

Legislature should find plenty to fight about

One of the most divisive issues for the Kansas Legislature this coming spring might be immigration, which oddly enough, is mostly the responsibility of the federal government.

Conservatives will be fully in command of the scene in Topeka, and they look to agree on many things. Social conservatives will push for laws restricting abortion, drugs and maybe even strip clubs while trying to defend religious liberty. All of those are areas where people have a lot of federal court protection, however, so whatever the Legislature does is liable to be more for show than substance.

Victory on the floor will make a lot of people feel better after years of having social initiatives suffocated by more liberal governors, however, and Gov. Sam Brownback is liable to sign many of these bills.

Another thing liable to unite disparate conservatives is cutting the budget and keeping tax rates down. While last spring, compromise on drastic tax cuts enacted at the last moment appeared likely for the coming session, all bets are off now that conservatives have solid majorities in both Houses behind a conservative governor.

The smart money says there may be little incentive to raise more money to close an alleged \$700 million budget gap now. Instead, the emphasis may be on cutting programs and slashing the budget even more. The administration maintains it plans to put more money into public schools, however, and not less.

Whatever happens, low income-tax rates pushed last year by the governor appear to be

with us for the next few years. Now neighboring Missouri is making noises about copying Kansas rates to keep pace in economic development. Lower taxes are seen as attractive to businesses looking for a new home.

But immigration is the rub. Gov. Brownback and his allies, including the state Chamber of Commerce and farm and ranch groups, tend to look at the situation from the standpoint of labor shortages. They know the state has jobs which can't be filled without immigrants. It's a practical matter with them.

The xenophobic wing of the party, led by Secretary of State Kris Kobach, wants the state to enact restrictions on hiring illegal immigrants, along with tougher still election laws and maybe even an Arizona-style law requiring police to check the status of possible illegal immigrants.

Mr. Kobach pushed the state to require voters to show photo identification, though he had no proof — and still has none — that illegal immigrants were voting or that there was any kind of problem with voter fraud. His "issue" sounded good enough that he got the bill through a conservative Legislature which should have been concerned with the civil liberties problems it raised.

When push comes to shove, and with more than 50 freshman legislators, no one really knows how to count the votes, but the issue could split the solid-red statehouse down the middle. And make a supposedly slam-dunk session more than a little interesting.

— Steve Haynes

Son finally finds his home

It's been a long four months, but our son has gone from being a homeless person to a homeowner.

Lacy went off to KU in 1999 and never left Lawrence. He fell in love with the town and has been living in a series of apartments ever since.

About a year ago, he decided it was time to buy a home. But he had some things he wanted in a house. It needed to be near the downtown, and he wanted an older home in one of Lawrence's traditional neighborhoods.

He also needed to find a place he could afford.

He started a serious savings program and contacted a loan officer to advise him as to just how much he could spend. While that amount would have purchased a pretty nice house out here in northwest Kansas, it wasn't much for some place in Lawrence.

Still, he started looking at houses in the area he liked. He moved into a cheaper apartment, just big enough for himself and a couple of cockroaches (not that he had those, mind you). For a while, he worked two jobs and pretty much gave up dating.

By the time he was getting serious in his search, and he was calling home and telling us about houses he had looked at, it was July.

In Lawrence, the rental market is geared to students, and you rent with a year's lease from Aug. 1 to July 31.

Lacy hadn't signed a new lease because he knew he couldn't afford to pay for two places, so he was suddenly without an apartment or



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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a house. He had, however, made backup plans. His friend John had a basement with a spare bedroom and bath. Lacy packed up his stuff and became a basement dweller.

Then he found the house on Connecticut Street. He put in a bid with the stipulation that the owners put on a new roof. The owners countered with a higher offer and agreed to the roof.

Over the next month, he worked with the loan company and the government, which was guaranteeing his new-homeowner loan, to ready the place for the transfer.

Last Wednesday, he got homeowners insurance and put the utilities in his name. On Thursday, he signed the papers and started painting the bedrooms.

It's a cute little place, more than a century old, with two upstairs bedrooms and a downstairs bathroom. Built in 1906, it has floors that slope and a little front porch that is brightly painted but ready to fall off.

On the plus side, it has a refrigerator, washer, dryer, dishwasher and garbage disposal. On the minus side, it has a hookup for a gas stove and no central air. But, he found the

window units neatly stored inside his small garage, and he got a check from Mom and Dad for Christmas to help buy a new stove.

He's one happy man. But, he admitted over lunch on Sunday, he still doesn't quite feel like a homeowner. Each night after work, he goes over and works on the house — everything needs paint and the hardwood floors need to be refinished before he can move in.

He says it just feels like all those times he's helped friends work on their places.

Still, he's envisioning where his furniture will go and hoping to be in his new home by Christmas.

In the U.S.A.

"I've often thought that the process of aging could be slowed down if it had to go through Congress."

George H.W. Bush
Born June 12, 1924
41st U.S. president



Husband lights up the world

And the Lord said, "Let there be light."

He didn't say, "Jim Plotts, it is your job to singlehandedly put Christmas lights on every nonmoving object on your block."

Jim's obsession with Christmas lighting is legendary. He puts lights where lights have never been before. He puts lights on tractors and trucks and makes their wheels appear to go round and round. He puts lights on bushes, fences, houses, trees and wheelbarrows. If the cats would hold still, they'd be lighted.

Our neighbors know they will have lights shining in their windows for precisely six hours every night. The photo-cell timer automatically turns our lights on at sundown and off six hours later.

Our musical tree, however, still has to be operated manually. Jim is so proud of that tree. He scored it on a midnight Black Friday shopping foray in Dallas one year. This tree has light bulbs that change color as they flash in synchronization with a loop that plays Christmas music nonstop.

Jim is in charge of outside lighting; me, the inside. Right now, I'm having a hard time just getting two strands of lights to work on our tree.

-ob-

How do you herd a chicken? Very carefully, it seems.



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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Neighbor Carl called to tell us one of our chickens was hiding under a trailer on his lot and he needed us to come get our wayward hen.

While this weather has been so nice, I've been letting my little flock out of their coop during the day. I thought they had never wandered, but apparently I was wrong.

It's been fun to watch them scratch and peck. I even scatter feed on the ground for them.

A side benefit to all their activity (besides naturally fertilizing the lawn) is they have also aerated the entire back yard. I bet next spring we have the best grass we've ever had.

Anyway, back to our wandering clucker. Together, Jim and Carl "shooed" her back to our place, but she looked more than a little worse for the wear.

She was missing lots of feathers from her back and her head looked like she had been mauled. I'm guessing a stray dog caught her. She

was happy to be home and doesn't seem too traumatized by her ordeal. I'll bet she doesn't wander off again, though.

The hens have been given a temporary reprieve from the stew pot. They're laying once again. Molting season must be over, and they're getting back to their primary occupation: keeping us in eggs. Four eggs a day isn't going to cut it, but it's a start.

From the Bible

As it is written in the prophets, behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

— Mark 1: 2-3

Speedway boss loves sports

What sort of person would you expect to be running a NASCAR track?

Some good ol' boy who went to a southern college and grew up around race tracks?

Or maybe a guy with a law degree from some stuffy place like the University of Kansas, plus a law degree from KU, and a Master of Business Administration from the prestigious University of Chicago?

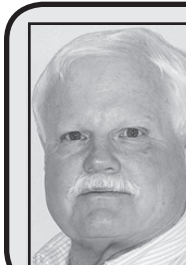
A race fan, or a button-down guy who spent much of his career in a major college athletic department?

You may be able to see where this is going. For the president of the Kansas Speedway is not your everyday Bubba.

Pat Warren joined the athletic department at KU under former Athletics Director Bob Frederick, a legendary figure at the university. He said he loved working there, he said, but left after Frederick was eased out. He went to Chicago and got the MBA, assuming he was out of sports for a while.

And when he applied for the job at the speedway, he said, he had to be honest. He told the NASCAR people he knew next to nothing about stock-car racing.

"They told me they didn't like to hire race fans," he told Associated Press editors meeting in Kansas City this week. "When they did,



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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nobody got any work done on race weeks."

Listen to him talk, though, and you can tell that Mr. Warren has become, if not a true race fan, a fan of the business and the people it draws. He likes to talk about the family atmosphere at the tracks and the way a race is open to everyone, fans and the media alike, in a way almost no other sport can claim.

Where else do the starts sign autographs and mingle with fans before an event? he asks. Where else is the equivalent of the locker room as open as the pits of a track?

And he compared access to drivers' radio frequencies and in-car cameras to football fans being able to listen in on the coach, the offensive coordinator and the quarterback. As if that'd ever happen.

Having two NASCAR races a year is the economic equivalent of two all-star games a year for Kansas City, he says, but the track is chal-

lenged to fill its seats for both races if the second one is to stay in Kansas for the long term.

The track, which has about 35 year-around employees, already is credited for creating more than 5,000 permanent jobs in Wyandotte County and with prompting millions in associated investments in shopping and hotels around the area. It's all been done without public money, he said, except for improvements paid for through tax-increment financing paid for by the valuation of new development.

Now Mr. Warren is an evangelist for motor racing, urging everyone to come see what the sport is all about — and to be sure to put on a headset and listen in on their favorite driver, so we learn what it's all about, not just noise and fast cars, but knowledge and logistics on a high order.

It probably doesn't take an MBA to understand NASCAR, but apparently, it doesn't hurt.

Pheasants are good for economy

Saturday, Nov. 17, I had the pleasure of attending the second annual Governor's Pheasant Hunt in Oakley. The town did an outstanding job of showcasing Western Kansas hospitality and the excitement of pheasant hunting.

The next two years, the event will be in Norton.

Pheasant hunting in Kansas is a \$4 million industry. It's also a family tradition I have enjoyed all of my life. The drought has cut our pheasant population drastically, and after opening weekend, I am afraid not many people will be traveling here to hunt. It is just one more way the Kansas economy has been hurt by this horrible weather.

I was so concerned, I contacted Robin Jennison, secretary of Wildlife and Parks, and asked him if shortening the season and/or lowering the daily bag limit were being considered.



Letter from Topeka

By State Rep. Ward Cassidy
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I received an informative letter in return. The gist of the information was that harvesting male pheasants has no impact on future populations because female pheasants are by far the most important in terms of population growth, and they cannot be hunted legally; because a single rooster can fertilize more than 10 hens; and research shows it's impossible to harvest more than 75 percent of the rooster population.

The bottom line is, we need wet weather for many reasons.

On a fun note, I got to hunt with the National Rifle Association lobbyist, who gave me a D rating for voting against conceal carry in college dorms. I shot two pheasants out from under him at the governor's hunt, and he gave me a hat when we were done.

Monday, Dec. 3, is the most important vote I will make in the next two years, when we vote for speaker of the House. Next week, I'll let you know how that turns out.

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

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

Nor'West Newspapers

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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.

