

Publication of notices under legislative attack

The centuries-old concept of giving the public notice of government and court action through publication in a newspaper is under attack in the Kansas Legislature.

The push is coming from cities that see a way to save a little money and public officials who just don't like the press.

One bill (SF 164), sponsored by Sen. John Vratil, vice president of the state Senate, would allow cities to publish all their notices on their own websites.

This violates the basic principles of public notice, because a city website is not a neutral posting, because a website does not constitute a permanent record of the publication as a newspaper would, and because not everyone could get to the web page — or even know where it is.

It's better to have these notices delivered to taxpayers' homes, but some officials claim the cities will save money. The result for many small Kansas towns, however, might well be the loss of their newspaper.

This might not bother Sen. Vratil, who is from Leawood in Johnson County, and is known for his dislike of reporters and editorial writers.

It might well be a blow to small Kansas towns which already have lost many of their businesses and much of their identity.

While legal notices are but a small part of many newspapers' income, they might represent the margin of survival for the smallest papers. The Legislature would be wise to avoid finding out, at least from our perspective.

The "scorched-earth" bill is not expected to pass, at least not this year, but Sen Vratil is a powerful man and he might resort to

late-session trickery to get his way. Our own senator, Ralph Ostmeyer of Grinnell, is on the Local Government Committee, which will decide this bill.

Another bill, SB 245, sponsored by the League of Kansas Municipalities, avoids the Internet issue and seeks only to save cities some money on publication of long ordinances. It would require publication only of a summary of ordinances, referring citizens to the city office for details.

This may sound like a good idea, but no one knows what damage it might do to those same small newspapers. People in the towns that would be affected probably would not be too happy to learn that their city is saving some money at the cost of their town's newspaper.

A better idea would be to require publication of a summary explaining the impact of every ordinance, along with the full text. Posting on the Internet along with newspaper publication would be a great idea.

The issue should not be saving a little money, but making sure the taxpayers and voters know what their city is up to. Allowing the full text to be tucked away in some office to gather dust just goes against all reason. The very parts that will offend or injure taxpayers may well be buried where they will never make the summary.

And if the ordinance is not published, how will people ever know. Remember, the city itself will be writing the summary.

Voters upset by this kind of closed-government thinking ought to complain to their senator and representative. It's not right, but it's how public officials sometimes think.

— Steve Haynes

Hearts offer cheap romance

Imagine my surprise Saturday morning (Valentine's Day) when I came down the stairs to find the family room, bathroom, kitchen and laundry room festooned with red construction-paper hearts. They were taped to walls, windows, mirrors, lamps and the television.

My sweet husband is such a romantic! We had looked at greeting cards the week before and showed the other what we would have bought — IF — we were buying cards. Not that we're cheap. Well, I am, just a little. But, the point is, \$3 or \$4 for a greeting card is absolutely ridiculous.

His homemade cards had sayings like little candy hearts: "Fool 4 U!", "Be Mine," "I Luv U," and "1-4-3" (our secret code for "I Love You"). These meant more to me than the fanciest card ever could.

He has extended the Valentine season by leaving the lighted heart on the side of our barn on Main Street on for a few extra days. Some of the guys in town give Jim a bad time. They say, "Cut it out, Plotts. You're making the rest of us look bad." I think, secretly, they wish they would have thought of it first.

Jim doesn't save his romantic side for Valentine's only. He opens the car door for me EVERY time we go someplace. In fact, he opens every door for me. He never lets me carry out the trash. He says that's his job. During the spring and sum-



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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mer, I find flowers in the house all the time. He has his own set of bud vases so he can leave me a flower whenever he wants to. Sometimes, it's a sunflower, sometimes a lilac, sometimes a rose. It could be a dandelion, and I would love it.

We've been married a little more than 14 years, and I don't see his endearments fading. I'm sure he'll still be bringing me flowers and opening my doors when we're in our 90s.

— ob —

If you are approaching your 65th birthday, heed this warning. "Beware of the deluge of advertisements you are soon to receive regarding Medicare."

Jim is fast-approaching that magic number, and for the last six months our mail box has been swamped with offers from dozens of insurance companies, each proclaiming their coverage to be the best.

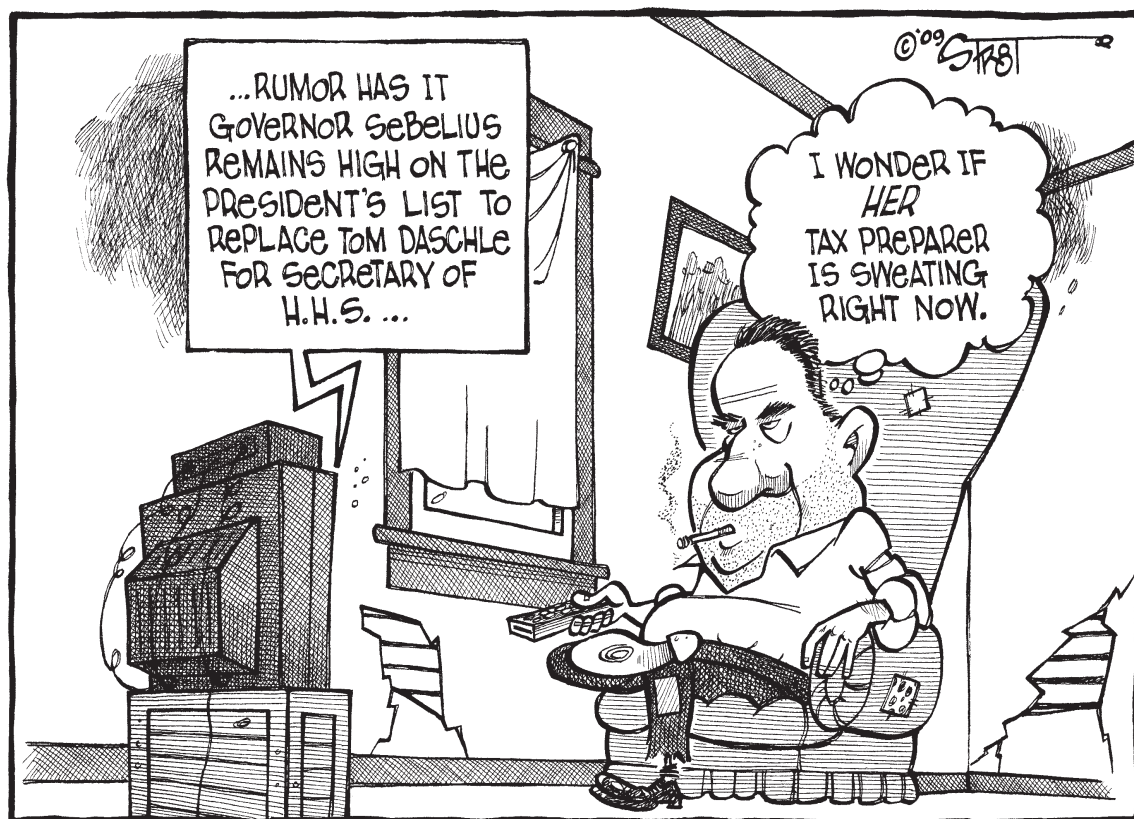
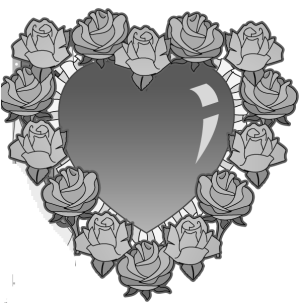
At first, I tried to study each one so we would make an informed decision. It wasn't long, though, before they all started to sound alike. Plan A, B, C, D. Then, here came Plan F

for only \$1 more. What happened to Plan E?

I even attended a workshop to learn more. It helped some, but, I'm still confused. The scare tactic used is, if you don't choose a plan during the sign-up period, you will be penalized for the rest of your life with a higher premium. What to do? What to do?

— ob —

And, now, a word about the weather. We've had a relatively mild winter — so far. I've been told the Farmer's Almanac predicts a late-season blizzard. Could it be a white Easter? I'll just parrot what everyone else is saying. "We sure do need the moisture."



Carnivals could be exempt

Both houses of the Legislature are moving to exempt small, home-owned carnivals from a law passed last year requiring operator training and annual inspection of rides.

Many of our northwest Kansas communities have home-owned carnivals. These organizations have been developed over the years out of both the need for a carnival at county fairs and community events, but mostly out of community pride.

All are run by nonprofit organizations and have a variety of small and large rides catering to our rural communities. These rides are maintained and operated by volunteers, and these communities have worked hard to keep them going from year to year.

The workforce has always been dedicated local residents donating their time in maintaining and operating these carnivals. They are proud of their excellent track records of safe and injury-free operations. Senate Substitute for House Bill 2504, passed in the 2008 session, created a hardship on these small home-owned carnivals.

Our home-owned carnivals were developed over the years because big-name carnivals could not be depended on. There was a clause in their contracts stating that if they received better offers, they didn't have to honor their obligation to our rural communities. After this disappointment, the communities



Letter from Topeka

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

began investing in a carnival of their own.

These carnivals are good for our small communities, and the pride that goes into pulling these events off each year is evident. People work together and this allows people to spend money at home and keep it invested right at home.

There is no question that the volunteers have a vested interest in keeping the rides maintained and in safe operating condition. Many of our operators have 20-30 years of experience operating their rides. Our home-owned carnivals provide a safe environment and I am not aware of any accidents that would necessitate any changes in their present mode of operation.

Senate Bill 178 and HB 2504 both would basically exempt small carnivals from some of the rigorous regulations that require a burden on the volunteers, who are equally as qualified as the inspector(s) who would train them. Our home-owned carnivals have always taken every

possible measure to insure safety for our communities.

The biggest obstacle will be getting the Kansas Department of Labor to understand that these carnivals will not be open more than just at county fairs and special community events. This legislation is very important to rural communities. I have witnessed the pride and hard work that goes into these annual events. It is important that we protect the rural way of life that so many family members look forward to every year.

I have heard from many of my constituents concerning this issue. The House hearing went well and we don't anticipate a problem in the Senate.

Feel free to contact me at any time. I can be reached by writing to Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol, 300 SW 10th Street, Room 262-E, Topeka, Kan. 66612 or call (785) 296-7399. My e-mail address is ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us.

Disabled put on waiting lists

To the Editor:

The State of Kansas is in the midst of a major crisis. For more than 12 years, inadequate funding for organizations that serve people with disabilities has created waiting lists that are out of control.

What was once a system with no waiting lists at all has been allowed to grow to over 3,800 children and adults with disabilities. The 2008 Kansas Legislature appropriated only enough money to serve 34 of these 3,800 people statewide.

Unfortunately, simply providing adequate money for these individuals does not solve the problem. Serving those who are waiting is important. Attracting and retaining qualified care providers also requires keeping up with cost of living and salary requirements.

Service providers like Developmental Services of Northwest Kansas face a constant battle with high turnover and staff shortages because they can't pay reasonable wages. Currently, these workers are paid on average more than \$5 less per hour than those doing com-

Letters to the Editor

parable work in a state institution. This challenge is not the result of the recent economic downturn; rather, it is the result of decades of being terribly underfunded.

Adequate funding would mean those who provide the care that keeps Kansans with disabilities out of costly institutions would finally be paid a competitive wage. Because these providers depend on state and federal money, an increase is their only hope for offering more competitive wages. Our legislators know of these needs and their budget people have made recommendations to address them.

I am writing with the hope that you will join me in urging our legislators to take necessary action. Small steps have been taken along the way, but, the Legislature has not made appropriate funding the priority it should be.

For Kansas children and adults with developmental disabilities on

the state's waiting lists, a day without services is a day lost forever.

I urge you to go to the website invisiblekansans.com to show your support for people with disabilities. This site explains how Kansans with disabilities are being made to feel invisible by being forced to wait years for services. Anyone visiting this site can send an e-mail to his/her legislators. It is simple to do. Just type in your zip code and the site will walk you through the process.

As Kansans, we take care of our own. It is a matter of justice. Persons with disabilities are counted among the least of these. Taking care of our most vulnerable, through full funding for community services, must be our priority and responsibility.

Yeyette Houfek, Hays former chair, Governor's Commission on Autism former member, Kansas Autism Task Force

Tootsie Roll Drive helps provide services

To the Editor:

Developmental Services of Northwest Kansas would like to congratulate all of the area Knights of Columbus units for another suc-

cessful Tootsie Roll Drive.

For many years, our agency has benefited from the generosity and hard work of the Knights. We appreciate their kindness and support

and feel fortunate to have these extraordinary men in northwest Kansas supporting our efforts.

All the money donated to our organization goes directly to support the people we serve who have developmental disabilities.

Steve Keil, director of development Developmental Services of Northwest Kansas

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