

Legislature still friend of smaller, rural schools

No one is quite certain what will come out of Topeka as legislators and the governor try to craft a new school finance plan.

One thing we know, though: the Legislature has been a lot more friendly to small, rural schools than the Division of Post Audit was in its report on school finance.

Still, the Supreme Court is looking over everyone's shoulder, and whatever plan passes both houses will have a day in court. There's no telling what the justices will say.

As the plan emerges, though, the Legislature seems quite willing to "hold harmless" smaller schools that otherwise would have lost millions in "low-enrollment weighting" money.

The Post Audit proposal wouldn't do away with low-enrollment money, but it could have reduced the weighting by half. Post Audit proposed the hold-harmless clause, noting it might cost the state an extra \$7 million to \$8 million.

When some city districts stand to get as much as \$130 million a year extra in "at risk" weighting, that's only a drop in the bucket. With courts looking for another \$500 million a year in school money, the low-enrollment money is small change.

So why cut small schools at all?

One of the big arguments in the lawsuit which brought all this chaos is that students in large, medium and small districts were not being treated alike. The medium districts pushed the suit over a decade (Salina and Dodge City were the primary plaintiffs) but the six large urban districts — Leavenworth, Kansas City, Topeka, Wichita, Hutchinson and Turner — will get the biggest share of the

new money.

There's always an argument if the small schools get more per pupil than the others. Everyone agrees that it costs more per pupil to run a small school, but there's a lot of disagreement about how much.

And even though the small schools don't get much, it's the principle, you know?

This newspaper has said for several years that many in Topeka want to cut small schools, and the Post Audit report bears that out. Right now, it looks like the small districts may come out all right when the new bill is drawn, but that's far from certain. There's always next year.

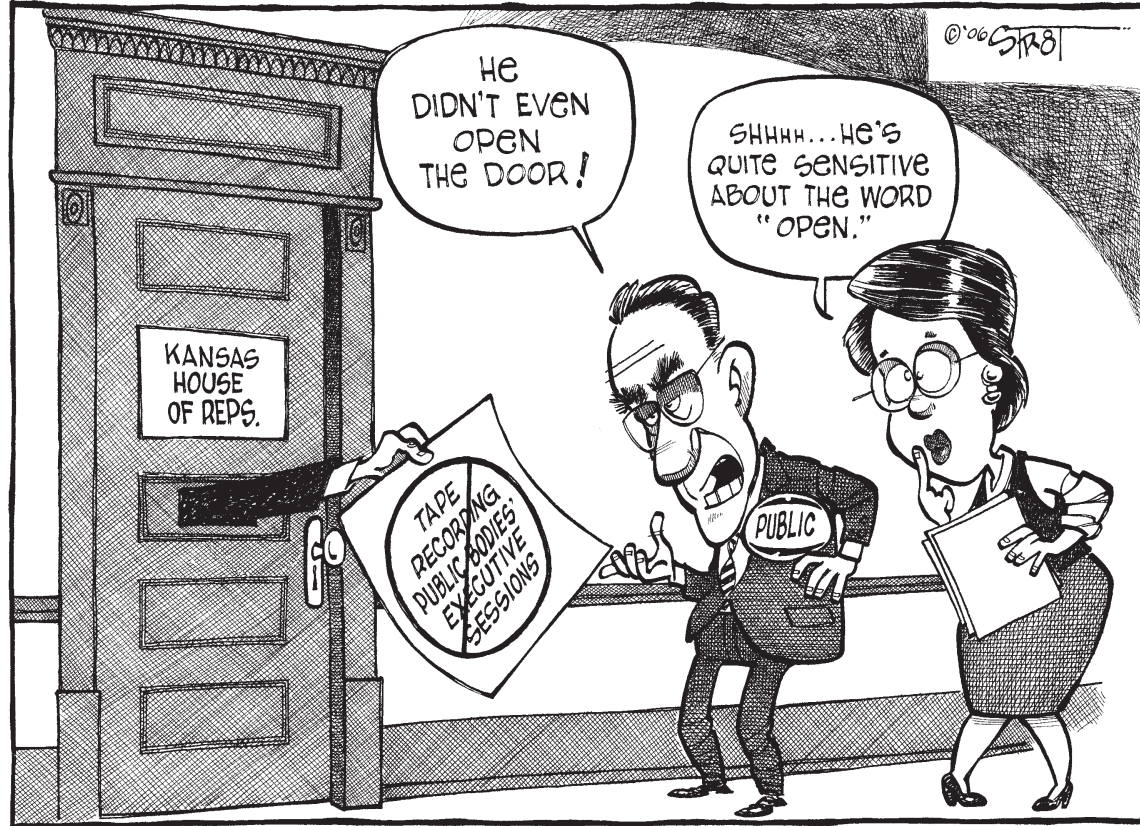
It's a shame, because small schools work. Partly, that may be because of the extra money and a lack of the grinding city poverty which devils some urban districts. Partly, it may be because of stronger community values in rural areas. Who knows?

Still, there have been four or five bills the last couple of years to consolidate schools and force smaller districts to give up their superintendents, but none to split big districts into smaller, more manageable units. That, interestingly, was one of the recommendations from the Augenblick and Myers study a few years ago which touched off much of the current controversy.

But no one has the guts to suggest breaking up the big districts.

There are a lot of axes, it seems, being sharpened with an eye on our school money. Every dollar will be a fight, and just doing a good job for kids won't save small schools.

— Steve Haynes



Grass roots press hears president

It's really mind boggling to be in the same room as the president and to listen to your friends ask him questions.

George W. Bush, the 43rd president of the United States, talked to reporters and publishers, all members of the National Newspaper Association, on Friday.

This wasn't a big, fancy press conference with CBS, Fox or NBC, though it did get national attention.

These people were from dozens of small dailies and weeklies in New Jersey, Texas, Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado and Louisiana, among other places.

Mr. Bush said he knows that it's the grass-roots press of the country that provides the information people need.

"I may not like what you print, but what you print is necessary for a free and vibrant democracy," he told us.

He talked about the economy, Social Security, alternate energy, passionately defended the No Child Left Behind law, touched on the war in Iraq and jumped on critics of a deal allowing foreign allies to run a few of our ports.

He said that we are through the recession and the economy is doing fine, with low unemployment and business expansion. The tax cut he pushed several years ago should be made permanent, he said. An increase will not cut the federal deficit, he said, because Congress will just spend the money.

"Washington will raise your taxes and find new ways to spend your money," Mr. Bush said. "Every program sounds worthwhile. Every spending request is necessary."

Social Security needs fixing, he said, and that will take agreement by both parties.



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
cahaynes@nwkansas.com

As for alternate energy sources — they are vital, he said. Other forms of fuel are needed besides gasoline and diesel. Ethanol can help.

"We're addicted to oil, and that's a problem," Mr. Bush said. "We want people to drive cars using fuel grown in America."

Mr. Bush says test scores are proving that the No Child Left Behind law is working.

"We're at war," he said. "I vowed on Sept. 11 that I would use all assets at my disposal to protect you."

"We're taking al-Qaida apart, but it takes time and we can't allow them safe haven."

"The world is better off without Saddam Hussein in power."

The enemy doesn't have the weaponry or an ideology that is appealing, Mr. Bush said, but it has one powerful weapon — the capacity and willingness to kill innocents.

"If we don't lose our nerve (in Iraq)," he said, "I'm sure we'll be successful."

The United Arab Emirates are one of the our best allies in the Mideast, Mr. Bush said. The backlash when a company owned by that country bought the firm running several of our larger ports smacks of isolationist and protectionism, he said.

Mr. Bush said he is worried about the message this sends to our

friends.

"We can't win the war on terror by ourselves," he said. "They're a committed ally. They've helped us numerous times."

Answering a question from a Colorado editor about a Denver teacher who was put on probation for comparing the president to Adolf Hitler, Mr. Bush said that he felt that everyone should have the right to criticize government officials.

"I think people should be allowed to criticize me all they want," he said, "and they do."

"The right of people to express themselves is a sacred part of our society. It separates us from the Taliban."

(The teacher was reinstated that same day.)

Mr. Bush said, getting worked up about the issue, said that he knows that not everyone agrees with him.

"You can't let the public opinion polls and focus groups allow you to determine how you make a decision," he said. "You've got to stand on what you believe. I know some of my decisions are unpopular, but that comes with the territory."

Relaxed, engaged, charming and funny, the president talked way past his time. No one seemed to mind.

And agree with him or not, Mr. Bush got an enthusiastic ovation from those present.

Senator defends vote on bill

I would like to defend my vote against Senate Bill 264, which would have changed the public funds investment policy in Kansas to allow out-of-area banks to hold idle public funds.

In my opinion, this bill would have hurt our community banks, and that is why I voted against it.

Many of our county treasurers and school boards feel that their hands are tied when it comes to finding institutions to invest their idle funds.

My feeling is that there is at least one community bank in each of my counties that can hold these public funds. I've always been a supporter of community banks. I think the wisdom of keeping Kansas taxpayers' money at work within their taxing jurisdiction makes good business sense.

These community banks provide



Letter from Topeka

By Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer
ostmeyer@senate.ks.us

continual competitive interest rates for local governmental units, capital available for local development and opportunities for economic activity that has the potential to generate tax revenues.

Allowing public funds to be invested in out-of-area banks could hurt our local economy. The impact of the loss in rural areas would be magnified by the fact that it would be much more difficult for borrowers in these areas to secure a loan.

This is especially vital for agricultural and small business purposes because of the lack of interest or expertise of lenders outside of the local market. Dr. John D. Wong wrote a summary about the public funds investment policy for the Kansas Bankers Association and Community Bankers Association. After reading his article and having contacts from community bankers in my district, I feel that I made the right decision.

Is jail first, trial later pre-judgment?

To the Editor:

Did the Supreme Court goof? Were their decisions on right to life, flag burning, ownership of property erroneous? Ruling on Ten Commandments a flawed precedent. We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal and endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights: Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Jails were never biblical punishment. Next to the death penalty, they should be a last resort. Pre-trial jail-

ing is a violation of the premise innocent 'till proven guilty. Jailing the nonviolent will often do more harm to society than the actions of the accused. Depriving them of lost earnings and stressing personal affairs is an excessive fine, cruel and unusual punishment to them and the taxpayers forced to pay for their keep.

Kids would be better playing in old cars than doing drugs! Acres of junk look better than horrible hairdos, goo-paint grease, and tattoos.

"Doth our law judge any man before it hear him, and know what he doeth?" (John 7:51).

Frank Sowers
Benkelman

Letter to the Editor

THE OBERLIN HERALD

Serving Oberlin and Decatur County since 1879

USPS 401-600

170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749-2243

Phone: (785) 475-2206 Fax (785) 475-2800

E-mail: obherald@nwkansas.com

Nor'West Newspapers

STAFF

Steve Haynes editor
Kimberly Davis managing editor
Mary Lou Olson society editor
Judy Jordan proofreader
Carolyn Kelley-Plotts columnist
Cynthia Haynes business manager
David Bergling advertising manager
Pat Cozad wantads/circulation
Karla Jones advertising production
Joan Betts historian
Jim Merriott sports reporter
Whitney Beinke page makeup

Published each Wednesday by Haynes Publishing Co., 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749. Periodicals mail postage paid at Oberlin, Kan. 67749.

Steve and Cynthia Haynes, publishers
Official newspaper of Oberlin, Jennings, Norcatur, Dresden and Decatur County. Member of the Kansas Press Association, National Newspaper Association, Colorado Press Association, Nebraska Press Association and Inland Press Association.

Subscriptions: One year, \$30 (tax included) in Decatur, Norton, Rawlins, Sheridan, Thomas and Red Willow counties; \$34 (tax included) elsewhere in Kansas; \$37 elsewhere in the U.S. Foreign subscriptions, \$20 extra per year (except APO/FPO). POSTMASTER: Send change of address to 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749-2243.

Office hours: 8:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. Mon.-Fri.
(Also open most Saturdays when someone is in.)



Newsman should be poster boy

Jim Taricani should be the poster boy for a federal shield law to protect reporters from malicious judges and overeager prosecutors.

A reporter for WJAR-TV in Providence, R.I., Mr. Taricani is one of three news people to face jail time in the last couple of years for defying court orders to reveal their sources. Though he did as much, or more, time as anyone, he got less attention, probably because his story was local.

The others, Judy Miller of *The New York Times* and Matthew Cooper of *Newsweek*, fell victim to a special prosecutor out after Scooter Libby, the vice president's former chief of staff. The Washington case got national attention while Mr. Taricani was sweating out a six-month term for criminal contempt.

It could happen to anyone, he says, though many, perhaps most, reporters from smaller organizations faced with the same situation would just cave in and give the prosecutor what he wants.

Most people couldn't afford to fight the federal judiciary, and nobody really wants to go to jail.

Mr. Taricani stuck by his guns. Three times he refused the prosecutor's demands that he reveal who gave him a tape of a city official taking a \$1,000 bribe in corruption-ridden Providence.

The tape came out of an FBI sting operation using a crooked contractor with contacts high at City Hall. It's the stuff movies are made of, he said, and in fact, there is a movie coming out about the mayor and his cronies.

Taricani said he got the tape from one of the lawyers in the case, promising he wouldn't tell anyone where it came from. If he hadn't made that promise, he notes, he wouldn't have gotten the tape. And the tape, he thought, was important.

The mayor's assistant and the contractor, talking like movie mobsters, joked about the bribe for a city contract. Until it aired, he said, it was



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
schaynes@nwkansas.com

easy for people in Providence to live in denial about their government.

He took the tape to his bosses at the station. They called in the lawyers, and eventually, top brass at NBC News in New York. He's thankful that he worked for a network-owned station, Taricani says, because the company never wavered in its support.

Eventually, he said, NBC spent \$765,000 on legal fees. When the judge started fining him \$1,000 a day, the station boosted his pay so he could pay the eventual \$83,000 bill. Later, the network paid the extra taxes on that, too.

But, he asks, how many news organizations could afford to spend \$850,000 to defend a reporter's rights?

"The lawyers' opinion," he said with a hint of a smile, "was if it happened again, the tape showed up on the doorstep in a brown paper bag."

In the end, it made no difference. Six months after the tape aired, after everyone involved in the case had either been convicted or pleaded guilty, the judge had Mr. Taricani hauled into his court on criminal contempt charges. A special prosecutor shook down everyone from the U.S. attorney's office to the FBI, but focused on an agent who'd known the reporter for more than 20 years — and the defense lawyer.

In the end, the FBI agent led him into making some admissions, he said, and the prosecutor leaned hard on him. The "mobbed-up" lawyer, facing drug and morals charges involving a 15-year-old girl, turned on him, not only admitting he supplied the tape but claiming that he never

demanding anonymity.

Mr. Taricani was left to face an angry federal judge who gave him six months in jail. Because doctors said the heart-transplant patient might not survive in prison, he wound up with a stiff home confinement.

He had to disconnect his Internet access, he said, couldn't leave the house at all and couldn't work. He read more than 30 books, and his wife, he said, got used to having a clean house. After four months with no violations, the judge set him free.

All to defend a source who had dropped a dime on him.

Would he do it again?

"Sure," Taricani says. "The story was that important."

From the Bible

Every way of a man is right in his own eyes; but the Lord pondereth the hearts.
Proverbs 21: 2

