

Judge finally tosses out suit for more state money

A federal judge did something sensible the other day, bringing Kansas a step closer to putting the school finance debacle behind it.

U.S. District Judge Monti Belot ruled in Wichita that the group Schools for Fair Funding wasn't entitled to have its legal fees in state court paid by the state.

Since 1993, the group, an alliance of "mid-size" Kansas school districts, has spent more than \$3 million in taxpayers' money to sue the state.

Then, the arrogant legal team that runs the group had the temerity to sue in federal court, asking that the state be forced to pay its legal fees.

The group won a controversial decision in state court forcing the Legislature to spend another \$800 million to \$1 billion on schools. State courts refused, however, to force the state also to pay legal fees.

Judge Belot not only denied the request for state legal fees, he dismissed a federal lawsuit filed by the group, saying the case had been settled by the state action.

Attorney General Paul Morrison, a Democrat elected last fall, hailed the ruling as "saving" taxpayers \$2 million to \$3 million. We'll still get the bill, since the school districts raised money for the suit from state and local school taxes.

Oddly enough, the attorney general hailed the suit, which he said had made Kansas schools stronger.

"But it's time for the state to move forward,"

he said, "and put our money into classrooms, not courtrooms."

Wise words, but a little late. It will take Kansas decades to recover from the damage done by the school lawsuit, which established that a group that loses in the Legislature can push its political agenda in the courts. And win.

The state Supreme Court asserted extra-constitutional authority to order the Legislature to spend more on schools. Legislative leaders, some of whom had been on the losing side of school-budget votes, decided to blink.

Both the House and Senate caved in, forever weakening their authority and shifting the balance of political power in favor of the courts.

In the meantime, Kansas faces needs ranging from crumbling classrooms to a health-care system which could be likened to a disaster waiting to happen. To get money for schools, the Legislature has short-changed nearly every other fund, from highways to health to the college system.

All these bills will come due about the time the current state surplus disappears in the next recession, and Kansas already has a tax structure that citizens and businesses can't afford.

We should applaud Judge Belot's sensible decision, though, as a step in the right direction, away from litigating the budget and back toward the political process where the governor and Legislature are supposed to settle these issues.

And that's a good thing. — Steve Haynes

Alcohol hard on government

The news from Washington isn't all bad, though with the Democrats in power, it is different.

There's still scandal, and despite the lofty spouting of the new majority, it cuts across both sides of the aisle. One thread runs through most of the problems: alcohol abuse.

A federal judge threw a fit when it came time to sentence former Rep. Bob Ney, an Ohio Republican who admitted taking golf and gambling trips, meals and campaign donations from the infamous lobbyist Jack Abramoff.

Scolding the disgraced congressman, she upped the sentence sought by the government to 2 1/2 years in prison and two on probation, plus a \$6,000 fine. Even that seems like a slap on the wrist for someone who, the judge noted, had violated the public's trust.

"You violated a host of laws that you as a congressman are sworn to enforce and uphold," said U.S. District Judge Ellen Segal Huvelle. "Both your constituents and the public trusted you to represent them honestly."

The only surprise is that the government asked for less time.

Officials said Mr. Ney could have a year off his time if he completes an alcohol rehabilitation program to deal with a drinking problem he's admitted. That's OK if it works, I guess, but many cons use that to con a parole board.

With any luck, we'll never hear about Bob Ney again.

Back in the House, the new majority was revamping rules for a board supervising congressional



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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pages. The old board seldom met and allegedly ignored warnings about former Rep. Mark Foley, whom one aide called a "ticking time bomb" because of his interest in teenage boys among the pages.

After his fall, Foley, a Florida Republican, said he, too, had a drinking problem. Drunk or sober, you'd think a congressman would have sense enough not to hit on the high school kids.

Isn't that why they hire college interns?

Oh, never mind.

The Democrats, of course, claim that they'll clean up this mess and return Washington to the path of honor and rectitude.

That'll not last, history shows, once they taste the intoxication of power. Scandal will ensue. The Republicans, given a few years out of office, will be glad to blow it out of proportion.

We know the Democrats were not immune to the charms of Abramoff and his ilk. The FBI caught Louisiana Rep. William Jefferson with \$90,000 in cash in his home freezer, and claims to have him on tape taking bribes. He still won re-election in sunny New Orleans.

The new majority will fall, as all

parties in power must, under the spell of money, sex, power and, yes, alcohol and drugs.

Is there something about Washington that makes men — and women — more susceptible to these sins? Or is it just that the powerful are so in the limelight?

A little of both, perhaps. One genius of our system is that the opposition is always more than willing to shine the spotlight of public scorn on the fallen.

That keeps things, if not exactly honest, at least open and balanced.

History teaches us not to expect perfection in Congress or elsewhere from the church to business.

The powerful are human, after all, but we have a right to expect some decency.

From the Bible

For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

II Peter 1: 16



Reader has own views on cats



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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Since I asked for it, Marcy Carroll of Kanorado handed me this week's column on a silver e-mail.

"I loved your cat 'characteristics'!", she wrote. "Since I have two inside and seven to nine outside (on the farm), I have plenty of observational material. I've thought of a few of my own. Feel free to use any (or not), to rewrite or reword them to suit your purpose. No need to give public credit, I'm just a cat-loving reader."

You might be a cat if:

1. You can cast off hundreds or even thousands of hairs every day without going bald.
2. You'll follow your human, if allowed, when she goes for a walk but scold her every step of the way.
3. You can watch a stream of water in a sink for hours.
4. Nothing gets your attention more quickly than two outside cats fighting.
5. The best perches are by windows.
6. You throw up easily and often.
7. You always cover your excrement, sometimes so enthusiastically that you sweep it right out of the box.
8. You're the only one in the house that can lick yourself all over.
9. You can jump on to and walk

along very narrow ledges but you really don't care if you knock stuff off.

10. Your greatest fun and challenge is predicting where your human is going to walk and staying three inches in front of him.

11. Open cupboards are an irresistible invitation to explore.

12. Your rule is to pounce first, check it out later.

13. You stop any small object that moves and move those that are stopped.

14. You either hide from strange people or welcome them as a new lap to lie on.

15. All soft, potential napping spots need to be thoroughly kneaded first.

16. You climb just for the fun of it.

17. A spool of thread or ball of

yarn is a great toy, especially if it unravels as it rolls.

18. The motion and position of your tail speaks volumes to those who can "read" it.

19. Your meow becomes more insistent when feeding or watering time is imminent.

20. Most warm places are suitable for napping. Laps and sunny spots vie for first place.

21. You might be trained to stay off the kitchen table or counters when your human is around, but none of that counts when she's absent.

"I'm sending this off so I can get it off my mind," Marcy wrote. "Cats are an endless source of amusement."

"Heck, that could have been No. 22."

Thanks, Marcy. I needed a column after being gone all week.

Water out to wash them away

It was late Saturday night when we returned home from a taco supper with friends. We both had our hands full, carrying stuff back into the house.

As I came up the sidewalk, my shoe splashed in some water. I called back to Jim, "Watch your step. There's been a lot of melting today, and there might be ice."

Gingerly, I made my way up the walk and onto the side porch we have been using to enter the house. Funny thing was, I was still walking in water. The closer I came to the side door, the more water I encountered.

A feeling of dread came over me, and I knew what awaited inside the house.

I opened the door to water covering the kitchen floor and the sound of rushing water from under the sink.

I dumped my armload and headed to the shut-off valve in the basement. More water there — lots more water.

After shutting off the water, we had a little time to assess the damage. A pipe had ruptured or came unglued in the wall between the closet and the kitchen. After flooding the north side of the house, it ran down the foundation to the basement.

For some reason the sump pump



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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did not come on and water backed up over the entire basement floor.

Jim tackled the pump and I grabbed the wet/dry vacuum. Slowly, we began to get ahead of it.

Finally we decided we had done all we could do. We were exhausted and bed sounded pretty good.

I had a couple of moments where I was angry, because we have dozens of boxes of belongings stored in the basement and they all got wet. We don't yet know what damage was done.

But I had to have a little talk with myself. I said, "Self, you've lived without that stuff for more than six years. You must not have needed it very bad in the first place."

Yes, it's only stuff. I don't even remember what all is there.

And, except for my grandmother's butter molds, I don't suppose there is anything I would really miss. Perhaps it's a good lesson in not making "stuff" too important.

Did you hear about the retiree who looked for fun where he found it?

He had been in a downtown store for only a few minutes when he came out to find a cop writing up a parking ticket.

"Hey, man," he said. "How about giving a retired person a break?" The policeman ignored him and kept writing.

The retiree called him a Nazi.

The policeman started writing another ticket for having bald tires.

The retiree called him a doughnut-eating Gestapo.

The cop started writing a third ticket, then a fourth and so on for about 20 minutes. The more the retiree abused the policeman, the more tickets he wrote.

But the retiree didn't care. He had ridden the bus downtown.

And the cop was writing tickets on a car with a "Hillary in '08" bumper sticker.

Reader says runway would be good

To the Editor:

"Build it and they will come." This line, taken from a movie, outlines a plan to build a baseball field with the dream of it becoming an all-American centerpiece for sports and entertainment. And at the outset, as the story unfolds, it's only a dream. Nothing more and nothing less.

On the other hand, in following the stories in *The Oberlin Herald* relating to a proposed new and longer runway for Oberlin Municipal Airport, there appears to be solid user interest. The long-dreamed-of proposal has moved beyond the "dream" stage and is now a reality.

The investment that Bus and Coach International has made in Decatur County, even to this point, demonstrates their level of faith in the future. And we can all appreciate why it's necessary for a business or industry to have the necessary tools to do the job.

In the case of Bus and Coach International, the need appears clear to have local access for operating their

business aircraft.

A runway suitable for handling larger corporate aircraft would also serve as a catalyst to attract other businesses to the area.

We have long emphasized that the local airport is, or should be, the front door for commerce and industry.

Decatur countians and community leaders have exemplified great vision and leadership through the

years in county community development. Here is yet another opportunity to step up to the plate to raise the quality of life for everyone.

The investment of time and financial resources will be worth it in the long run.

Randall Braden, Hays

Editor's Note: Mr. Braden, a former publisher of *The Oberlin Herald* and long-time Decatur County resident, is an avid aviator.

Road crew gets thank you

To the Editor:

I'd like to publicly thank our county road department for the great job they have done under very difficult circumstances the last few weeks.

I especially want to mention Tim Stallman and Jerry Stoney, since

they are the ones I come in contact with.

Our county roads have been a challenge to travel at times, but repeatedly these men have tried their best to improve them as much as they could.

Gisela Fisher, Traer

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