



Will money win or beliefs hold on?

Just who will run the Kansas Legislature could be decided by voters this fall.

It’s an important issue, as always, particularly because this session, for the first time in recent memory, forces pushing bigger government and more spending seemed to be in charge.

It wasn’t the Legislature that changed; the message coming back from the home front was that people wanted no further cuts in social programs, schools, roads or higher education.

The Legislature listened. Even our own Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer said as much. He voted for a 1-cent tax increase to help save schools and other programs from more cuts because he heard the message from back home. And he is about as conservative, anti-spending, anti-tax as anyone in the chamber.

And just what was the message?

Across the area, but particularly in St. Francis and Cheyenne County, school superintendents and board members, teachers, hospital administrators and nurses, anyone whose check depends directly – as with educators – or indirectly – as with hospital employees – on state and federal money was calling for an end to the cuts.

It’s natural that if you spent your life trying to provide a good education for children, you hate to see schools cut and cut and cut again. No one wants to see their life’s work whittled away, and schools have been cut a bunch.

Rural hospitals depend, even more than those in the cities, on state and federal dollars. So do nursing homes and clinics.

And people were scared. Scared that their jobs might be next. That their schools or hospitals might be crippled by lower income. That their lives would be altered, maybe forever.

Teachers’ groups, school and hospital administrators, those who benefit from public spending, and many supporters, helped organize the push. As many as 300 people turned out for a meeting with legislators in Bird City, an unheard of number.

And that got people’s attention, especially the legislators and other public officials. They felt the ground begin to move. It was as if Kansas suddenly had awakened and realized that author Thomas Frank in his book “What’s the Matter With Kansas,” had been right, that people out here should be voting their economic interests rather than their conservative beliefs.

If that’s true, it could mean a “sea change” in Kansas politics, which has for years been dominated by the anti-spending, anti-tax crowd. Before, the state always had enough money to pay for essentials like schools. When, after huge spending increases, the bottom fell out of state tax revenues because of the deep recession, ideas began to change.

It’s not just that schools and hospitals and other programs were hurt by state budget cuts. It’s that the reason for the “shortfall,” as they call it in Topeka, was that Kansans in general were hurting: out of a job, making less than two years ago, worried about making ends meet.

But despite the tough times, a lot of people realized that jobs depended on those state program, their jobs and others, and they made a cry loud enough to be heard.

It’s anyone’s guess who will be in charge next year. Voters might throw the rascals out and elect a whole new bunch. Or they might not.

The anti-tax crowd might get a boost when the new tax tables go into effect this summer, or the tax-and-spend crowd might wind up running the show.

One thing for sure, things will be different. And as always in recent year, it’ll be an interesting season. — *Steve Haynes*

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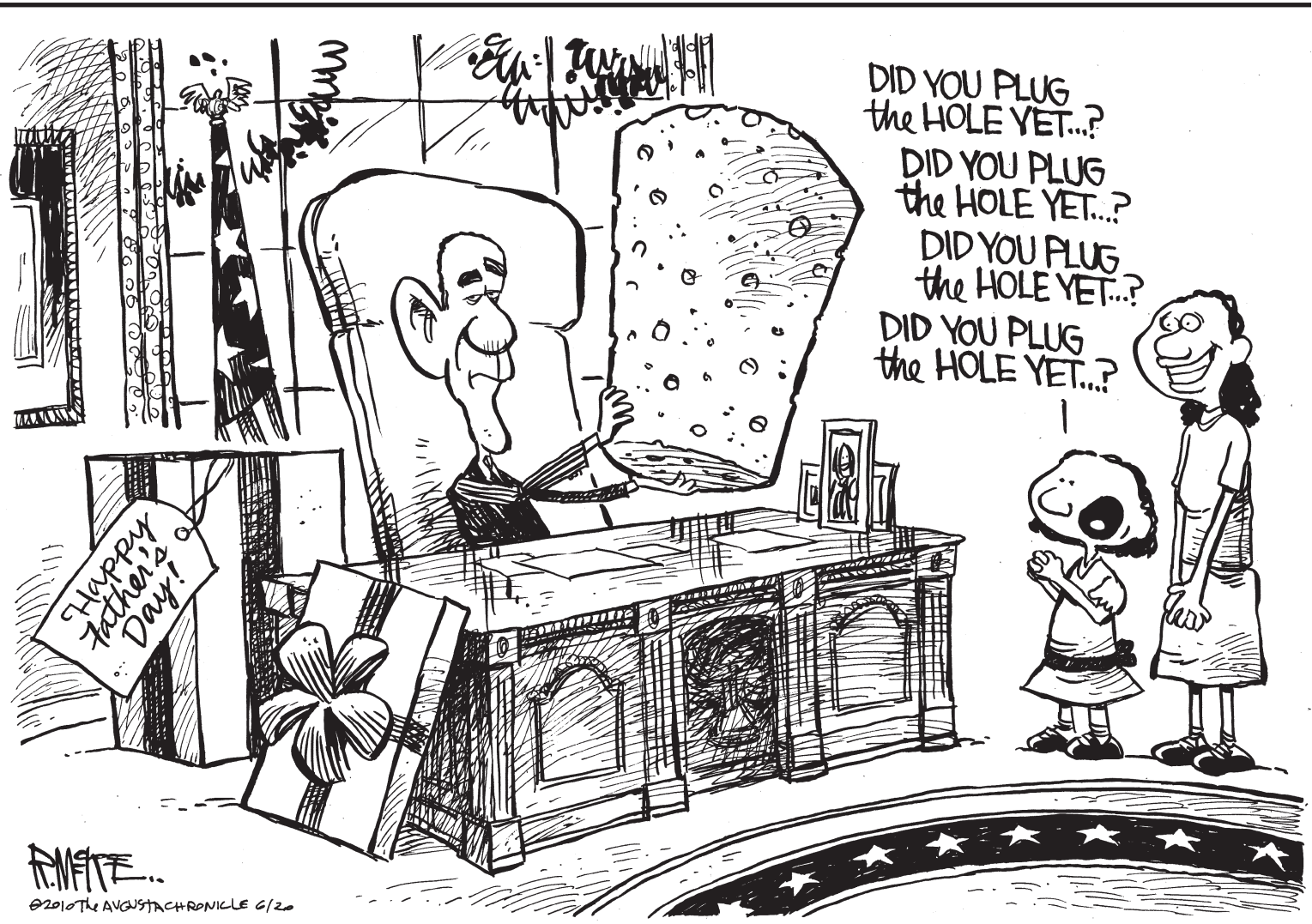
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Garden flourished while she was away

We got back from a week in Michigan to find the garden flourishing and the bugs having a wonderful feast.

My spinach was bolting, but that’s OK. It was a good year for the spinach. We started enjoying it in early March and had enough salads to turn us green between then and mid- June.

The lettuce needs to be given away, since it has gone from a tender, baby mix to something resembling small multicolored bushes. Again we’ve enjoyed many a salad off this crop and have given away enough to make vitamin pills obsolete in our little corner of Kansas.

The radishes have come and gone without a great deal of success. I planted icicles this year, and Steve thought they were horseradish.

Not even, dear.

He’s not fond of radishes, I couldn’t eat them fast enough and most of my friends prefer the round red ones, so some of that crop went into the compost heap. Oh well; they were fun to grow.

The first batch of corn had a couple of holes in the rows, so I planted a different variety for the second round. The second round has a huge area that didn’t come up. I’m blaming the cats for laying on that spot, but Steve says that’s silly. The cats have been laying on the newly planted corn for years, he said, and it’s always come up before.

I tossed the rest of those two packages and will try something different next year.



Cynthia Haynes

- Open Season

The peas are blooming and producing like crazy, but the heat last week has several of those vines starting to die. They will be replaced by my green beans, which love the heat and are growing like weeds, but haven’t bloomed or presented me with any beans yet. They will keep me busy in a week or so, though.

Over by the dog’s pen, the squash — yellow and zucchini — had to be thinned. I got them down to 19 plants.

Yes, I know, I know. Nineteen squash plants is way too many, and I’m sure I’ll have to thin them again. Not only don’t I have enough paper bags to put that much squash in to leave on the neighbors’ doorsteps, I don’t have that much room in the garden for 19 full-grown, taking-over-everything, squash plants.

The tomatoes have little green fruit. The cucumbers are setting on and the green peppers are flowering. So all is well with the really important garden plants.

But then there’s the cabbage and broccoli. The leaves looked like swiss cheese. They

had been eaten to pieces.

A careful examination produced no fewer than 24 little green worms, all of which got a bath in soapy water and a trip down my garbage disposal. I then carefully sprayed each leave front and back with an eco-friendly solution that said it would kill a dozen different bugs.

However, since then, I’ve found at least one or two more little green worms on my plants every day as I inspect them. I hate to bring out the big guns, but I’m getting tired of checking the backs of every broccoli and cabbage leaf in the garden.

Still, it’s summer. Most days are beautiful, and we’ve had plenty of rain for my crops so I’m a happy, if sort of busy, gardener.

Now, if you think I can jabber on and on about my garden, don’t ask Steve about his.

He’s got wheat and milo in the back 40 – 40 square inches next to the fence, that is.

Hey, it’s a square yard. 1,290 square inches, to be exact. — S.H.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor’West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes @ nwkansas.com

Is nature delicate? Not so much

“The delicate balance of nature.” That term “delicate” appeared again and again in my biology textbooks. As a field kid, I saw the changes each year as the forest filled in around our house in the woods, built after timber had been removed.

As the new vegetation matured each year, the insect populations changed to match it. “Delicate” seemed to make sense. Any little change in the complex food webs shifted all the other critters.

Then as a college freshman in 1964, I assisted my biology professor in a survey of un-reclaimed coal strip mines. Mined before the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977, these acid spoilbanks were a barren moonscape of 80-foot-high ridges and valleys. Soil was as acid as a battery. No plants could grow on the slopes because more acidic pyrite was exposed with each rain.

In 1981, I returned to repeat his study for my doctoral research — the only real-time study of change-over-time conducted on coal mine spoils. I now stood in the midst of grassland and forest! Only one site remained a barren ridge, still as acidic as 17 years earlier.

Grasses had populated the valleys and slopes. Then tall weeds shaded out grasses. Finally shrubs and trees shaded out the weeds. A new but thin soil had built up. Ants and other animals had moved back in. Today, satellite photos show no open spoil banks left; it is all solid forest. When those strip mines were abandoned, no one would ever have dreamed that they would grow back to forest in 40 years.

I stopped teaching about the “delicate” balance of nature.

The Gulf oil spill is today’s tragedy. The petroleum washing ashore looks as devastating and permanent as my old acid spoil banks. Delicate or durable is no longer a hypothetical question.



John Richard Schrock

- Education Frontlines

One radio personality dismisses the spill, proclaiming that the oil will naturally break down. He says life will go back to normal in the near future. On the other side, some environmentalists assert the Gulf shores will never recover — ever.

Some point to the Exxon Valdez spill and say it is now all cleaned up, like it never happened. But look under some rocks and you can sometimes detect oil residue. Others say those Alaskan shores will never recover. That is news to the wildlife that has repopulated the area.

Both extremes are wrong, and we should know better. This spill is a big one, with big consequences. It will have a serious impact on the folks who depend on the fishing, tourism and related industries. Like my coal spoil banks, it will change the environment for decades. For a generation that cannot fish or work in related businesses, it is an economic tragedy.

But the environment will come back. We should know that because the Great Plains was the origin of “come back science.” Pioneer researcher Frederick Clements first detailed the sequence of changes in a disturbed environment as it “makes it way back to nature.” His doctorate, awarded by the University of Nebraska at Lincoln in 1897, was the first to describe “succession,” the process where a sequence of plants slowly restores the potential natural community. Then Victor Shelford, a bi-

ologist from Illinois, described the succession of animals that repopulate a disturbed site.

This is no strange process to Kansans who tend a garden. In gardening, we are the disturbance.

We plow up the soil, tearing out the natural vegetation. Then we fight against nature, trying to preserve our special tomatoes and beans and corn. But as soon as we stop our hoeing and cultivating, nature begins the process of restoring wild grasses, tall weeds, cedar trees — the natural succession. Of course, pouring crude oil on the environment is a more lasting assault. For those of us who value nature, we get angry and want the President to be our tantrum-thrower-in-chief.

But the near-hysteria that has surrounded this oil spill represents a failure in biology education, a failure to provide a rationale appraisal of the harm. Our educational system, more-and-more isolated from gardening and the outdoors, has not given us the wisdom to calibrate between delicate and durable.

The near-term effects of the Gulf spill will be economically costly and will affect natural populations. But for those whose hand has held a hoe, you know that in the long term, nature is durable.

John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher’s college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.

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Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

