

## It's your money, so keep an eye on it

A bill filed this year with the Kansas Senate raises some interesting questions about how your tax money is spent. The bill would restrict local governments from spending taxpayers' money on lobbyists. As you'd expect, lobbyists for local governments have come out against the measure. Imagine that. Backers claim cities, counties and school boards sometimes spend tax money to push causes that their voters don't like and wouldn't back. One example they give is a bill to limit government's power to take private land for redevelopment, a controversy which is raging across the nation. A lot of voters want to restrict "eminent domain" powers, they say, but cities and their lobbyists aren't supporting the cause. The bill isn't aimed at cities' power to condemn land for roads or power lines, but at the ability, which has grown in recent years, to take land and turn it over to private developers for a "higher use."

"They're not real helpful," Sen Tim Huelskamp, chairman of the Local Government committee, was quoted as saying after a hearing on the bill. "On one hand, there's a high percentage of people wanting eminent domain reform, and on the other hand, lobbyists are up here saying something else."

It's not fair, backers say, for government to take tax money from people and spend it on something they oppose.

Don Moler, executive director of the League of Kansas Municipalities, and a lobbyist for the group, sees it differently. He says cities and counties need to have a voice in Topeka. "Without public interest lobbyists, who represent local governments and their citizens," he said, "the field would be left completely open to monied private interests who employ numbers of lobbyists to advance their private agendas."

While that's partly true, it's not the whole story. Citizens can and do affect the process by lobbying their representatives themselves. Anyone can call, talk to a legislator, get on the witness list for a bill. Some days, there's nothing more noble about government lobbyists than there is about big-oil representatives. Both are capable of arguing against the public good. The bill wouldn't affect associations like the municipal league, anyway, says its sponsor, Sen. Kay O'Connor of Olathe. That's too bad, because the league, the Association of Counties and the school boards are some of the most powerful lobbies in the state. All run on public money donated by member governments, but they seldom ask ordinary people how they should vote. O'Connor says she mainly wants to keep local governments from lobbying for more money, but that's only part of the problem. There's a host of issues where government lobbyists often take positions counter to good government. Issues of secrecy and public information, tax changes, government powers — all sometimes pit cities and counties against their citizens. It's unlikely that real reform will come anytime soon. The only defense we have — and it's not always easy or cheap — is to keep an eye on the people in Topeka ourselves. And cry foul when they get out of line. — *Steve Haynes*

## Thumbs Up to...

- √ **Amber Sheley**, Norton County's Spelling Bee champion. She is a student at the Northern Valley Junior High.
- √ **Clair Rumford**, for being there when the need arises. The word 'angel' comes to mind.
- √ **Coach Jim Cole**, for the kind words.
- √ **Eisenhower Elementary** dance campers. You know how to light up one's life!
- √ **Big Brothers Big Sisters** on your after-school program. Another need is met! (To include a name, names or group in this column, e-mail [tomd@nwkansan.com](mailto:tomd@nwkansan.com), call 877-6908, drop by the office, or mail to 215 S. Kansas Ave., Norton 67654. Thanks in advance for your help. - tomd)

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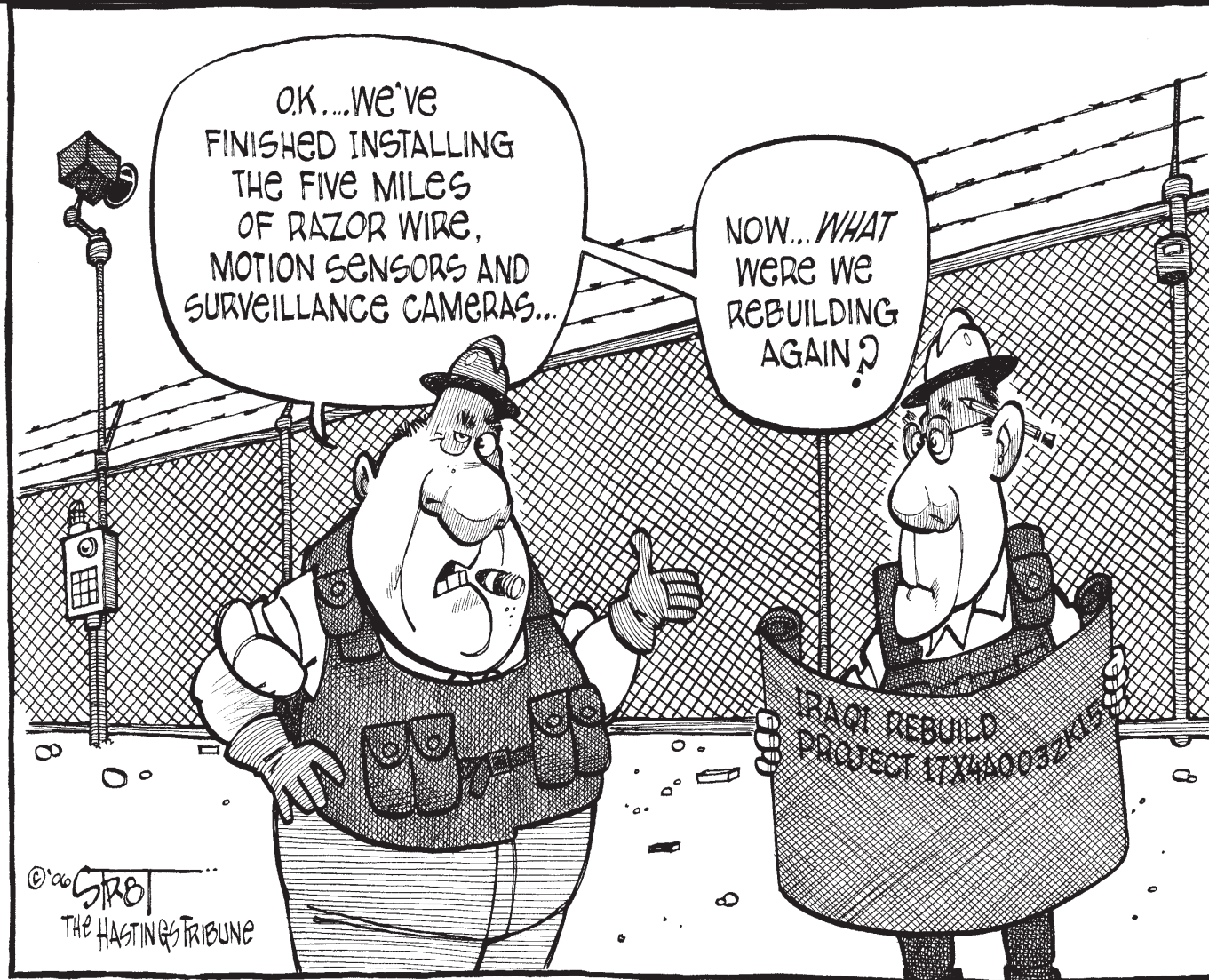
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## It looks, feels like winter has arrived

The change in weather is now more compatible with the calendar. In a word it's *winter!* Cloudy, breezy, some snow, a big drop in temperature. The past few weeks we have been living in a fantasy world, but we knew there would be a rude awakening just over the horizon. Welcome winter! We've been waiting.

-td-

When I talk about winter, my mind automatically flashes back at my years in northern Wyoming — Sheridan, to be specific. The average annual snowfall for that community was 78 inches and I swear that it nailed down that number each winter I lived there. Sheridan is a hop, skip and jump away from the base of the Big Horn Mountains, which kind of explains the snowfall.

And it was a cold place. I mean COLD! I remember one morning hearing the guy on the local radio station say, "Bundle up. It's 42 degrees below zero out there!" And that was on a windless day, so there was no wind chill factor. The minus 20's and at times minus 30's were just part of the winter package. Some daytime highs never got out of the sub-zero range. I don't intend to paint this as the entire winter's plate because it wasn't. These extremes were usually reserved for the month of January and at times into early February.

That was the only place I lived where at night I not only plugged in my bed but also my car. And talk about the car seat being cold and hard! Wow! It didn't take me long to figure out why so many Wyoming folks headed south in the winter.

But Sheridan was a great place in late spring and summer. And you could always take the 15-minute drive to the mountains and enjoy all those big hills (as

## Good Evening Norton

Tom Dreiling



I used to call them to the laughter of the locals) had to offer.

Tip: don't go up there in January.

-td-

I had occasion to be in St. Francis Wednesday and what a nice drive that was. Nice highway, countryside looked good, wheat looked promising at this time. Then on the return after dark, the lights of the small towns along the way offered hope to travelers who might, for whatever reason, find themselves stranded. Inside those homes you will find some of the nicest people. I know that for a fact because one of my high school classmates, Gene Sramek and his wife Pat, farm just a mile or two outside McDonald. And the lights of Norcarutur looked almost like they were winking, then it dawned on me that our own Carolyn and Jim Plotts live there. Maybe that explains the wink.

-td-

No mail. No money. In a nutshell that's what Monday will bring in cities and towns and villages and hamlets all across this great land. There may be some other places of business that will be inactive on that day, too.

"Why?" you ask.

Because (drumroll) it's Presidents Day! A holiday! It generally affects state and federal offices. The key word is *generally*. Kind of like *maybe*. We will have something elsewhere in today's paper on this topic. Please check it out.

But, before you set out on your rounds Monday, you might want to call ahead to make sure the places you are going to are open.

We will be.

-td-

A Norton e-mailer had this in my box yesterday morning. Lot of truth in it. Read on...for a smile or two:

Dear Lord,  
So far today, I'm doing all right. I have not gossiped, lost my temper, been greedy, grumpy, nasty, selfish, or self-indulgent. I have not whined, complained, cursed, or eaten any chocolate. I have charged nothing on my credit card.

But I will be getting out of bed in a minute, Lord, and I think that I will really need your help then.

-td-

My e-mail Thursday morning also contained this: "I'd rather hunt with Dick Cheney than ride with Ted Kennedy." Don't know who to attribute the quote to but I bet it will create some chatter. For you younger folks who don't know what that's all about, ask mom or dad, or better yet grandma or grandpa.

-td-

My fingers are tired so I'll put this in the "done" file. Comments to me at [tomd@nwkansan.com](mailto:tomd@nwkansan.com).

-td-

Have a good evening and good weekend! And as always, visit the church of your choice.

## Nothing like musical memories

Music helped stir memories. I and a few friends attended a piano concert a few weeks ago presented by Professor Bill Miller of Nebraska Christian College. The concert was presented at the Beaver City Christian Church. A wonderful pianist playing hymn arrangements, what beautiful music.

He had all the hymns listed in groups on the program. He mentioned that if you knew only one song, you would still enjoy all of them, and if you recognized all of the hymns, you truly were blessed. I believe that comment.

On a personal note, Professor Miller directed the New Way Singers, a summer singing group of high school students, when my sons, Michael and Alan, sang with them. Several other Norton students have had the opportunity to travel with this group.

## Memories

Sonya Montgomery



The next week, I attended a women's conference in Kansas City where my daughter Fonda was guest soloist.

Fonda wrote a song called *Your Name* especially for the theme of the conference. She also made a CD of her song.

Proud mother, yes.

It reminded me of an incident when she was about 3 or 4 years old. I gave piano lessons and it has always been my tradition that when a student plays the assigned

piece correctly, they receive a sticker.

I had accompanied the Norton Christian Church choir for many years when they performed *Handel's Messiah* each year; however, every year I played or "practiced" at home as well.

One day I left the music on the piano and when I checked on Fonda a little later, she was placing stickers on the *Messiah* music. She said she thought I did them well enough to deserve a sticker. She no doubt had an ear for good music even then.

This last Sunday, I attended the piano concert in Phillipsburg presented by James Rivers. Another time of great classical music.

Professor Rivers taught at Washburn University when Fonda attended Washburn at Topeka.

I believe good music stirs the mind and soul.

Have a great day singing.

## Letter policy

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They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

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