

Closed-door meetings shouldn't have happened

Leaders of the state Legislature and the Shawnee County prosecutor are snarling at each other over charges that legislators may have violated the state's Open Meetings Act when they gathered last month at Cedar Crest to mingle with the governor and his staff.

Many Republicans have charged that District Attorney Chad Taylor, a Democrat, has a political motive in pursuing the charge. In fact, it was the *Topeka Capital Journal* and the Kansas Press Association that filed the complaint. Mr. Taylor responded by opening an investigation, which is his duty.

House Speaker Mike O'Neal of Hutchinson barked that Mr. Taylor "should have gone through legislative leaders" to get information, rather than writing to all members of the House and Senate. The speaker, a lawyer, and a good one, should know better; a prosecutor has every right to look where he may for evidence of a violation.

Violation of the Open Meetings Act, while not a crime, is a serious matter. The law forbids public officials of all ranks from meeting behind closed doors to decide public business. Its basis is that the people have a right to know about state business.

The governor's office claims these meeting with legislators were strictly social affairs, and the members were cautioned not to discuss official business among themselves. The meeting involved Republican members of several key committees, who came together, present-

ing at least the appearance that a majority may have been meeting behind closed doors.

The way things were set up, it's no wonder many were suspicious. Why, we wonder, were the press and public excluded from these "social" gatherings? If the purpose was to get together and get to know one another, why not invite a few of the statehouse reporters and others to come mingle as well?

The governor himself cannot be accused of violating the Open Meetings Act, since he is an elected individual state officer, and not a member of the Legislature. The appearance of undue secrecy cannot help him, however, and he and his staff must have anticipated that tongues would wag.

Inviting Democrats, now that's another manner....

How much smarter the governor's office — and the legislative leadership — would have been to simply have avoided this trap and kept the meetings open. They were not, after all, conducting any important business.

"Social gatherings" held at a state facility with state money and state officials — there's a smell to that, and it isn't good. We doubt the investigation will turn up any serious wrong. But it never should have been necessary.

The governor, the leadership, the Legislature as a whole should set an example of openness for all public officials. It's what the voters and taxpayers expect and deserve.

— Steve Haynes

Your books, she could keep

Anyone who knows me knows I'm no bookkeeper. At least not for myself.

Oh, I make a stab at reconciling my checkbook each month, but truthfully, as long as the bank says I have more money than I say I have, I think, "close enough."

But I am trustworthy. That's why I've been made treasurer of three groups I'm involved with. And when it comes to someone else's money, I make sure I balance the account, to the penny, every month.

I'll never forget the time I asked a highly-respected bank teller to help me with my personal account. She asked to see my check register. I explained that I "rounded up" my entries. You know if I wrote a check for \$5.68, I would enter \$6. You could see the look of horror and disbelief in her eyes.

"Why would you do something like that?" she asked.

I gave her what I thought was a perfectly logical answer: "I thought it would be an easy way to save a little money."

So you can imagine her shock when, several years ago, I came into her bank to sign the card for the local high school alumni association. "They made YOU the treasurer?" she asked.

Beaming with pride, I answered, "Don't worry. I manage other people's money better than I do my own."

All of this is to say that after this last week, I feel like I could pass a Certified Public Accountant test. (No offense to my friends who are real CPAs.) I am the treasurer of the Haven, the nonprofit organization on whose board Jim and I sit. It is



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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annual report time, and not only did I get that done, but I completed spreadsheets on our last four years of operation. Ask me something. I can tell you the average amount of our monthly utility bills, or how much we spent on plumbing repairs, or insurance. I don't know if we will ever really need this information, but, by golly, I have it, if we do.

-ob-

When a catalog says, "Some assembly required" in the fine print, best believe it.

I ordered a cute little minidresser for the bathroom. When it arrived, I was appalled to find about a jillion pieces in the box.

That's when I called on son James. He is so good to me. In no time at all he had Tab A in Slot B and all the pieces fit together perfectly, with not one left over.

-ob-

This is the week of Valentine's Day. It's one of my favorite holidays because my husband is such a romantic. The big red heart on the side of our barn is lighted up for all the world to see.

And I don't mind sharing my heart with all the other "girls" in town. I don't even mind if their husbands/boyfriends tell them THEY are the ones who put up the heart and said,

"It's just for you, baby, just for you." Really, I don't.

Because, like the song says, "All we need is love." Love for each other. Love for our fellow man.

There's another quote that is pretty good, too. It's about faith, hope and love. "But the greatest of these is love."

From the Bible

To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak; I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.

— I Corinthians 9: 22-23



Carnivals to lose exemption?

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

This tradition may be threatened by a bill filed for the state Department of Labor which would end an exemption from state regulation and inspections required of commercial carnivals and amusement parks.

Homeowned carnivals are run by nonprofit organizations that buy and maintain small and large rides catering to our rural towns. These rides are maintained and operated by volunteers, and the groups work hard to keep them going.

It is my understanding that our home-owned carnivals were developed over the years because traveling carnivals were not dependable. They had a clause in their contracts stating that if they received better offers, they didn't have to honor their obligation to our small towns.

After being disappointed time and time again, the towns (Oberlin was the first in Kansas) began investing in a carnival of their own.

There is no question that the



Letter from Topeka

By Sen. Ralph Ostmeier
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volunteers have a vested interest in keeping the rides maintained and in safe operating condition. Many of our operators have 20 to 30 years of experience operating the rides.

A bill passed by the Legislature in 2008, Senate Substitute for House Bill 2504, would have created a hardship on these small home-owned carnivals. We managed then to carve out exemptions from inspection requirements meant for commercial operations.

A bill proposed by the Labor Department this year, Senate Bill 356, would take away the exemptions from state regulations, creating a major burden on the volunteers, who are equally as qualified as any inspector who would train them. This bill is a direct response to an accident at the Norton carnival,

though there also was a minor accident in Goodland last year.

Our home-owned carnivals have always taken every possible measure to insure safety for their people. I have witnessed the pride and hard work that goes into these annual events. I have heard from many of my constituents concerning this issue.

I am waiting for a hearing date on this bill. We need to be organized in order to hold this exemption. Please contact me if you have questions.

To reach Sen. Ralph Ostmeier, write to State Capitol, 300 SW 10th Street, Room 128-S, Topeka, Kan. 66612 or call (785) 296-7399. His e-mail is ostmeier@senate.state.ks.us.

A friend finally finds his rest

A few flakes of snow swirled around in the persistent, sharp wind Saturday. The cold crawled through your coat and chilled you.

I had to stop and brush back the tears, but I was not that unhappy. TD was home.

You don't get to meet that many people like Tom Dreiling, let alone get to know them, or call them friend. TD, as he was known, and as he signed thousands of columns, was one of the good guys.

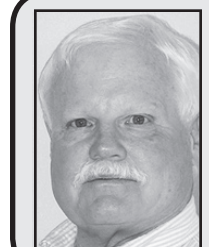
A fine journalist, yes. He had a homey touch that gave his editorials and columns a warm feeling. He mentioned dozens of townspeople each week. He knew that journalism is all about people.

As a publisher, he was more than adequate. He knew how to set the standard he expected, and he had his ways to make sure it was met.

He was good at his job, and devoted to it. More than that, though, he was just one of those people you counted it a privilege to be associated with. He always tried to do the right thing. He lived his Catholic faith. And his sense of humor made everything a little brighter.

He grew up in Hays in one of those German-Catholic families that once populated parochial schools on the plains, second-youngest of nine. He joked that he never knew exactly how old he was, since he had paperwork which showed he was born Nov. 25 in both 1934 and 1935.

His journalism career stretched back to the time right after he came



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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out of the Air Force and worked for the *Ellis County Star*, a weekly in Hays owned by two of his brothers. He went from there to the *Hays Daily News*, becoming sports editor, then city editor.

In 1965, he moved to Goodland to be editor of the old *Goodland Daily News*, then owned by the McCants family, and later by the Seaton family. He stayed 24 years, and might have retired there, but in 1989, the Seaton sold *The Daily News* to an outfit formed by an accountant and a New York investment banker. Not much good came from that union.

After the sale, Tom recalled, they called him in and told him he could stay, but his salary would be that of a new hire out of college, about half what he was making. Tom took a hike, and later won an unemployment case against the company.

While he'd grown up and later worked in Hays, Goodland was home for Tom. His boys were born there, his wife, Jean, died there in 1975 after coming down with leukemia, and the boys grew up there.

The first time he retired, he tried

to live in Hays. That lasted less than three months before he wrote us a letter: "I've made a terrible mistake," he said, going on to ask if we could take him back.

The second time he retired, he moved to Goodland, and he said it felt more comfortable. Deteriorating health — his eyes and his feet had been ravaged by diabetes over the years — prompted him to move on to the Denver area. However, that's where his kids and grandkids were anyway.

Through it all, Tom continued to write, right up to the week before he died. His columns always included reader comments and a little humor. I usually read them right away. A lot of people did.

As I walked away from the grave, I had to stop and wipe away a tear or two. I will miss him, but I wasn't so much sad as happy. After we left, the workers would lower his urn into the ground next to his beloved Jean, she waiting alone all these years.

I couldn't help but think it was a moment he'd grown to long for.

Little support seen for school plan

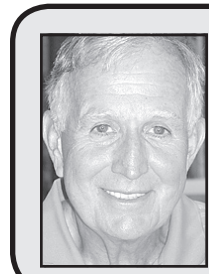
The Legislature finally received the governor's school finance plan, a 147-page document that has many moving parts.

The proposed teacher evaluation plan (all teacher evaluations would be posted on the Internet) has actually received more attention than the financial part. I am sure it will be debated and written about many times before it is resolved.

Right now, I feel, there is very little support for this plan.

The governor has proposed \$17 million in cuts to the Children's Initiative Fund, paid for by tobacco settlement money. The state expects \$40 million this year in receipts.

It really doesn't make sense to cut such programs as Smart Start, Early Childhood Block Grants and Parents as Teachers. A major goal of the Brownback Administration is to improve fourth-grade reading readiness, and we cannot shortchange the programs that lay the groundwork



Letter from Topeka

By State Rep. Ward Cassidy
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to that goal.

Research shows that for every dollar invested in quality childhood programs, the state would save at least \$7 down the road.

I have signed on to three House bills that are easy for me to support. The first is Casey's Law, which would require legal guardians and parents to call the police when a child is missing. The second is a review of mandatory reporting laws for sexual abuse, to make sure we are providing protection on college campuses in our state. Both of these

were driven by the national news.

Finally, an Arts Commission Check Off on state income-tax returns would allow taxpayers an opportunity to support the arts.

The House redistricting plan has been set out. If the plan stands, the 120th District would add Graham County to Cheyenne, Rawlins, Decatur, Norton and Phillips.

Ward Cassidy of St. Francis, a retired school principal and teacher, is the state representative for the 120th District. Send e-mails to ward.cassidy@house.ks.gov.

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