

Taxpayers need to know where \$3.2 million spent

With any luck, the dispute over disclosure of money spent by school districts to sue the state over school finance will be headed to court soon.

Kansas taxpayers deserve to know where this money — now more than \$3.2 million in tax funds — went and how it was spent.

The lawyer running this sorry show, Alan Rupe of Wichita, at first claimed his organization, known as Schools for Fair Funding, is exempt from the state Open Records Act. How that could be, given that all its money comes apparently from public school districts and thus from the state is hard to figure.

Later, Mr. Rupe reportedly offered to disclose much of the financial information if the *Topeka Capital-Journal* would just drop its lawsuit. The paper declined to do that, saying the issue is whether the group is subject to the Open Records law.

The principle here should be clear. Tax money should be accounted for to the taxpayers. Just because this money has been washed through a private corporation doesn't change that; the corporation's sole function is to do the bidding of public school districts.

Mr. Rupe apparently claims that some information is protected by what he calls the "attorney-client" privilege. (Apparently they don't teach spelling or punctuation in law school.)

It's hard to see how that applies, though. If he were working for a single school district, there's no question that his bills would be sub-

ject to public review. Matters of legal advice and strategy might not be public, but the bills are and should be.

Mr. Rupe, in a letter to the editor, charged that the paper has a broader agenda, and in that, he's on the mark.

Other supposedly private, not-for-profit groups are organized to spend taxpayers' money to lobby positions that taxpayers may or may not agree with. These include the League of Kansas Municipalities, the county commissioners' association, the Kansas Association of School Boards, and dozens of other groups formed by public officials to push their interests in Topeka.

None of them publishes a report on spending, though all of their money comes from tax funds contributed by member governments.

Many legislators doubt the fairness of allowing public agencies to spend money lobbying for more state money, let alone suing the state itself for more as the school group has done.

Back to the first principle again: If it's public money, taken from the taxpayers, then the public gets to know how it's spent.

In that case, a speedy resolution of this suit should benefit taxpayers. Either their right to know will be vindicated by the courts, as it should be, or the Legislature can fix the situation by changing the law.

Taxpayers tired of being sued with their own hard-earned dollars should like that outcome. So bring it on.

— Steve Haynes



Aunt was still outrageous at 92

I knew her for all of my 58 years and never realized her first name was Clara.

My Aunt Adele died earlier this month and my sister and I drove to the funeral in Arkansas. Our mother wanted to go, but she couldn't have made the nine-hour trip. It hurt her to not be able to say a last good-bye to the older sister she had loved, fought with and been babied by for so many years.

Aunt Adele was 10 years older than Mom — part of the first litter, as my grandmother used to say. There was Madelyn and Adele — just two years apart and then 10 years later there was Emma and Jeff — just a little over a year apart.

Adele was 92 when she died and was as young at heart and as outrageous when she was in her 90s as she was when a teenager and the despair of her parents.

Her only son, George Allen, spoke at her funeral. He said he hadn't spoken at his father's service back in 1964 and he always regretted that. He was in West Point when his father died suddenly, leaving his mother alone.

I was sort of surprised that Adele never remarried. She had been a housewife all her married life and had not held a job since she married in the late 1930s. She was a beautiful, vivacious woman and I could never understand why some smart man never was able to snap her up. But, no one could ever match her Bill and she remained a widow for the next 42 years.



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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A widow with her only child in the military, serving his country all over the world, Adele became a house-mother at the college in her hometown of Russellville, Ark.

Later she became a tour guide and traveled almost as much as her son.

She was a true Southern belle, always dressed in the best she had and always wore earrings — big clip-on earrings. She would never go anywhere without her earrings and she seemed to have hundreds of pairs, each bigger and danglier than the last.

My favorite memory of Aunt Adele is a piece of advice she gave me when I was turning 16 and ready to get my driver's license.

When you pass a police car, she said, always smile and wave. They'll be too busy smiling and waving back to check their radar.

That may not work with modern equipment, but I don't ever remember Aunt Adele getting a speeding ticket and she drove like a bat out of hell, as they say.

Adele made out her will in the '80s. She asked to be cremated and laid to rest next to her husband in the

family plot. So after the service in the beautiful old Presbyterian Church she had attended, the family took her up to the hill in the neighboring small town of Dardanelle, Ark., and laid the box — about as big as a silver chest — in the foot-deep hole. The preacher said a prayer and we all threw flowers into the little hole.

I couldn't help thinking that my Aunt Adele had always been petite but this was ridiculous. Then cousin Lisa passed by and said we were doing this wrong. We shouldn't be throwing flowers into the grave, she said. We should be throwing earrings.

She was right.

From the Bible

But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.
II Corinthians 10: 17, 18

Please! No snakes in my space

One movie I won't be seeing anytime soon is "Snakes on a Plane."

I have to cover my eyes and ears or leave the room when the previews come on television. It creeps me out.

It's not like people need another reason not to fly. There's enough paranoia about terrorists without adding a creature that represents a phobia most people have.

Admittedly, I don't like snakes. But, except for rattlesnakes, I have an attitude of "you leave me alone; I'll leave you alone." Snakes eat a lot of rodents and other snakes, so they have a place in nature.

But I do not want snakes on the loose in a place I can't get out of. Like a plane.

Of course, it doesn't help during those televised promos, when I have my eyes and ears shut, that Jim has to make appropriate hissing sounds and pinch me with his fingers. That's just not right.

I have friends who recently moved from the city to the country. They embrace the rural life, to a certain degree. However, they draw the line at snakes in the house.

In the past week they have found three of the slithery reptiles inside. One was a pencil-size baby, the next of modest proportions, but the last one was perhaps the mother of them all.

Granted, they were all bull snakes. But a four-foot, angry bull snake can be pretty intimidating. A bull snake's defense mechanism is to try to act like a rattlesnake. And, to a couple who aren't yet sure how to tell the difference, it's been pretty scary.

I tried to tell my friend that a



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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rattlesnake's head has a triangular shape and a bull snake's head and body are about the same.

"Well, who's going to get close enough to look?" was her reply.

Good point. If you have a snake in the house, all you can think of is to get out of the house. I tried to point out the positive side: "At least you won't have any mice."

Not too convincing. But, they are taking a proactive approach. They got a big dog and are giving the house's foundation a close inspection and closing every crack they find.

The baby is doing fine. Little Annie is going to be three weeks old this week. And, I have to admit, I call Jennifer or instant message her every day. If you're a grandparent, you know how hard it is not to be able to see them. They grow so fast and change so quickly.

We won't see her again until Thanksgiving. She will be four months old and we'll have to get re-acquainted all over again. I'm going to ask Jennifer to show her our pictures every day so she'll recognize us. Hey, it could work.

Schools all over the country are in

full swing by now. Most kids were ready to go back. Mostly because they missed seeing their friends every day.

Parents were ready, too. Perhaps for the same reason. They missed seeing their friends every day.

I've been writing this while switching back and forth, watching President's Bush's press conference. Evidently, the journalists don't understand plain English. No matter how many different ways they tried to ask the question, the president's answer remained the same: "America is not going to cut and run. If we leave Iraq before the job is done, terrorism will follow us home."

I don't know about you, but I don't want to worry about roadside bombs on my way to work. We have to support our troops, our government and our president.

Terrorists are like playground bullies. You have to stand up to them.



THE OBERLIN HERALD

Serving Oberlin and Decatur County since 1879

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

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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, Norcatour, 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, \$33 (tax included) in Decatur, Norton, Rawlins, Sheridan, Thomas and Red Willow counties; \$38 (tax included) elsewhere in Kansas; \$42 elsewhere in the U.S. Foreign subscriptions, \$50-\$250 (in US dollars only) 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.)



Parents trust early teen drivers

To the Editor:

"Don't we care about our kids?" was a question I read on an article on the Opinion Page titled, "Licensing 15-year-olds just killing our children," by Steve Haynes.

Well, to me, that is a very poor opinion. How can a person even ask something like that?

Of course parents care about their children. That's the reason why they let them get licenses at such an early age.

They trust them and understand they are growing up and need more responsibilities.

It's not like parents just let their kids drive to kill themselves, and if they did, then they aren't a very good parent, are they?

Most parents do not let their kids

Letters to the Editor

drive illegally. Teenagers are rebellious. I should know; I am one.

We all break the rules sometimes, as do adults. But no one should ever pin a child's mistakes on an adult. We can think for ourselves.

All of the communities around Oberlin are agricultural, which is why we get farm permits at 14. A lot of us help out parents and relatives out on the farm. Heck, most of us are driving farm equipment long before that. We get the permits to help our families, but not to put ourselves in danger.

Sometimes kids are a lot safer

drivers than adults are. Kids have better hearing and eyesight than adults.

We do not think it's "silly" to follow laws. Granted, yes, there are times that we do not obey them completely, but neither do adults.

So I think the real question is, why should anybody be able to get a license?

No one obeys all of the laws and no one is a perfect driver. It doesn't matter ... kid or adult ... stuff happens.

Kassia Bryan Oberlin

Drawing was a big disappointment

To the Editor:

Kansas — where it can rain, hail, even snow at the most unlikely of times. And the night of Aug. 16 was not an exception!

The big disappointment is when you find someone to work for you so you can specifically attend the drawing that was publicized to be held at the City Park at 6:30 p.m. — "Must be present to win."

Obviously it was raining. I went to the City Park thinking it probably would be at the cafeteria in the high school, but no one was there. So I went back to work and called *The Oberlin Herald* office.

The person there told me that they could not even get the "names to the park for the drawing" because they couldn't get out of the office due to

the heavy rainfall. I asked when they would be drawing and they didn't know.

At that point, when the 6:30 drawing time lapsed, a decision should have been made as to what specific time the drawing would take place, but that wasn't done.

If it wasn't possible to let the community know of the "time change," then this drawing should have been postponed or the "must be present to win" clause should have been abolished. Whoever they had drawn first, based on the circumstances of the weather and the public not knowing "when" the drawing would take place, that person should have won regardless if they were there or not.

At Christmas time when they

draw for the scrip money, if there is incumbent weather, it is advertised that the drawing will be moved to another place. This should have been implemented in the paper stating that the \$1,000 Shopping Spree drawing would occur in the cafeteria at the high school in case of bad weather — and the drawing still should have occurred at 6:30 p.m. as published.

I am quite sure I am not the only person who was disappointed. I was there at 6:30 p.m., in the rain. Supposedly the drawing took place an hour and 15 minutes later. Some of us work and make arrangements to be there at the time that an event is advertised to take place.

Rose Riffle Oberlin

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