

Your right to know could be put in the cold

Across Kansas, groups that represent public officials are gathering support for a massive assault on your right to know.

The main focus this year will be a push to end or severely limit public notices, which for nearly a century and a half have been published in the state's independent newspapers.

Many cities and counties have adopted "platforms" for legislative action written in Topeka by the state League of Municipalities and the Kansas Association of Counties.

These two groups, financed by taxpayers' money, spend much of their time trying to find ways to keep the workings of government hidden from the taxpayers.

In a democracy, that just ain't right.

In the past, the municipal league and the counties have fought most attempts to strengthen open meetings and open records law. You'd think public officials would understand that the taxpayers need to know what government is up to.

Instead, these groups use your money to fight any attempt to open up government and end secrecy. Now, they've set their sights on public notices.

City, county, school and special district governments are required to publish many things, including budgets and financial reports that detail how tax money is spent. Tax-sale notices bring in far more money than any county spends on them. Other notices include ordinances, that have the force of law; zoning changes, which can affect hundreds or thousands of people; and election polling places and candidate lists.

All these are critical to our democracy. Without them, people would know far less about what government is up to.

In the name of saving money, these tax-funded groups want to end publication of notices in favor of posting most on the Internet,

on a government-controlled website. That's not a good idea, for several reasons:

- Not as many people will have access to notices on the Internet as in a newspaper in their hometown.

- Notices on a government website would be difficult to verify and subject to control of government employees who are not independent. Links easily could get "lost."

- Costs saving would be illusory. It costs big money to build and run a government website.

- Taxpayers would have to go looking for notices, rather than having them delivered to their homes.

The agreed-on definition of public notice includes these elements;

- A public notice is published in a forum independent of the government, such as a local newspaper.

- A public notice can be archived in a secure and publicly available format.

- A public notice can be accessed by all segments of society.

- The public and the source of the notice must be able to verify that the notice was published, and its information disseminated to the public.

For nearly a century and a half, newspapers have been guardians of the public's right to know and sentinels of public notice. Independent newspapers can verify and archive public notices, making them available to everyone.

Why change?

A better suggestion: Taxpayers would save more money if the Legislature banned lobbying by tax-supported groups, such as the municipal league and the county association. Why should they be able to spend your money to work against you?

Taxpayers who've had enough of this kind of nonsense should say so. — *Steve Haynes*



Housework allergy persists

Steve says I'm a workaholic. That's sort of true. However, there are some things I really don't do — housework, for one.

I'm allergic to cleaning. It makes me lethargic and out of sorts.

It took Steve a few years to figure this out. His mother was a housewife, who despite raising four children, kept an immaculate home.

My mother was a teacher, who, like me, is allergic to housework.

Since I've always worked full time, we've tried to have someone come in to help do the floors, bathrooms and dusting.

We've been so lucky to have Barbara for the last few years. She's an absolute jewel. She showed up once a week for four hours, and when she left, the house was clean and smelled wonderful.

Did you notice I changed to the past tense?

Barbara got a new job and she's not available to clean houses anymore. I'm in mourning.

After she left, I made a list of jobs that need doing around the house and assigned a job or two to each day so that I wouldn't have to do everything at once.

Tuesday — kitchen counters and floors.

Wednesday — downstairs bathroom/change towels.

Thursday — upstairs bathroom/change towels.

Friday — dust and change bed-



Open Season

By *Cynthia Haynes*
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ding.

Saturday — vacuum rugs and furniture.

Sunday — sweep and mop hard floors/do laundry.

Monday — work at office and forget house.

After the first week, though, every day seemed to be Monday.

I do change the bedding and towels, keep the dishes and laundry done and do lots of general picking up. What I didn't do was sweep, dust or mop unless there was a major spill or the cats left a present.

By last week, however, the fallacy of this started dawning on me as I found everything I owned was covered in cat hair. We have three, and when it's nice, they go outside. When the weather is bad or it's cold, they become house cats.

Without a pretty consistent program of dust and hair removal, the place soon becomes overrun with dust bunnies and cat hair.

So, I took Thursday off to clean.

I swept. I washed. I dusted. I scoured. I cleaned.

I hated every minute of it, but just turned the Christmas music on high and dove in.

Now, I'm very proud of my handiwork.

The only problem I see is, I'm going to have to do it again next month.

From the Bible

And he, that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.

And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.

He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

Revelations 21:5-7

Time to put away noisy Claus

It's the week after Christmas and time to put away the noise-activated, rocking-humming-knitting Mrs. Claus.

When I sneeze, she starts humming and rocking. If I drop a book on the table, she starts humming. I admit, she never fails to give us a little laugh. A good friend gave her to me a couple of years ago with the words, "She reminds me of you." Since I don't knit, it must be the grey hair.

Jim put up some lights, but not the multitude he usually strings all over our property. I've always said, "If it stands still, he'll put lights on it."

But, this year he's not been 100 percent. Since before Thanksgiving, he's had a nagging cough, plus aches and pains.

Since he was diagnosed with bronchitis, he has doctored and medicated for more than a month now. Every night he would come home from work and collapse in his recliner. I should have strung lights on him, because he was the one who stood still. Just like with his favorite football team, there's always next year.

— ob —

I love all those television shows about big families: "Jon and Kate Plus Eight," "17 Kids and Count-



Out Back

By *Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts*
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ing," and "Kids By the Dozen." Jim cannot understand my fascination. He does not consider the shows entertainment.

I think it's amazing to see how these families function. Just preparing a meal is a major task. And, going to the store, forget about it.

Perhaps I enjoy them because I'm so glad I'm not the mother of all those kids. But I always wanted a big family and when Jim and I got married, I got my wish. I instantly had five children, three grandchildren and another on the way.

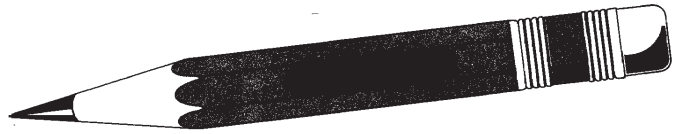
Now, there are seven grandchildren, plus two sons-in-law. Just that many more to love. We'll see what the future brings.

— ob —

A long-term cancer survivor, my oldest brother, Bob, received some disturbing news before Christmas. A lump on his leg turned out to be malignant. The treatment will be pretty aggressive, but we're optimistic that his overall good health and attitude will help him sail through.

— ob —

I don't know where the year has gone, but next year is here. In less than a month, the country will have a new president, days will be longer, resolutions will be made (and broken) and life will go on. A new year is like a present. I wonder what it holds.



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Kansas economy like weather

The weather changes so quickly here.

Friday it was 64 degrees and Saturday, just half that at 32.

Then Sunday, the mercury soared into the 50s again.

It's a little like living on a yo-yo, but Kansans get used to it.

The economy out here can be like that, too.

It was slow last year, even after a good fall crop.

Spending heated up all through 2008, even while the national economy was headed for the tank, as farm prices reached record highs and wheat topped \$12, however briefly.

Anyone who's watched the grain market at all knows a price like that won't last, though. Today the national economy is really tanked, and wheat is in the \$5-\$6 range.

Last summer, everyone was saying \$5 wheat would produce a loss. That might still happen, but there's no certainty.

It would not have been a bad price a couple of years ago. It still may not be a bad price this spring, as long as fuel costs stay down.

Hard to figure, isn't it?

Just when we get set for high prices and big profits, they disappear.

Just when everyone assumes prices will "always be that way," things change.

People have a way of taking whatever the situation is today and assuming that's the way things always will be.

Only it never turns out that way.



Along the Sappa

By *Steve Haynes*
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Those of us who grew up with the Cold War "knew" the Soviet Union would always be there to threaten us. Now most of the "Iron Curtain" countries are our friends, and most are members of NATO, the decades-old anti-Communist alliance. Go figure.

And sure, the Soviet bear might be reborn in the guise of a newly nationalistic, growing, KGB-let Russia. But the bear lacks teeth, real economic power or a modern military. Wait a few years and we'll see.

Back when we were looking under the bed for communists every night, who would have thought of the Muslim world as a threat to equal the Soviets? No one I can think of. Maybe there was a voice crying in the wilderness, but no one heard it, that's for sure.

Few in this country even knew who Osama bin Laden was when President Bush gravely pronounced his name after the September 2001 attacks. Today, we still don't know where he is, of course, but that is another story.

Then along comes Global Warming, the next bogey man. It's going to drown the earth under rising seas,

if we don't die from the pollution first.

Not to minimize the problem — pollution is awful and needs to be curbed — but in a couple of years, there'll be a new threat and we'll forget about global warming.

And did you hear, last year the earth cooled off?

Anyone old enough to remember how the population bomb was going to bury the earth in unfeedable people should be able to take a long-term view of these pseudo-science scares.

There's always an underlying problem, but like the weather, things change.

And the economy?
It won't be as bad out here, where housing prices never rose, as it is in the cities. We'll feel the pinch, but won't suffer a lot.

Be thankful that we missed the housing boom, and that most farmers paid down their debts the last couple of years. With a lot of unpaid farm debt, this year's crash in prices could have been much worse.

By next year?

Oh, the weather will be different then.

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