

Cities, counties taking grant money for granted

The great expansion of federal spending in the name of “Homeland Security” is nothing short of scary.

Cities and counties today get money for things they used to just assume were part of their jobs, and while money’s always nice to have, you’d think some of these things never got done before.

The much-maligned Federal Emergency Management Agency has been pouring money into Kansas, as with other states, for everything from weather damage to emergency gear.

There’s money for planning for “bioterrorism,” whatever that means, to fire trucks and hard hats for emergency crews. Most years, there’s so much money to be had, the county has to go out and look for something to spend it on.

Heaven help us if some of the money has to be sent back to the feds.

Some of these things would be done whether the feds were giving us money or not. If the old fire truck wears out, we’ll probably find money to replace it. If there’s a federal grant, then it might be done a little sooner.

Other things, like generators for small-town emergency shelters, well those towns got by without them for a century. They might make it for another 100 years. People don’t usually stay in shelters too long here, or without power, for that matter.

It’s not that these things aren’t all nice to have. Everyone knows that federal money is “free money,” money that commissioners and council members don’t have to raise taxes to get.

It is taxpayers’ money, of course, and not to be wasted, but everyone agrees, if we don’t spend it, the feds will just give it to some other town or county. They never give it back to the taxpayers, that’s for sure.

So for decades now, the battle cry of local government has been to “get a grant.” If you

can get a grant, you don’t have to pay for it.

But free money isn’t always free. For one thing, “free” equipment has to be replaced. Often there’s no grant for that. It’s like the old police grants where the federal money paid to hire and train a new officer to hunt for drugs or drunk drivers. When the grant ran out, the city or county was expected to — gasp — pay the guy’s salary.

Or take the “free” vehicle our county picked up a few years back. It was seized by the sheriff after a drug arrest. No one ever claimed it. The incumbent ambulance chief asked if he could use it as a “chase” car.

Well, it was free, wasn’t it?

Until the car started to wear out. By then, it had become an essential part of the ambulance service. The county spent \$24,485 to buy another.

That’s where free will get you.

So with the Federal Emergency Management Agency pumping money into the state every time a storm hits, whether it’s millions to rebuild Greensburg, or a few thousand to reimburse Decatur County for plowing the roads and over several hundred thousand to townships to replace gravel on the roads, public officials line up at the trough.

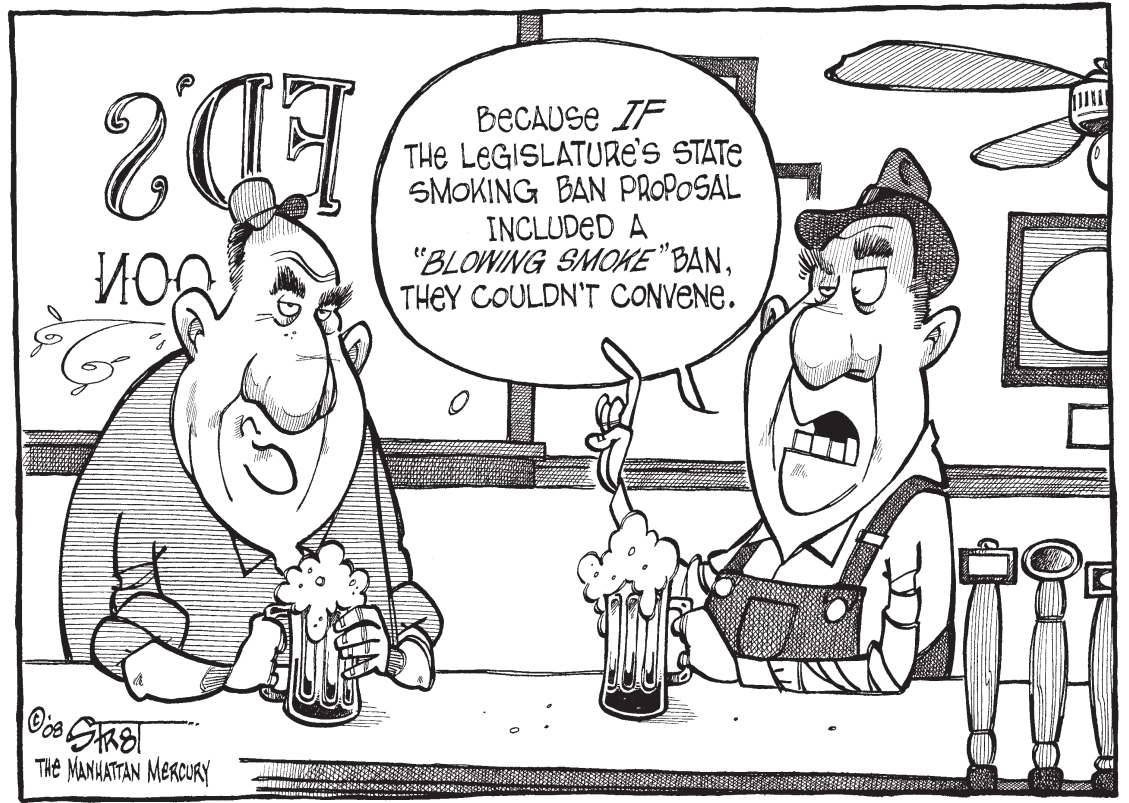
Never mind that FEMA couldn’t even find New Orleans when the chips were down. Today, they’re our friends.

It’s hard to believe that just a few years ago, the cities and counties and maybe even the state would have paid for these things themselves — or maybe we’d have gone without.

You have to wonder where this road is leading us, but we suspect it is no place good.

Even free money has strings attached. And eventually, we’ll know what those are. Loss of freedom. Local decision-making power. Priorities set by “mandate,” whatever that means.

Local government run just to get federal dollars. But they’ll be “free.” — *Steve Haynes*



Sí, I’ll have the national dish

I could have been sitting in a food court in any mall in America.

This one especially reminded me of Washington, where a mall has been built around the old train station. A food court fills the basement, and there you can buy everything from Thai to TexMex fast food.

There was one big difference. In Washington, you will hear hundreds of languages. People at the next table could be speaking French, Mandarin or Swahili.

Here, I heard only one — Spanish, the national language of Nicaragua.

I was at a mall in downtown Managua to find my lunch while Steve was in a board meeting.

It was easy finding the mall — it was across the street from our hotel in Managua, the capital city of Nicaragua. The food court was on the lower level, just like in Washington, but there were fewer choices.

This was my first day in Nicaragua and I was feeling rather adventuresome. I’d just crossed the street between the mall and hotel without being run over. I was on a roll.

Let’s see. What exotic, way south-of-the-board delicacy should I choose?

The choices turned out to be about the same as at home — chicken, beef or fish.

In fact, most of the fast food places were no mystery.

In a U around the seating-and-eating area were Quiznos, McDon-



Open Season

By *Cynthia Haynes*
c.haynes@nwkans.com

alds, Subway and Burger King. There was also Oriental King and Cajun Grill, a couple of fast-food stir fry places I know they have in Washington.

Over in the corner was American Donuts, a chain I didn’t recognize. However the sign was in the same format and font as Dunkin’ Donuts, so I was suspicious.

Pris Kaffee was a new one on me, but I wanted food, not coffee and pastries, so I kept looking. Neither Pizza Hut nor Mona Lisa Pizzeria Italiana sounded like what I wanted, so I looked over the chicken places.

Campero had a chicken in a cowboy hat on its sign. Tip Top showed a chicken and Rosti Pollos smelled like fried chicken.

I ended up with two choices — Coccinnde DnaHaydee, el autentico sabor de la comida nicaraguense, and El gua Pinal, carne al la parrilla.

While my rough translation of the Coccinnde sign was that they served authentic Nicaraguan food, my nose led me to the El gua Pinal, where

I got carrinita with tomato relish, pickled onion and carrots and a side of rice and beans.

The carrinita, I was to learn, is almost a national dish. It’s a quarter-inch-thick steak that looks like a small rack of ribs but has no bones. It’s delicious and I was able to eat it with the plastic knife and fork.

Of course, it cost me 49.96 for a four-ounce serving. Not too bad with you figure the exchange rate is 19 to 1. That made lunch \$2.63 plus the cost of the diet Coke and rice and beans.

I ended my first Nicaraguan lunch with a stomach full of the local cuisine and a pocket full of the local currency, which they gave me as change for my American \$10 bill.

Throughout my visit to this delightful Latin American country, I had no trouble spending American dollars and everyone from the fast food restaurants to the people selling trinkets in the open-air market had a calculator and was able and willing to figure the exchange rate. And I frequently got my change in dollars.

A sure cure for grandma

The diagnosis is in. I have a severe case of MMG (Missing My Girls). But the cure is in sight. We leave this week for a few days in Texas.

We saw Adam, Kara and Taylor this summer when they drove up here, but we haven’t seen Jennifer, Alexandria and little Ani since last March; it’s been more than a year since we’ve seen Halley; and I can’t remember the last time we saw Becky and her family.

We talk on the phone a lot and send e-mails, but that doesn’t get you hugs from grandkids or early morning kitchen time with your daughters.

It’s as it should be, though. They are all independent and raising families of their own. I don’t want to keep them tied to my apron strings — I just want to see them more often.

So until I retire, we’ll grab whatever chance we have. It’s really not enough, but I can get by if I can see all my kids (and grandkids) a couple times a year.

I’ve talked a lot about the girls, but we already have a spring trip planned to see our son, James. So, everyone is covered.



Out Back

By *Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts*
cplotts@nwkans.com

Jim and I need help. We want to be “wired in” to the rest of the world (we really do), but technology has left us in the dust.

Take cell phones, for example. We just need phones that can make and receive calls, but there is no such thing as a simple cell phone anymore.

I went to replace a phone I had dropped and broken. Our service contract was up for renewal and the nice girls at the phone store had a great offer: Buy one, get one free (after the mail-in rebate), or something like that.

Feeling very hip and “with it,” I walked out of the store with two brand new phones, still in their boxes.

The challenge came when we tried to operate them. Jim accidentally found the speaker-phone button but then couldn’t turn it off. I still haven’t found it, and forget about text messaging.

These phones have cameras, something called a Cell-top, alarm clocks, Internet access, calculators and probably a global positioning locator.

If I knew how, I think, I could even check the stock market. It’s a mini-computer in your pocket.

Surely, there are others who feel like we do. We just want to make and receive calls. We don’t need all the bells and whistles.

Less really can be more, can’t it?

Tourist paradise is very poor

We just got back from taking a couple dozen editors, their spouses, some friends and a very committed lady ophthalmologist to Nicaragua, the second- or third-poorest nation in the Americas.

It’s an amazing place, full of amazing people. I’d been there last year with Bob Sweeney of Denver, a long-time friend and a past president of the National Newspaper Association, and Dr. Jane Bateman, who runs the eye institute at the University of Colorado Medical Center but lives in Sacramento with her doctor husband and two sons. She describes herself as a “red-blooded American,” but her roots run deep in Nicaragua.

While it’s a beautiful country, a potential tourist paradise, Nicaragua is poor. Other than Haiti and possibly Cuba, it’s the poorest in the hemisphere. Average income (gross domestic product per capita) is just \$3,100 compared \$43,800 in the U.S. Even Cuba, with its failed communist economy, produces \$4,100, according to the CIA. Haiti, at \$1,800 is only a little more than half Nicaragua, and that’s dirt poor.

Nicaragua’s depression is the product of a century of American domination, followed by dictatorship, followed by civil war and strife. Not until 1991 did democracy establish itself with the election of Violeta Barrios de Chamorro as the first freely elected president in Nicaragua’s history.

The U.S. Marines held sway here during the first couple of decades of the 20th century, followed by nearly 60 years of dictatorship under the Somozas, father and sons. When the U.S. finally dropped its support in 1979 under President Jimmy Carter, the Communist-backed Sandinistas took over. Their rule was equally harsh and equally disastrous.

Ten more years of war and dictatorship ended in a peace brokered by now-ex president Carter and an agreement to hold free elections. Nicaraguans buried their guns — literally, in a hole under a new peace monument downtown — and began building a nation.

Meanwhile, the rest of Latin America had passed them by, growing economies and tourism and wealth far beyond what people here have. Nicaragua had lost 30 years, at



Along the Sappa

By *Steve Haynes*
s.haynes@nwkans.com

least, on the economic scale.

Four presidents down the line, the country looks and feels as if it might recover and begin to prosper. The only question mark today is the resurgence of Daniel Ortega, the Sandinista leader, as president. In a “deal” engineered with a disgraced former president, Arnoldo Alemán, Ortega was able to be elected with only about 36 percent of the vote, taking office last year.

His administration is led by technocrats and lined with assurance that he’ll respect businesses and the rights of investors, but his track record the last time around scares both the opposition and some investors.

Still, downtown Managua gleams today with new malls and high-rise hotels. A few tourists manage to find their way to beaches as fine as any along the Pacific, to islands off the Gulf coast on the east, to the coffee-growing mountain regions. Room rates and meal costs are low, maybe half what some Mexican resorts get, and in the winter dry season, the weather is delightful, 85 to 90 with a strong breeze.

U.S. investors smell profit in abundant cheap land, pristine beaches and untracked mountains. But it’s the people and their stories that attracted us. They’ve lived through dictatorship, civil war and now, maybe, prosperity and

freedom. The tales they tell harken to the frontier era of our country, to the Border War between Kansas and Missouri, to our own sorry civil war and our unsettled formative years as a democracy.

Over the next couple of weeks we’ll be sharing some of them — there are too many to tell them all — with readers.

One thing about Nicaraguans, they always tell you exactly what’s on their minds. No punches pulled.

Another thing, while they minimize their deeds, they are among the bravest people you’ll meet anywhere. They’ve had to be.

And finally, if you think they’ve been through a lot, they’d be glad to have some help. Thousands of Americans go to Nicaragua every year to do everything from teach school to dig wells. These volunteers provide, says U.S. Ambassador Paul Trivelli, as much aid together as does the State Department with its millions.

Hasta mañana.

From the Bible

Blessed be God, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me.

Psalm 66:20

Honor Roll

Welcome and thanks to these recent subscribers to *The Oberlin Herald*:

Brenda Anderson, Bismarck, N.D.; Harold Miller, Alma, Ark.; Betty Snipes, Freeport, Ill.; Jon Peters, Damascus, Ore.; George Jansen, Cottonwood, Ariz.; Virgil Dotson, Belleville, Ill.; Bill Ater, Burselon, Texas; Jesse Rummel, Glenwood, Ark.; Raymond Haag, Bartley, Neb.; Mrs. G. L. Ankenman, Federal Way, Wash.; Judy Windisch, Tempe, Ariz.; Grace Andres, Saint Joseph, Mo.

Colorado: Doris Kreyborg, Greenwood Village; Faye Lombardi, Lakewood; Donald Ater, Lamar; Butch Vernon, Lafayette.

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: oberlinherald@nwkans.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 want ads/circulation
Karla Jones advertising production
Joan Betts historian
Jim Merriott sports reporter
Sarah Marcuson production

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, \$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.)

