

Legislature gave up without finishing the job

The Kansas Legislature ground to a halt Sunday, nine days overtime and leaving a couple of pieces of important business undone.

The House and Senate did manage to pass a \$14.3 billion state budget which includes tax cuts, a 3 percent cut in overall state spending for the first time in years and a \$464 million cushion, or ending balance, as required by law.

Another accomplishment was passing a plan to reform the Kansas Public Employees Retirement System, which covers state workers, teachers and educators, and many city and county employees as well. Existing pensions would be protected with new revenue sources, and new employees would go under a different, less expensive plan.

Left undone was the biggest job of the year, however, drawing new boundaries for all House, Senate and congressional districts as required by federal court rulings and the Constitution. This must be done every 10 years after the federal census so districts have roughly equal population.

The redistricting could and should have gotten done if a spirit of compromise had prevailed among conservative and “moderate” Republicans and the Democrats, but that was not about to happen.

Halfway through the session, conservative groups announced plans to file candidates against seven or eight more liberal Republican senators in a bid to break the moderate faction’s hold on Senate leadership. Many were popular incumbent House members.

Senate leaders countered by drawing a Senate map that put many challengers outside the districts they’d filed in. Conservatives, such as Sen. Ralph Ostmeier representing

northwest Kansas, were given no say in their own districts.

And the fight was on. Another major failing was to pass a tax-cut plan that even conservative leaders admitted may have been too aggressive. Instead of phasing income-tax cuts in over a decade, the bill which passed both houses will cut everything right away.

Many project the need for big cuts in state spending down the road, though some would see that as a good thing. It’s an issue the next Legislature likely will have to revisit.

The redistricting now apparently will fall to the U.S. District Court, where a three-judge panel could wind up drawing the lines. The only other alternative would be a special session, but that might only delay the inevitable.

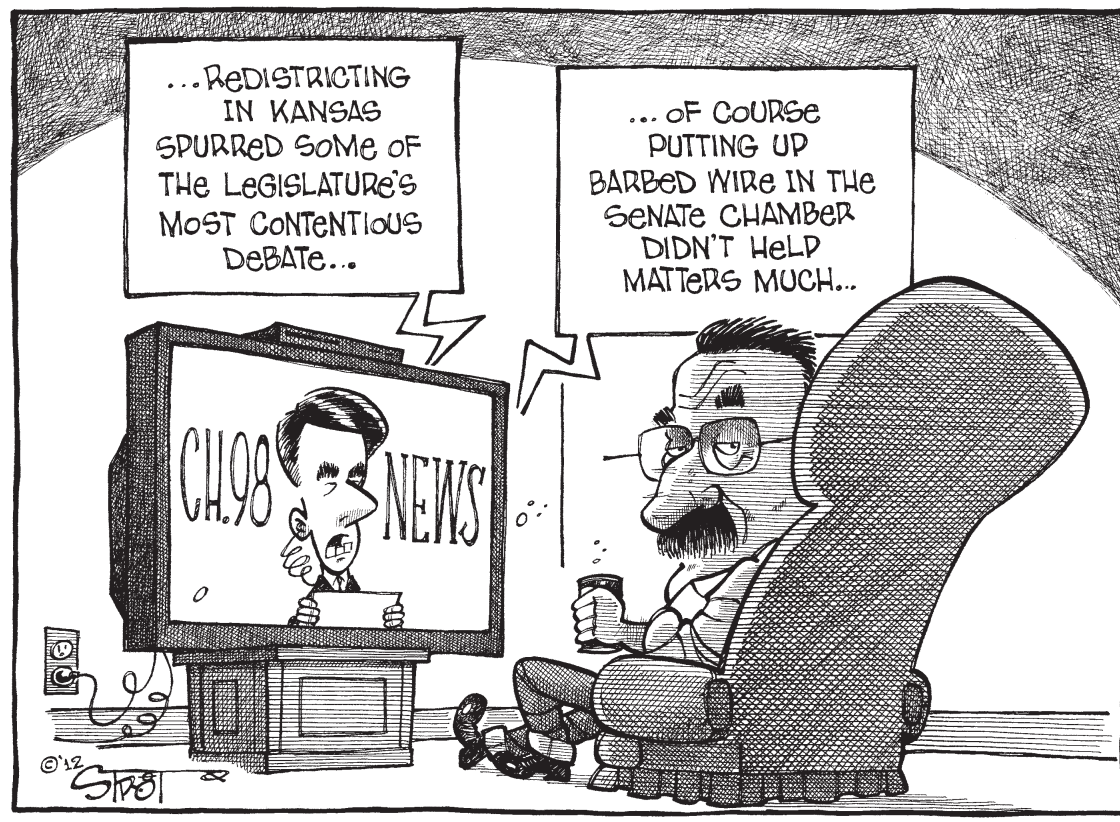
As it is, the August primary may have to be put off, no matter who draws the districts, since the June 15 deadline to file for state and local office is fast approaching. Secretary of State Chris Kobach says the maps must be ready by Friday, June 8.

Who will wind up in control of the Senate is anybody’s guess, but voters in some districts may not cotton to what will be seen as a power play by business—the challengers were recruited by a group tied to the state Chamber of Commerce — and allegedly, the governor.

How the new district will affect the outcome is anybody’s guess. Legislators on both sides may wish they’d gotten along better.

While the session undoubtedly produced some accomplishments, failing to handle the big issues is not a point of pride. Voters and citizens should not be pleased with either side for that.

— Steve Haynes



Long session crept to an end

The Legislature continued its work last week in the Veto Session. We expected to return to wrap up the budget and any other key issues that need to be addressed before adjourning (which happened over the weekend).

Time is of the essence when legislators came back to Topeka, and finishing the budget will be a top priority in addition to a few other priorities the Senate laid out at the start of the session.

Balanced Budget. The Senate passed a balanced budget that reduces overall spending by \$324 million and calls for a \$457.7 million ending balance. The Senate budget takes into account anticipated cuts from the federal government and it restores some of the money previously cut from state aid to schools.

During the recession, nearly \$18,000 was cut from every Kansas classroom. The Senate budget begins to restore some of those dollars to help reduce larger class sizes, increased fees and teacher layoffs.

The House adopted its version of the budget last week, allowing the two chambers to begin negotiating differences. The negotiations had to continue before a final budget could be voted on by both.

School Finance. The Senate sent two bills to the House prior to the close of the regular session addressing school finance. The first would put more dollars directly into the classroom by increasing the base state aid per pupil by \$74 over the next two years. This bill was sent to the House Budget Committee at the end of March.



Letter from Topeka By Sen. Ralph Ostmeier ralph.ostmeier@senate.ks.gov

The other bill allowed for schools districts to save up to 10 percent of a district’s general-fund budget in a contingency reserve. The option to set aside dollars for future operation expenses would help local schools plan for fluctuations in the economy without risking classroom resources, teachers and other essential services. These bills remained in a conference committee, where Senate and House members can negotiate a final plan.

Property Tax Relief. Property tax relief was a priority for the Senate this year. Senators overwhelmingly passed a plan to restore the Local Ad Valorem Tax Fund, sending \$180 million to local governments to reduce property taxes, or \$45 million per year for four years. This was adopted in the Senate’s version of the budget; for each dollar paid to a county, there must be a \$1 reduction in local taxes.

College or Career Ready. This plan would ensure that each Kansas student has the opportunity to prepare for college or a career path by graduation. It also establishes an incentive program that awards school districts \$1,000 for each high school student who graduates with an industry-recognized credential in

a high-demand occupation.

Based on the governor’s technical education plan, the intent of this bill is to support the preparation of our workforce in shortage areas — such as certified welders, automotive, aircraft and computer support technicians and nursing — and to prepare students to go to work at these skilled, higher-paying jobs after graduation from high school. The House adopted its version of the bill late last week and it was to be sent back to the Senate.

Redistricting. The committee met last week and passed out a potential Senate map. The map can be found at bit.ly/Buffalo20.

From the Bible

In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.”
— John 7:37-38

Eggs should be hatching now

By this time next week, the head-count at our house will have risen significantly. Hopefully, by 50.

That’s the number of eggs I “set” in my little counter-top incubator. We’ll see what happens, because I haven’t been the best “mother hen.”

According to the directions that came with the incubator, I was to turn the eggs twice a day at the same time. I always turned them at least once a day, but never at the same time.

I remember the summer our granddaughter Chantelle was with us. She was about 9 years old and loved, I mean really loved, chickens. My friend Suzy had banty chickens and one of these little incubators. She gave me a dozen fertile eggs and the loan of the incubator.

Chantelle really was a good little mother, turning them every day. If I remember right, we had to warn her to not turn them too often. When the eggs started to hatch, it was all she could do to keep her hands off the struggling chicks. Naturally, your first instinct is to help them out of their shell, when it’s the very struggle that makes them strong enough to survive. Nature has its way.

Makes me think we should take a cue. Parents today seem to want to help their children too much, when, in fact, it’s the struggle that makes them strong and prepares them for



Out Back By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts cplotts65@gmail.com

the future. I used to tell my girls, “Just because you did it wrong doesn’t mean you don’t have to do it. Try again.”

Anyway, “little Chantelle” is graduating from high school this year. Her nickname was “The Texas Tornado.” She is still a very high-energy girl with a megawatt smile. She was on swim team, in a service organization, has a million friends and kept her grades up, too. She is planning a future as a registered nurse.

Look out world. Here comes Chantelle.

Coming home from town one night, we spotted a herd of about 10 deer in the ditch. They barely lifted their heads as we passed. Before I knew it, Jim had pulled over and wheeled around.

“It’s about time they get a taste of their own medicine,” he said.

We drove toward the deer, and as we got close, he laid on the horn.

They started to run back into a field, but it wasn’t until I opened my window and gave them my high-pitched, crazy-as-a-loon, Basque yell that they really got scared.

I hope that put the fear into them and they’ll think twice before venturing onto a roadway again.

—ob—
Took a little trip down memory lane last week. I was writing a story about one of the anniversary classes from my alma mater. During my research, I was going through some of the old newspapers and ran across one of my mother’s columns.

She said my dad had tangled with a mad cow and lost, ending up with a couple of broken ribs. It was just a few days before the alumni banquet and doctor’s orders were to stay down and take it easy. When Mom suggested he skip the banquet, his reply was, “I’ve never missed one before, and I’m not going to start now.”

THE OBERLIN HERALD

Serving Oberlin and Decatur County since 1879

USPS 401-600

Office hours: 8:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. Mon.-Fri.

170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749-2243

Phone: (785) 475-2206 Fax (785) 475-2800
E-mail: oberlin.herald@nwkansas.com

Published each Wednesday by Haynes Publishing Co., 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749. Periodicals postage paid at Oberlin, Kan. 67749.

Nor’West Newspapers

STAFF

Steve Haynes editor
Kimberly Davis managing editor
Mary Lou Olson society editor
Carolyn Kelley-Plotts proofreader, columnist
Joan Betts historian
Cynthia Haynes business manager
Pat Cozad want ads/circulation
Crista Sauvage advertising makeup

Official newspaper of Oberlin, Jennings, Norcat, 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, \$38 (tax included) in Decatur, Norton, Rawlins, Sheridan, Thomas and Red Willow counties; \$42 (tax included) elsewhere in Kansas; \$48 elsewhere in the U.S. Foreign subscriptions, \$50-\$250 (in U.S. dollars only) extra per year (except APO/FPO). POSTMASTER: Send change of address to 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749-2243.



We barbecued our way south

We drove all the way to Augusta, Ga, this month, which is about 1,330 miles, give or take, to see our daughters.

Who are we kidding. We did it to see our granddaughter, and her mother and aunt. The spring drive has become a habit since she was born. Before that, we flew, which is faster and usually cheaper, but not half as interesting.

And this time, on the way down, anyway, we drove about 1,600 miles over four days, spending one night in a hotel and two with friends who’d invited us to stop by. This takes longer, but makes the trip even more interesting.

One thing you have to understand about traveling with Cynthia is that any road trip becomes a tour of the barbecue places of the nation.

Ask her what she wants for lunch: “Oh, how about barbecue.”

Dinner: “Are there any barbecue places?”

You get the picture. She will take an occasional hamburger, especially on the first day. And she’ll eat about anything if she gets hungry enough. But barbecue is her No. 1 desire for road food. It’s not that I don’t like barbecue — actually, I love it — but I do believe in variety.

To her credit, by the way, she has not yet asked for barbecue for breakfast. I think that’s coming, though.... The first day, we took a detour from the prescribed, but somewhat sterile, route and left Wichita east-bound on U.S. 400, a mostly new, high-class two-lane road across southeast Kansas. If you’ve never been that way, it cuts through the Flint Hills before crossing the Neosho and Verdigris river valleys. It’s beautiful down there, especially in the spring.

By dusk, we had crossed into Missouri and stopped for barbecue at Joplin. Then we headed south on four-lane U.S. 71 to catch the new freeway from Walmart land — I mean Bentonville — south to join Interstate 40 east.

We didn’t get as far as we’d



Along the Sappa By Steve Haynes s.haynes@nwkansas.com

hoped, but the barbecue was great and the freeway through the Ozarks seemed to be spectacular — high soaring trestles and beautiful vistas, at least in the moonlight. We made it to Clarksville, Ark., on the river, and called it a night.

Next day, we were up and moving early, made Little Rock by mid-morning and stopped somewhere for lunch down in southeast Arkansas. Mexican food; it was almost Cinco de Mayo, after all.

That night was spent with friends in Brookhaven, Miss., where we sat on the porch and heard tales of the gators and snakes at their country place and had a great dinner. Grilled chicken, but not barbecue.

Next morning, we toured their operation, saw Amtrak’s City of New Orleans make its daily stop, then took off for our next overnight, just south of the big racetrack at Talladega, Ala.

When we got to John’s house in Roanoke, he had bought barbecue from the local stand. Ribs, beef, pork, beans, Brunswick stew, all great. Next morning, he made us breakfast — eggs, bacon and blue corn grits. Fancy.

And that evening, after bucking traffic in Atlanta, we wound up in Augusta, tired of the road and full of tasty barbecue.

We spent a great week with the kids — it’s always great when we visit there — and took the short route home: Chattanooga, Interstate 24 to Nashville, spent the night somewhere in Illinois after finding motels in Mount Vernon completely full (in the morning, we discovered it was Nashville, Ill.!), then made St. Louis on Saturday morning.

Though we could (and should) have headed north for U.S. 36 across Missouri, a pleasant and pretty drive and all four-lane now, I wanted one more shot at some good barbecue at Gates and Sons in Kansas City. I know, this time, it was me, but Kansas City barbecue is still the best.

So we followed I-70 across the state, a nice drive, but jammed with trucks and, while it should have six lanes, Missouri apparently can afford only four. The barbecue made it all worthwhile, but if you’re headed anywhere east of downtown Kansas City, or even to the airport, take U.S. 36. It’s shorter, faster and much easier driving.

And we did just that after lunch, arriving in Oberlin dead tired about 10:30 p.m. that Saturday night after a smooth drive across the state.

So, there you have it: the barbecue tour of the South and Midwest. And for the most part, when we didn’t have barbecue, we should have.

Write

The Oberlin Herald encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of public interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

Mail letters to 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan., 67749, or by e-mail to oberlinherald@nwkansas.com.

We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise.