

## Budget cuts are coming, but some could be easier

State officials and legislators are telling Kansans to brace themselves for budget cuts, which we all know are coming.

With the Legislature and governor trying to trim nearly \$300 million out of this year's budget and \$1 billion from next year's, there are bound to be some painful changes.

Public schools took the smallest cuts, only about 2.6 percent, but already some of the districts which sued the state a few years back are talking about another lawsuit to force the Legislature to give them more.

How they can take your tax money and sue your Legislature to make you pay them more is just a little strange, but when there's money involved, people do strange things.

School boards and superintendents had plenty of warning, and most found room to squeeze something out of the budget. Students and parents will notice, though, when activities fees go up or popular programs like art and band, even sports, get cut.

Colleges don't have to just accept a 10 percent cut in state money. They can and will raise tuition, and tuition costs in Kansas already have shot up. Expect the cost of your kids' diploma to take another jump this year. A decision is expected this month.

Regents colleges are scrambling to find money to fix old buildings, where needs are measured in hundreds of millions but where the Legislature gave only about \$7 million this year.

Some agencies will cut a little here and there, and you'll hardly notice it. Others will want to make their customers sit up and take notice.

The state Historical Society, for instance, dealt with the cuts by, among other things, simply closing some smaller attractions such

as the Cottonwood Ranch, a historic Old West sheep ranch near Studley in Graham County. The one employee was let go and the gates padlocked, though the sparsely populated area needs whatever tourism it gets.

You could argue that the need for state money is far greater in Graham County than in say, Topeka, but the ranch got the ax.

Other agencies say they're trying to keep taxpayer needs in mind, even though that's obviously not the case.

The Supreme Court ordered layoffs for dozens of part-time workers in court clerks' offices across the state to save \$800,000. In Lawrence, where the Douglas County District Court offices lost four part-timers, the court clerk said the office would have to close over the noon hour because of the cuts.

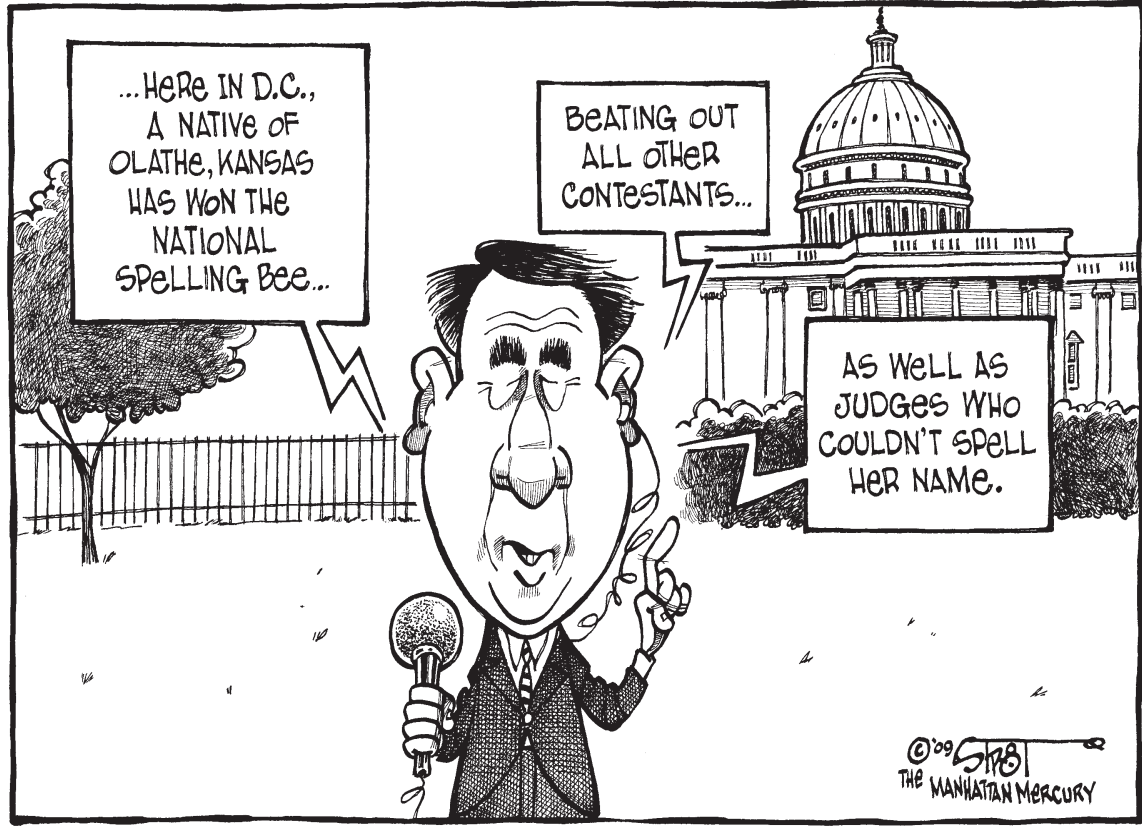
Court Administrator Linda Vogelsang said she understood that this would be a hardship on people who could only come in during the noon hour, but there was nothing she could do. Apparently the 15 full-time employees either all go to lunch together, or don't get along well enough to schedule noon-hour coverage.

Undoubtedly, some of the cuts will hurt, with more to come that will hurt even more. The state has to live within its means, though, and with 63 percent of the budget spent on education, other programs are really suffering.

The Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services, the state's welfare agency, will limit the amount spend on funerals for the poor to \$550, down from an average of \$678. You have to wonder what they will cut out of the service.

But the budget must balance, and there's no end in sight to the current round of cuts.

— Steve Haynes



## Sharp burglar steals the seed

The cut was neat, professionally chiseled, like a bank job done by someone who knew what he was doing.

And the thief cleaned out the vault — in this case, the bottom of one of Cynthia's bird feeders.

The "door" we found in the grass below, as neat as if it'd been blown.

The perp, we haven't spotted him yet, but we've got a description: about a foot long, bushy, 12-inch tail, red fur, and sharp, sharp teeth.

That's what gave him away. The cut in the plastic around the feeder hatch was just way too neat. No bird could do that. And the seed inside, it was gone, gone, gone, even the two inches at the bottom that the birds never get to.

I'm not sure what Cynthia is going to do. She says she was ready to shut off the two feeders out back for the summer. They hang in the ash tree, and the leaves are just too thick to see through right now.

Bird feeders are her latest addiction. She started with a pair last summer in Colorado, and by fall, she had dozens of finches, sparrows, wrens, bluebirds and jays hooked on her seed.

Step out the front door, and a cloud of birds would rise off the lawn and trees.

Then last fall, feeders started to appear in the yard here. First a couple with trays below to catch the



## Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes  
s.haynes@nwkans.com

seed the big birds spill, then an iron brace and a pair with no trays.

Those, I had to mount on the south, so she could watch feeders morning, noon and night.

At first things were slow. She feared the birds here had plenty to eat and she'd never see any. Then came spring. We had to start hosing down the brick patio, the birds were making such a mess.

A lot of the flock were blackbirds: regular blackbirds, redwings, starlings, you name it. They eat a lot and they relieve themselves a lot. They are, in a word, a mess.

But there were robins, finches, jays, wrens, sparrows, little brown birds with fuzzy reddish heads that I can't find in the bird book. Lots of birds.

Most of them are fun. The blackbirds just eat everything — the quinoa, the millet, the sunflower seeds — everything. They even steal the corn off the cob we put up on the back fence to feed the squirrels.

That's OK, I guess, because the squirrels soon figured out there

was food in the bird feeders. We'd see the boss squirrel hanging on the feeder upside down, trying to figure out how to break the bank. Little did we know.

You've seen these feeders: a plastic cylinder with a hanger and little doors to go in holes in the side with perches, adjustable to favor larger or smaller birds. The manufacturer says they're squirrel proof, but those guys haven't met our squirrels.

Anyway, the one with the door cut out of it is toast. I don't see any point in buying another one of those, at least not one with the tray the squirrel can work on while blowing the vault.

I hate to punish the birds for the squirrel's sins, though, so maybe we'll look for one that's got better security: thick wood construction, maybe, or steel grates, something even a squirrel can't just gnaw through.

I'll file a report later. Right now, the score is squirrels 1, Cynthia 0.

## Despite eye, she so (not) vain

I am not vain! I am not vain! I am not vain! OK, maybe I'm a little vain.

Five days after surgery, and still not being allowed to wear make-up, has brought out the "vanity monster" in me. Wednesday, the stitches will be removed so I can bring out the eye shadow and mascara.

I was talking to an out-of-town friend over the weekend. I told him that I had just had surgery. He asked how I was, and I said, "I look like I've been a couple of rounds with Mike Tyson."

"Oh, no!" he said. "Did they cut off your ear?"

I hadn't mentioned it was eye surgery.

Maybe Tyson was not the right boxer to mention. I was going for the visual of a black eye. Actually, it's more greenish/yellowish, with a tinge of purple. And, still a little swollen.

Maybe I should have used Sugar Ray Leonard.

The long story, short, is that everything came out fine. It was a skin cancer and the doctor had to take a little more than expected, so I have two fine rows of stitches. One where the growth was; the other where he made a cut to give him a little more "leeway" to close the first incision.

The surgical staff was wonderful. Very kind and considerate. I think they must go to school to learn how



## Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts  
quality-pro@webtv.net

to treat people. When the nurse asked me to remove all my jewelry, I told her I never take my wedding rings off. She never missed a beat, nor acted as though she thought I was "batty." Instead, she said, "No problem," and, taped over the rings right on my finger.

The anesthesiologist was named Tony Piccone (Pick-own-ee). Honest. I couldn't make that up. When he and the doctor were rolling me into the surgical suite, the doctor asked, "Are you ready for this?"

I told them Jim had already prayed for me and had prayed for them, too, so I was "good to go." They put me in what they called a "twilight." I was aware of what was happening, but didn't feel a thing.

For the trip home, I took some kind of high-powered drug and slept all the way. It probably was the most peaceful drive Jim has ever made. I never complained about his driving, not once.

I was kind of like George Carlin's character, the hippy-dippy weatherman. "Hey! Que pasa?"

—ob—

What a difference a few days makes. Wheat fields are suddenly starting to ripen. The color is changing, and in a few days will be golden. Now is the time nerves wear thin and farmers watch the sky as much as they watch the fields.

—ob—

Listening to the radio, I heard the late Adrian Rodgers say, "A man can have intelligence. but wisdom is knowing how to use that intelligence."

## From the Bible

For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.

For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.

Romans 14:8-9

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E-mail: oberlin.herald@nwkans.com

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## Tenure protects bad teachers

In an ideal world, Kansas law would make sure that schools attract and keep good teachers and eliminate ineffective ones. It looks like legislators have some work to do before we get there.

Each year, the National Council on Teacher Quality grades states on their laws on identifying and retaining effective teachers and removing those that are ineffective. Read the 2008 report at www.nctq.org.

This is a comprehensive report that not only offers constructive criticism but also comparisons to other states, including examples of best practices. The council commends Kansas for a few things, but overall gives the state a D+, citing the need for new policies.

Take tenure, for example. Many jobs have a probationary period, after which employees gain certain rights, although nowhere near the extent of protection provided by teacher tenure. One of the downsides of tenure is that it makes it difficult to dismiss ineffective teachers.

According to the report, "the awarding of tenure appears to be virtually automatic" in Kansas. State law does say schools must consider student performance in deciding whether to grant tenure, but only as one of several factors, and not even the most important. Worse, there's no requirement that schools present any objective evidence that a teacher is effective.

Kansas does a somewhat better job in retaining effective teachers. The council gives the state high

## Other Opinions

By John R. LaPlante  
Flint Hills Center for Public Policy, Wichita

marks for its laws on new-teacher mentoring, which are meant to help ease teachers into the job. On the other hand, it says "the state should consider rewarding teachers for their effectiveness by supporting a performance pay plan." Right now, effective teachers are paid the same as average ones.

Changing the way we pay teachers could help districts find teachers for hard-to-staff subjects and schools. If people who can teach science are at a premium compared with, say, English teachers, they should be paid more. Yet that doesn't happen.

To make matters worse, would-be teachers with relevant experience in an outside job — say, engineers who could teach mathematics — get no bonus. Instead, they start at the bottom of the pay scale.

The council says Kansas should be more aggressive in getting rid of ineffective teachers.

"The state," it says, "should adopt a policy whereby all teachers who receive a single unsatisfactory evaluation are placed on a structured improvement plan." Those who receive two unsatisfactory recom-

mendations should be dismissed, it says.

There are two main approaches to improving school quality. One says that schools, like businesses, improve when they must compete for customers. It advises states to let parents spend education money on the school of their choice, not just the one assigned to them by the school board.

A second approach is to adopt regulations designed to increase quality, such as those recommended in the report.

We should use both approaches. School districts, as we know them, are going to be important players for a long time, so it's important that we make the best use of them.

Given that taxpayers in Hays help pay for schools in Salina, and taxpayers in Olathe help pay for schools in Wichita, it makes sense for the state to require schools take a serious look at policies governing how they recruit and retain good teachers and get rid of ineffective ones. Thanks to the National Council on Teacher Quality, we have some suggestions on what those policies should look like.

## Cross a symbol of approach to God

To the Editor:  
The cross is a symbol of man's vertical approach to God, with his horizontal dealings with people. Whatever rituals, rites, ceremonies, praying, praise, exhortations, validity, are reflected in how "U" treat others.

Those who worship God work regularly commit less crime than those who don't. What crime merits denying the free exercise of religion? What crime deserves a penalty preventing the right to work? Jailing does both: suspending the right to assemble and earn a living.

"But if any provide not for his own, specially for those of his

## Letter to the Editor

own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." 1 Tim. 5:8.

Jails were never Biblical punishment. Next to the death penalty, they should be a last resort. Pre-trial jailing is a violation of the premise "innocent until proven guilty." Jailing the nonviolent will often do more harm to society than the actions of the accused. Depriving them of earnings and stressing their business and personal affairs is an excessive

fine, cruel and unusual punishment to them. And taxpayers are forced to pay for their keep.

"Let him that stole, steal no more, but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth." Eph. 4:28

The loss of freedom of worship and to work by jailing is a torture more grievous than death.

Frank Sower  
Benkelman, Ne