127th Year, Number 10

Wednesday, March 8, 2006

Who noticed Kansas debt per capita quadrupled?

quadrupled in just a dozen years.

The tab hit \$4 billion in 2004, or \$1,400 for issued without a public vote. every man, woman and child in the state. In 1992, the figure was just \$363.

says, Kansas went from 43rd in state debt per require a statewide vote. person to 17th.

Most of the money went into concrete, asphalt and steel for new roads, as the Legislature turned to bond issues to finance new construction. It's faster, and sometimes even cheaper, to build big projects right now with

You borrow the money and pay for construction at today's prices, not an inflated future price. To a degree, that makes sense, but the in future years.

As payments on that debt come due, it'll be harder to pay for highways in the future. Already, the Legislature has stripped the road fund of sales tax money promised for coming

State Budget Director Duane Goossen was quoted as saying he's "not worried" about the debt. Kansas has a strong credit rating and plenty of capacity for more borrowing, he said.

fact that someone has to pay this debt off.

Guess who?

Apparently, no one has noticed — or much Worse yet, the Legislature has been using cares — that Kansas' per capita state debt has more expensive revenue bonds for state borrowing. That's mostly because they can be

General obligation bonds, backed by the "full faith and credit" of the state, would be In 12 years, a Wichita State University study cheaper, but anything over \$1 million would

> It's easy to see why the Legislature went with revenue bonds. The state borrowed \$500 million in one bond issue just to stabilize the employees' pension fund.

> It's unlikely voters would have approved that loan, let alone the several issues for road building. With revenue bonds, once the governor signs the bill, the state can just go ahead and sign for the debt.

Now, though, there's a move afoot to refimore you borrow, the less money there is left nance the bonds, or at least part of them. Lowering the interest rate just one point could save \$4 million a year.

> The state could issue general obligation bonds, at a lower rate, and call an election to approve the issue. Some legislators think people would vote for that. "It's like refinancing your house," said Sen.

Phil Journey, a Wichita Republican. "You're in Greenville. crazy if you don't do it."

What's crazy is spiraling, ever-more-expen-That's good to know, but there remains the sive debt. It remains to be seen whether voters will buy that logic.

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts

Out Back

— Steve Haynes



Now, I'm getting nervous. We leave for Mexico soon, and I have begun to realize I know just enough Spanish to be dangerous.

I'm afraid I am going to call someone's kitchen a little pig or say their baby is ugly. When I knew just a few words, I limped by with them. Now, I have this "vast" vocabulary of at least a hundred words and I'm worried I'll pull out the wrong one.

If all else fails, I'll resort to my Spanish/English dictionary.

The question is, how do you say, "I have a terrible head cold" in Spanish? It looks like I might be crossing the border with a cold, instead of getting one when I get back.

worse Saturday, and by Sunday all I wanted to do was sleep. I stayed home from church because I didn't want to give it to anyone there or at chapel services.

Watching TV was my only option for entertainment, and I discovered Sunday morning broadcasting is rather limited. But, it did teach me a lesson. After watching a couple of television evangelists, it sure made me appreciate our own minister. Some of these guys reminded me of sleazy, vinyl siding salesmen.

anyone even seen the movies nomi- of those "social impact" movies, but nated for Academy Awards this I didn't get it.

year? "Cinderella Man" is on CD I want to see, because I remember I just don't care that much. the real event happening when I

watched the 1972 Olympics. I started getting sick Friday, got the Clutter family was killed. It was for it. As long as they (and the puba crime that rocked this nation.

> murder, I couldn't wait to read it. It important than yours or mine. was so chilling, once I started reading I couldn't stop. It was probably two or three in the morning when I finished the book. The rest of the night, I was sure I saw the doorknob turning to my room and heard the floorboards squeaking.

So, yes, I would like to see the story behind the story.

We did rent "The Constant Gardener," but we went to sleep during Speaking of entertainment, has it. I know it was supposed to be one

now, so I did see it. "Munich" is one actors up for awards I have to admit, Please, it's not rocket science.

As for the rest of the films and

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They are not discovering the cure for "Capote" is another one I would cancer. They are grown men and like to see because, again, I remem- women playing pretend and getting ber the events. I was a teenager when paid exorbitant amounts of money lic) remember they are celebrities When Truman Capote wrote the and not political geniuses, we'll get book, "In Cold Blood" about the along fine. Their opinion is no more

From the Bible

No man, when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth it under a bed; but setteth it on a candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light.

Luke 8: 16

Honor Roll

Welcome and thanks to these recent subscribers to The Oberlin Her-

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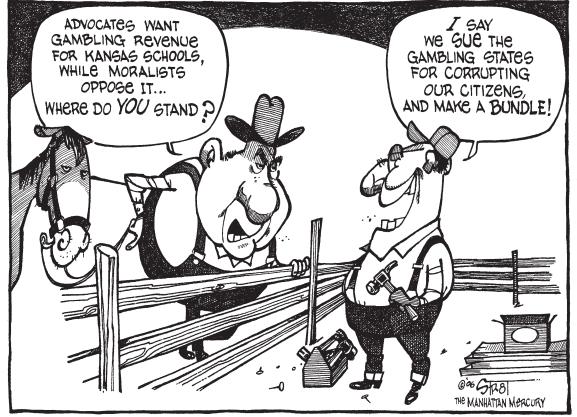
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Our grandkids only purr or bark

We visited our daughters over the weekend — in South Carolina and

Youngest daughter Lindsay is a graduate student at the University of South Carolina in Columbia. She'll be graduating in May with a master's degree in library science.

Oldest daughter Felicia and her husband Nik live and work in Augusta, Ga., in the Internet department of a large newspaper company. Hey, at least she stayed in the business, even if I can't get her to come home and let me retire.

We're here to attend the South Carolina Press Association meeting

I'd never heard of Greenville, S.C., before and couldn't figure out why a state with such beautiful places as Columbia, Hilton Head, Myrtle Beach and Charleston would go to someplace that nobody had ever heard of.

However, as these things usually go, Greenville turned out to have a vibrant downtown full of fun shops and nice restaurants. The trees had started to leaf and the spring flowers were blooming. Residents and tourists were strolling down the streets. We had a great time.



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes cahaynes@nwkansas.com

back to Augusta to meet our new granddog, Khan. (With three children over 25, you'd think we'd do better than four cats and two dogs, but so far our grandkids all purr or bark. Oh well, Khan's a great kid.)

After the convention, we headed

We had a great time with Felicia and Nik and the cats and dogs. We spent Saturday night in Augusta and we even had Louie, one of Felicia's cats, sleeping with us. I appreciated that. After three nights in hotel rooms, I was missing my kitties.

Sunday, we headed for Columbia to spend the night with Lindsay.

There are no cats in Lindsay's house because they're all living at my place. (Well, two out of three are. She gave the third one back to her Aunt Barb after she found out that her boyfriend is allergic to cats.)

While Lindsay's house is sadly lacking in felines, it has a lot of memories.

She had my Grandmother Desilet's buffet and china cabinet. I have to smile, since they are

heavy, dark pieces of furniture crammed into her tiny apartment. She'll still have those pieces when she had a nice home in the suburbs,

Steve and I had my parents' oak table and a roll-top desk crammed into our tiny place when we were first married. We never did get that house in the suburbs, but they no longer look quite so crammed.

It was nice in the South. Nice to see our girls and nice to visit new beautiful places, but I'm ready to get back to Kansas. After all, there's no place like home.

Election year politics apparent

By DOUG ANSTAETT **Kansas Press Association**

The Kansas House of Representatives showed us this past week just what effect an election year can have on the conduct of public business.

Faced with a barrage of telephone calls, e-mails and personal visits from lobbyists representing cities, too explosive to send to the House

Instead of instituting a rather limited safeguard for the public's right to know, the House folded to election-year politics.

What the Kansas Press Association, Kansas Association of Broadcasters, the League of Women Voters and the Kansas Sunshine Coalition for Open Government were seeking with this bill was a check on the right of public bodies to adjourn to executive or closed sessions.

House Bill 2719, endorsed by a majority of the House Governmental Organization and Elections Committee on Feb. 22, would have required the tape recording of an executive session only when a member of a board, council or commission believed the discussion violated the Kansas Open Meetings

The law outlines 13 instances, or

exceptions, where public bodies can go behind closed doors to discuss sensitive topics such as nonelected personnel, employer-employee negotiations, consultation with an attorney, security and preliminary discussions on acquisition of real propcounties, school districts and comerty. Other discussions, such as porter or a citizen. munity colleges, the House Repub- policy decisions, long-range planlican leadership decided a bill to al-ning and budgeting, are forbidden in low for the tape recording of execu- a closed meeting. Furthermore, no ing its members from a tough retive sessions of public bodies was votes are allowed in closed session. We believe the vast majority of

elected officials are honest, hardworking individuals who want to do the right thing. They make sure discussions stay focused on the legally allowed subjects mentioned above. And when those discussions stray outside the legally protected lines, strong administrators and board members rein them in.

Unfortunately, there are some who don't. They are the ones for which this law was designed.

Backers believed that rather than stifle debate or "chill" discussions, the existence of a tape recorder would deter public bodies that might veer outside the lines. The mere would signal to the board, council or commission members to get back to the legally protected subject at hand. If they chose to continue to dis-

cuss an illegal topic and a courageous member asked that it be recorded, a judge would listen to the tape in private to determine if the discussion had indeed violated the law. Then, and only then, the tape recording could be turned over to a party seeking enforcement, such as a member of the public body, a re-

Unfortunately, the House leadership was more interested in protectcorded vote on a controversial topic. Their thinking must have gone something like this: those who supported the bill would be lambasted by their local elected officials; those who voted against it would have to face the wrath of their local news-

The solution was to deny a vote, saving the representatives the need to explain to either side.

Don't let them off the hook. Even if they didn't vote publicly on the issue, the folks back home still have a right to know where every legislator stands on this open govern-

Doug Anstaett is executive direcpushing of a tape recorder button tor of the Kansas Press Association. He is a former publisher of The Newton Kansan, and chief editorial writer for The Topeka Capital-Jour-

Reader enjoys newspaper style

I like the way you present the

news - letters, articles and especially the editorial page, the homey stories and especially the cats!! I like everything about your pa-

I was gone for 55 years from

Atwood so don't know the people in Hawkins. the yesteryear column, but I pass the

paper on to my sister, Ada (Hawk- in Hawaii and she sends me articles

son and family, Gordon and Edna for 33 1/2 years. Some articles I sent to my friend

Letters to the Editor

ins) Schruben at Good Sam, and her from the Hawaii papers. I lived there

Elsie Bryan

Ranch officer leaving with regrets life when I realized we could no forgotten. They are true profession-

I am writing to you, the voice of the community, in hopes you will relay my sincere regrets on having to bid farewell to the great commu-

Over the past several years, I have found the citizens of your community to be the down-to-earth folks that I knew as a boy growing up in the small town of Tonganoxie. I have been able to work with many wonderful people from this area and feel fortunate to call several of them

longer operate the youth ranch due als and an asset to the citizens of to financial constraints, the uncertainty of future funding and dwindling workforce. Because of this, my associates and friends were out of work. Though I'm certain mine weren't as bad as theirs, I will never forget my feelings. I wish all of them the best and thank them for their ef-I appreciate the past support pro-

vided by your city officials, especially the city administrator, Gary Shike, and chief of police, Wade It was one of the worst days of my Lockhart. That, too, will never be I hope to be able to return fre-

quently as a visitor to this great city of Kansas to prove my sincerity and show my appreciation. Until then, I thank the citizens of the Oberlin area for their hospitality and wish each and every one a bright future and much success. Terry Campbell

V.P./Chief Operations Officer Clarence M. Kelley **Detention and Youth Services** Topeka