



Other Viewpoints

Speaker is legal; lawsuit looks bad

Kansas House Speaker Mike O’Neal technically might have standing to bring a lawsuit against the state over fee-fund sweeps, but that doesn’t mean he should be the plaintiffs’ attorney. Just because he might be technically right doesn’t mean it looks good.

And in reality, it just doesn’t look right for the speaker of the Kansas House of Representatives to bring suit against the state. Generally, we expect representatives of government, whether of different branches or not, to stand behind their government, not bring lawsuits against it.

And when O’Neal, like other legislators, criticizes the state’s public school districts for their legal action against the state, he loses considerable credibility when he essentially is doing the same on another issue. He also has compromised himself when it comes to legislation that affects any of these clients, and he stands to profit personally from this at taxpayers’ expense.

And, remember, this isn’t just any legislator. O’Neal, a Hutchinson Republican, holds the top position as leader of the House.

Ultimately, it doesn’t matter whether O’Neal is in the right. It looks bad. And O’Neal wasn’t the only lawyer who could have sued the state on behalf of 17 plaintiffs who were victims of the state sweeping about \$5 million from their designated funds — among them, the Bank Commissioner Fee Fund, various worker compensation funds, the Real Estate Fee Fund and the Kansas Corporation Commission Conservation Fee Fund — and diverting them for other state spending.

We think that this case has considerable merit. State government — with the approval of the Legislature and the governor — was wrong to raid funds specifically designated for certain beneficiaries and purposes. Former Attorney General Carla Stovall issued an opinion to that effect years ago, though it was not binding.

And O’Neal appears to be right in his contention that he legally may be the plaintiff’s attorney in this case. O’Neal not only opposed the appropriations bill that included the fee fund sweeps, but he entered a formal written protest. That, he said, allows him to bring the suit.

O’Neal is a smart man, and he has done his homework on this subject, but he is wrong-headed about his role in this crusade.

O’Neal should not have been the attorney to file this suit. At least one legislator has called for his resignation as speaker. He shouldn’t do that. Instead, he should hand off this case to some private-practice attorney with another law firm.

— *The Hutchinson News, via The Associated Press*

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We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise. Nor do we run form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area. Thank-yous from this area should be submitted to the Want Ad desk.

Letters will not be censored, but will be read and edited for form and style, clarity, length and legality.

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Storytellers offer a gift to all

I’m addicted, I confess.

I’m hooked on stories. I have been, every since I saw that first amazing adventure unfold on the pages of a book. I think it started, “See Spot. See Spot run. Run, Spot, run.” That story, and nearly every one since, have been magic to me.

It’s as though I hear the voice of the author reading to me through the words on the page. (I always loved to be read to, and probably drove every reader around me crazy.)

The stories I gravitate to have changed over the years.

The summer I was first allowed to go to the Carnegie Library (as many town libraries were known in those days), I hunted out every story I could find about wagon trains. The stories of the pioneers fascinated me.

As I read pioneer stories including, of course, the *Little House* books by Laura Ingalls Wilder, my mother told me stories as well. She became the unofficial family historian, telling what she knew of both her family and my father’s.

I graduated from pioneer stories when my big brother introduced me to the wonders of science fiction. I’m still fascinated by the stories of Isaac Asimov and Robert Heinlein, Poul Anderson and C.J. Cherryh.

There are other kinds of stories I like – in fact there are very few I don’t enjoy on some level. Through all of them, there’s a common



Marian Ballard

- Collection Connections

thread:

The storyteller.

When I find an author I like, I try to read everything they have written. All at once. The storyteller’s voice, after all, is important.

Movie fans sometimes do the same thing. How many people can tell you every film that Mel Brooks ever made?

In fact, the medium is not important. It’s the story, as it has been for all of humanity’s history. As we have learned and grown and changed, the stories of life have been one of the most critical elements. Perhaps that’s the attraction they have for us – that they serve a survival function, teaching us by increments how to better cope with all the world offers. (I might be better equipped to travel by wagon train than someone who never read a book about a wagon train, for example.)

Not all books, of course, are storybooks in the strictest sense. There are textbooks, philosophy books, mathematics books, science

books. Yet even these convey a story of knowledge and discovery and the advancement and exploration of understanding. Each classified ad in the *Colby Free Press* conveys a story, as jobs and pets and cattle and furniture shift from one person to another.

In ancient societies, the storyteller held an honored place in society. His or her voice and words were a part of the rhythm of life, carrying history, sharing dreams, conveying faith.

At this moment in 2010, the storyteller is still important in Colby, Kansas. There is the story of the 125th anniversary of a community known as Thomas County. The story going around the world of the Winter Olympics, which joins the story of other Winter Olympics in our imaginations. (Would I date myself by confessing to childhood dreams about skating like Peggy Fleming?)

We all have smaller stories, of homes and neighborhoods, school classes and church groups. Each has value for the future.

The question is, are we only listening to stories, passively receiving messages from television and the Internet? Or are we remembering to share the stories of our own lives?

Marian Ballard has collected careers as counselor, librarian, pastor, and now copy editor for the Colby Free Press. She collects ideas, which are more portable than other stuff.

Celebrate our bountiful food supply

Food Check Out Week will be celebrated this week in Kansas and across the United States, marking the day when the average American will have earned enough to pay for his or her entire year’s food supply.

Based on U.S. Department of Agriculture statistics, it takes just 37 days for the average American to earn enough to pay for a family’s yearly food supply. In comparison, the average American had to work until April 11 to pay taxes last year.

Consumers in Kansas and across this country share in this wealth of food products every time they set foot in their favorite supermarket. Today’s shopper is fortunate to reap the benefits provided by America’s farmers and ranchers. Incidentally, the average American devotes just 10 percent of his or her disposable personal income to pay for food, the lowest in the world.

This year’s theme, “Stretching your Grocery Dollar with Healthy, Nutritious Food, is the perfect message to provide new opportunities for farmers and ranchers to tell their story.

As part of this year’s Food Check Out Week celebration, the Kansas state committee of Farm Bureau Women, Sedgwick County Farm Bureau and Farm Bureau state President Steve Baccus will partner with the American Farm Bureau’s women’s leadership committee and national Farm Bureau President Bob Stallman. They will work together to highlight how consumers can stretch their food dollars while donating food and time to worthy causes, including elementary schools and Ronald McDonald Houses in Sedgwick County.

Food affordability is just one of the many success stories worth celebrating when it comes to American agriculture. There are many others.

In 2008, \$115 billion worth of American agricultural products were exported around



John Schlageck

- Insights Kansas Farm Bureau

the world. Of each dollar spent on food, the farmer’s share is about 19 cents. The rest goes for costs beyond the farm gate, including wages and materials for production, processing, marketing, transportation and distribution. In 1980, farmers and ranchers got 31 cents.

More than 21 million Americans (15-percent of the U.S. workforce) produce, process, sell and trade this country’s food and fiber. Only 4.6 million people live on farms – slightly less than 2 percent of the tota population.

Farmers and ranchers are proud of their profession. Nowhere is this more visible than the Midwest and our home state of Kansas. Our farmres take great pride in producing the cleanest, most abundant wheat crop anywhere in the country. Farmers are also proud of the other grain crops they produce, along with fruits and vegetables.

Our ranchers produce some of the best cattle, hogs and sheep. As producers of some of the most abundant, healthy and economical food anywhere, they wouldn’t trade their profession for any other. They remain a fiercely independent group.

Kansans are also proud that Food Check Out Week is an idea that originated with Kansas Farm Bureau in 1997 and has since gone national. Neosho County Farm Bureau member Linda Reinhart, former chair of the Kansas committee of Farm Bureau Women and the American Farm Bureau Women’s Committee, thought the concept was important and saw it

through to completion.

The core message of Food Check Out Week remains the same – food in America is affordable and safe, thanks in large part to America’s productive farmers and ranchers. Food Check Out Week allows us to back up that message and build on it to strengthen the consumer’s awareness and image of America’s farmers and ranchers.

The story of the American farmer and rancher is truly a success story. Ours are the most productive in the world. Remember to help celebrate this story and the healthiest, safest food anywhere on the planet this week.

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm near Seguin, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

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Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

