

## Legislature finds puzzle, not answers, for session

The 2006 Kansas Legislature opened Monday without answers to any of the big questions:

How much money will the state have to spend?

How much will schools need?

How much will the Supreme Court force the state to spend on schools?

How much should schools cost, anyway?

And how much of the roughly \$125 million legislators borrowed from the road fund will they put back this year?

Will it take a tax increase to pay for schools without losing part of the road program?

It'll be a couple of months before leaders know exactly how much money the state should have this year, but tax collections are running ahead of projection by the millions.

It sounds like a big pie, but a lot of people are lined up to eat it. Schools stand first in line, but they'll have to fight for whatever they get. Other groups are just too hungry after years of recession and, well, schools getting all the money.

No one knows exactly how much schools need, but they want it all. Schools have pressured the Legislature with lawsuits which led to a Supreme Court victory. Last year, they got more than \$290 million after a special session. This year, they'll move to grab whatever money shows up.

Monday, the Legislature received a report on questions it asked about how much it costs to run schools and why. No one believed the

report would result in less school spending. How much money will schools need? More.

How much money will the courts give schools? Even more.

Yet there will be great pressure against a tax increase. Some business groups, in fact, are pushing for tax cuts. That is going to make it hard to find cash for other spending, including social programs and highways.

With the secretary of transportation touring the state, threatening to ice projects in all areas unless she gets the money she needs, it's going to be tough to resist refilling the highway fund. Our guess, though, is the Legislature will juggle the books again and hope an improving economy will give it even more to spend next year.

Kansas got so far behind during the recession, without making the cuts the state should have, that it'll take years to get out of the hole.

And by that time, there may be another recession.

Once again, there's not much support for a tax hike, especially not in an election year. That means the Legislature will scrape and squeeze to get by, hauling out the smoke and mirrors as required.

No matter how much comes in, it'll all go out. And once again, state spending will grow, as will our record debt. It's not a pretty forecast, and not much improvement over recent years, but there you have it. — *Steve Haynes*

## Newcomers join geriatric set

Jim and I have officially crossed the line into the geriatric set. This New Year's Eve, we didn't even make it to 11 o'clock before we succumbed to the temptation of slumber.

The next morning, though, I roused to the thought of it being the first day of the new year. Carefully, opening one eye, I detected that Jim was still sleeping but in that fitful state right before you wake up.

Gathering my energy, I sat bolt upright and yelled at the top of my lungs, "Hey! Happy New Year!"

I think I gave him a heart attack, but he laughed, so 2006 is officially off to a good start.

It's Monday morning and I am sitting in my easy chair pondering life and the first day of the new week.

My mind wanders and I notice the dieffenbachia plant needs to be turned. I have to rotate the giant periodically because it grows into the window and messes up the drapes.

When it's turned away from the light, though, the branches and leaves hang directly in my line of sight between my recliner and the television. I spend two weeks leaning to the left at a 45-degree angle in order to see around the foliage.

After the leaves start to turn eastward again, I have about a three-week reprieve before it's time to rotate the plant and start the process all over again.

All this thinking about house plants leads me to remember I haven't watered any of the plants for at least two weeks. That's not all. I carried all my outside potted plants to the office for the winter, and I



### Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts  
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haven't watered them either. It's good they thrive on neglect.

Talked to my youngest daughter, Kara, over the weekend. They just returned from a week's ski vacation in Colorado.

It was their 7-year-old's first time on skis and she took to it like a pro. Kara said she was on a run down what is called a "rookie slope" when she heard, "Hi, Mom," as Taylor went sailing by. Kara could only yell to her daughter's back, "Taylor, slow down. Slow down. Make big turns."

To no avail. Taylor is fearless. She also knows how to defend her position.

Taylor is the shortest child in her class and on the soccer team. Conversely, her friend Claire (a year and a half younger) is the tallest amongst her peers. Even taller than Taylor.

Both sets of parents are sensitive to their daughters' emotions regarding their body image. Both assured their child that small or tall was best.

Claire and Taylor were playing when they began to argue about which was best, to be tall or to be small. Kara listened for a while, hoping they would settle them-

selves, but finally realized she would have to intervene. "Everyone is different," she said, "and everyone is special."

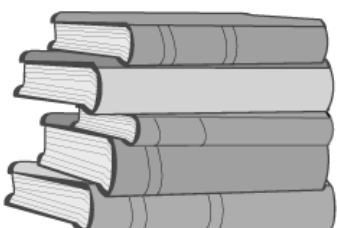
Taylor was silent for a moment then said, "Yeah, but it's always the smallest who gets to be on top of the cheerleaders' pyramid."

Can't argue with logic like that.

### From the Bible

Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart: So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man.

Proverbs 3: 3, 4



## A Peek at Kansas' 2006 Future...



## No bald cat found in this house

"Where's the bald cat?" Barb wanted to know.

"Bald cat? We have no bald cat?" I said, somewhat mystified. "We have lots of cats. More than we know what to do with. We have our two; our daughter's two; our son's phantom feline, which may or may not still be here; and several neighbor cats that drop by for a visit and end up eating our cat food and sleeping on our furniture. However, none of them is bald, as far as I know."

"There must be at least one bald cat in this house," she insisted. "The amount of cat hair I found in the upstairs alone proves it."

Barb is more of a friend than a housekeeper. She helps me out most weeks, but she was visiting her children over Christmas and couldn't make it. I was busy ignoring my house and enjoying the holidays, so nobody bothered to dust under the furniture for about two weeks. That can add up to a lot of cat hair during shedding season — which for cats is 51.5 weeks a year.

Having animals around is a great way to stave off empty-nest syndrome. How can you feel lonely and unneeded when there is always a dog to walk and a cat to sit on your lap?

And food, the dog is always appreciative and the cats always demanding. You don't want to be around our house when the cat bowl



### Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes  
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is bare — they get as obnoxious as a bunch of tired and hungry children.

Speaking of which, they fight like brothers and sisters, too.

Molly Monster is the top cat. She chases everyone else around and only old Jezebel will stand up (or more accurately hunker down) to her.

Rupert likes the high ground and enjoys sitting on top of the refrigerator, which she gets to by jumping up on the counter in front of the coffee maker and then onto the top of the fridge, where she makes a nest among the brown paper grocery bags.

The other day Molly decided that Rupert was entirely too comfortable up there. So she got on the counter and jumped up on the top of the fridge.

Soon, fur, paper bags and refrigerator magnets were flying everywhere. When the noise stopped Molly had the high ground, Rupert was under a desk at the other end of

the room, the coffee maker was overturned and the floor was littered with debris.

Steve picked up the debris, tossed both cats outside and straightened up the coffee maker. It wasn't until I tried to make coffee that I realized that the cats had broken the grounds basket. It's held on by a stem on the bottom and the top. The bottom stem was broken although the top one was still in place and it still works.

I've been using the broken basket for more than a week now, waiting for the new part to arrive. I might not have ordered it at all, but I found that you can't put the grounds in before the water. I did and I had to clean up three scoops of spilled dry coffee grounds. I was not happy.

In fact, I was seriously thinking of snatching one or both of the miscreants bald — but I've wanted to do that with the kids sometimes, too. They had some warm fannies now and then, but they never lost any hair over their misdeeds, either.

## Letter should be required reading

### Letters to the Editor

To the Editor:

I, for one, would like to commend the young man from Sappa Valley Youth Ranch who wrote the "editorial" on addiction. I have no idea how much of what he wrote he knows from personal experience, but he hit the nail squarely on the head. This letter should be required

reading for all students from fourth grade through 12th grade.

Hopefully this young man will keep these thoughts foremost in his

mind and with the help of God, family and friends, he will be OK.

Bev Reiter  
Oberlin

## Student appreciates story in paper

To the Editor:

I would first like to thank Mr. Merriott for last week's article in the paper about Joe Mondero and myself. It is great that *The Oberlin Herald* is interested in the future plans of the youth in this community.

Although it is a dream of mine to attend the United States Military Academy in West Point, I wanted to

clarify that I have not received an appointment. I have, however, received a nomination from Congressman Jerry Moran and am hoping for an appointment. I will find out in the next few months.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the teachers of Decatur Community High School and community members who have

written letters of recommendation and/or given me support in this process. I am very fortunate to have these people in my life.

At this time, I do not know for sure what my future will be. However, nothing would be more of an honor than serving my country.

Denton Bailey  
Oberlin

## Does Congress work just for rich?

To the Editor:

Congress has grown our biggest debt ever — topping \$8 trillion. We now borrow money from China to operate our government.

Some congressmen say they're reducing the deficit. That's not what's happening. Only one part has been cut — services to the disadvantaged. Other budget items have increased for those that need it the least.

Look at oil money. Gas prices have doubled in the past 10 years. In this same decade, Republicans took more than \$100 million in campaign contributions from oil and gas companies. In return, Congress gives gifts to oil companies. This July, Congress passed a bill providing \$14.5 billion to the energy industry. In October, Congress passed another \$2 billion giveaway to the oil refinery industry. It also gave away Federal lands and closed military bases to huge oil companies. Do oil giants need free stuff?

Congress gifted companies that are enjoying the highest profits in history. Exxon Mobil, Shell, BP, Chevron Texaco and Conoco Phillips have together raked in \$254 billion in profits since Bush has been president. Kansas pay 25 percent more for gas in 2005 over 2004. This winter, Americans will still see natural gas home heating costs increase 41%.

from Congress while our poorest neighbors struggle to pay for groceries, gasoline, utilities and health care?

Why does Congress rob the poor to give money to the wealthiest few? Look at who is scratching whose back — it's simple arithmetic. As middle class families pay more for gas, congressmen take more oil money for their campaigns. Oil companies give cash to congressmen; Congress gives money to oil companies. Americans pay more for gas; oil companies rake in their biggest profits.

Here's the tragedy — regular folks can't give big campaign contributions to congressmen — so, Congress cut life-saving services to senior citizens and the disadvantaged by \$50 billion. Following that cruel deed in November, all congressmen gave themselves pay raises.

Now, Congress wants to borrow about \$70 billion more from nations, like China, to subsidize their newest giveaways to other already profitable corporations — and the smallest handful of the wealthiest individuals — not just oil companies.

Over 97 percent of you will not be significant recipients of these new gifts. Forty percent of that \$70 billion will be given to individuals with annual incomes over \$1 million. Some congressmen may say all households will receive tax relief.

Your mother would say that's a white lie.

Only 16 percent of these proposed tax cuts will go to people who make between \$100,000 and \$200,000, but the dollar amounts will be very small per person. Households with incomes of between \$50,000 and \$100,000 will only get \$29 a year in tax savings. Those with less than \$50,000 income would receive an average of less than \$11. What does \$11 a year pay for? Four gallons of milk.

Do people who make over \$1 million per year need to be given extravagant gifts that we have to borrow \$70 billion more from China just to pay for? Isn't this obscene? Since just two weeks ago, Congress reduced medical services for many poor grandmothers?

This "back scratching" of the wealthiest few is happening this month, December, in your Congress. Please don't look away.

Pam Pohly  
Hays



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