work of the church and the cause of world peace and solidarity.

Let us all — Catholic, Protestant, Jew, the unchurched and even the unbelieving — say a prayer for Benedict XVI, that the Lord will lead him down whatever path he has planned for him.

The world likely will be a better place. If nothing else, it'll be a fascinating trip.



There is life without television

It's been three weeks, two days, six hours and 39 minutes since the satellite television was cut off at our house. But, who's counting?

To say I don't miss it at all would be a lie. But, the truth is, we're getting along very nicely without it. We are using the television set to watch good, wholesome videos without the danger of being ambushed by advertising that borders on the edge of soft porn.

We are reading more. Jim is devouring material on creationism, playing his guitar and working on his sermons. I finished a book by Dr. Laura, "The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands," a book I would highly recommend; have started another on financial independence; and caught up on my past issues of "Reader's Digest."

We are getting to bed earlier, which helps both our dispositions. And my co-workers have noticed that I've been clocking in a few minutes earlier, which helps my boss' disposition.

—ob—

We went to Lawrence last weekend and by the time we got home, recuperated, and took a look around the place, weeds had just about taken over. The back lot, where we "pasture" our calves when they get big enough, looked like it needed a baler.

When I called my friend Patsy to see if she would be interested in "renting out" a couple of her sheep,



Out Back

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I don't think she thought I was serious. But, we were. Sheep are the best four-legged lawn mowers you can have. The lucky two we got from Patsy think they have landed in the middle of "cheat-grass heaven." And, they're just big ol' pets. When we walk to the fence, they come running, hoping to get their heads scratched.

Grandchildren of one of our neighbors came over to see the sheep and our two baby calves. They are town kids who love to play on our swing and see what new animals we might have.

Jim was building a storage shed inside the sheep pen that day and was only half listening when they told him they were going to feed the calves. "Okay. Whatever," was his comment.

Later that night, long after the kids had gone home, Jim went out to feed the calves and wondered why their pellets wouldn't go into the feeder. He came back in the house, laughing. "I guess they really did feed the calves," he said. "The feed trough

was packed solid with grass." No harm done, except for a few calf pellets on the ground.

—ob—

My daughter and her family moved to a new house over the weekend. Kara called me last night and said she thought she had found all the food boxes. I talked with my 6-year-old granddaughter, Taylor, and found out she likes the house and really likes the idea of having a big back yard to run and play in. Even if it doesn't have a swimming pool like her old house.

From the Bible

Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep.

Psalm 127: 1, 2

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