

Who noticed Kansas debt per capita quadrupled?

Apparently, no one has noticed — or much cares — that Kansas' per capita state debt has quadrupled in just a dozen years.

The tab hit \$4 billion in 2004, or \$1,400 for every man, woman and child in the state. In 1992, the figure was just \$363.

In 12 years, a Wichita State University study says, Kansas went from 43rd in state debt per 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 bonds.

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 more you borrow, the less money there is left 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 years.

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.

That's good to know, but there remains the fact that someone has to pay this debt off.

Guess who?

Worse yet, the Legislature has been using more expensive revenue bonds for state borrowing. That's mostly because they can be issued without a public vote.

General obligation bonds, backed by the "full faith and credit" of the state, would be cheaper, but anything over \$1 million would require a statewide vote.

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.

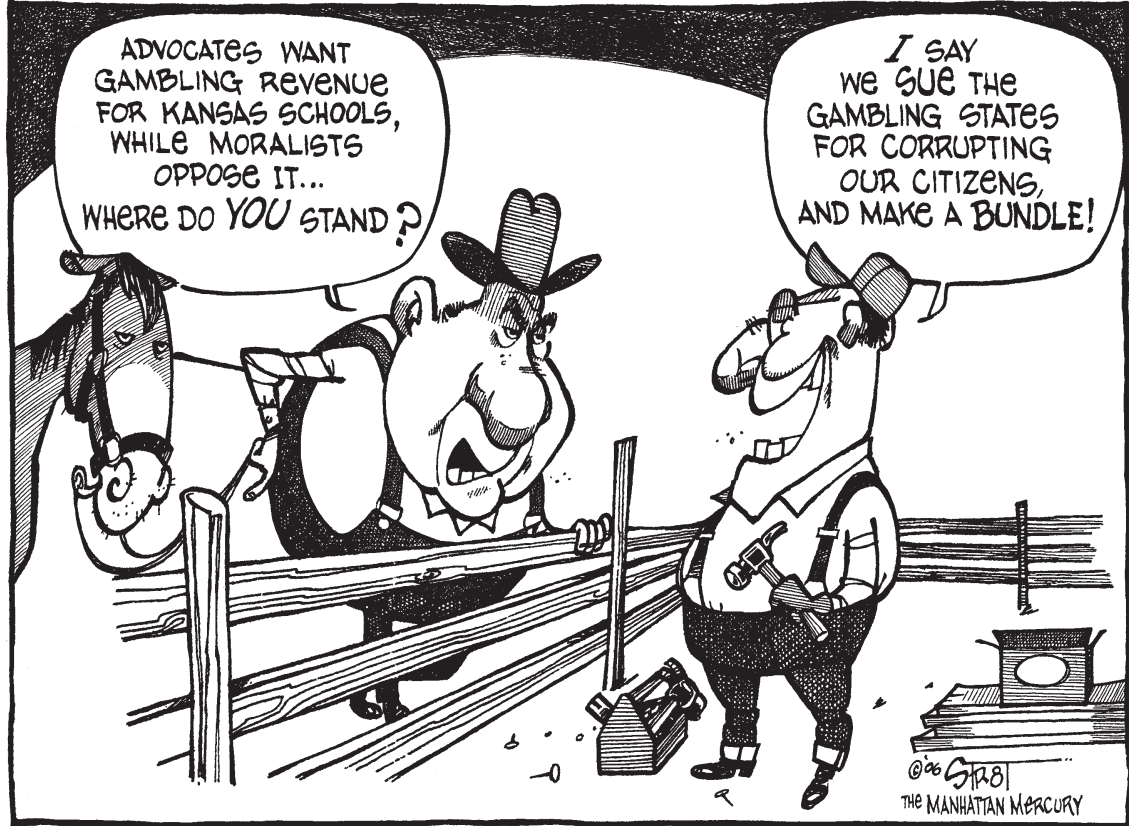
Now, though, there's a move afoot to refinance the bonds, or at least part of them. Lowering the interest rate just one point could save \$4 million a year.

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 crazy if you don't do it."

What's crazy is spiraling, ever-more-expensive debt. It remains to be seen whether voters will buy that logic.

— Steve Haynes



Our grandkids only purr or bark

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

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 in Greenville.

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
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After the convention, we headed 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.)

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, I'm sure.

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.

Hoping to get by with Spanish

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.

—ob—
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.

I started getting sick Friday, got 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.

—ob—
Speaking of entertainment, has anyone even seen the movies nominated for Academy Awards this



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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year? "Cinderella Man" is on CD now, so I did see it. "Munich" is one I want to see, because I remember the real event happening when I watched the 1972 Olympics.

"Capote" is another one I would like to see because, again, I remember the events. I was a teenager when the Clutter family was killed. It was a crime that rocked this nation.

When Truman Capote wrote the book, "In Cold Blood" about the murder, I couldn't wait to read it. It 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 it. I know it was supposed to be one of those "social impact" movies, but I didn't get it.

As for the rest of the films and actors up for awards I have to admit, I just don't care that much.

Please, it's not rocket science. They are not discovering the cure for cancer. They are grown men and women playing pretend and getting paid exorbitant amounts of money for it. As long as they (and the public) remember they are celebrities and not political geniuses, we'll get along fine. Their opinion is no more important than yours or mine.

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

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Reader enjoys newspaper style

To the Editor:

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 paper.

I was gone for 55 years from Atwood so don't know the people in the yesteryear column, but I pass the

paper on to my sister, Ada (Hawkins) Schruben at Good Sam, and her son and family, Gordon and Edna Hawkins.

Some articles I sent to my friend

Letters to the Editor

in Hawaii and she sends me articles from the Hawaii papers. I lived there for 33 1/2 years.

Elsie Bryan Atwood

Ranch officer leaving with regrets

To the Editor:

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 community of Oberlin.

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 friends.

It was one of the worst days of my

life when I realized we could no longer operate the youth ranch due 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 efforts.

I appreciate the past support provided by your city officials, especially the city administrator, Gary Shike, and chief of police, Wade Lockhart. That, too, will never be

forgotten. They are true professionals and an asset to the citizens of Oberlin.

I hope to be able to return frequently 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
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