

Other Viewpoints

Restaurant goes on with town's backing

Seth M. Hays would be proud of the pioneer spirit that still lives in Council Grove.

Hays, a great-grandson of Daniel Boone, settled there in 1847, well before Kansas was a state, and in 1857 opened the Hays House Tavern and Restaurant. Current residents have taken it upon themselves to ensure the business continues to operate and its history continues to be written.

A grease fire destroyed the Hays House's kitchen in December and caused smoke and soot damage throughout the building. A water line also apparently burst during the fire, causing water damage in the basement and kitchen.

Such a calamity is enough to spell the end of a business in many communities. But not in Council Grove these days.

A group of 25 Council Grove residents purchased the restaurant following the fire and it is scheduled to reopen on Friday. A former owner will serve as general manager and head chef.

We applaud their initiative and their dedication to a historical place and the Council Grove community.

Similar stories are told frequently across Kansas and rural America, where small- and medium-sized towns strive to hang onto the businesses, churches and schools that for so long defined them and provided the backbone and connective tissue essential to the sense of community.

A grocery store or restaurant goes out of business and someone decides to pick up the ball and open another. Church members take it upon themselves to make the necessary repairs to keep their place of worship standing or donate more money when the coffers aren't healthy enough to pay a minister.

Some of the stories have happy endings. Many do not, despite the best efforts of small town citizens, consumers or parishioners.

In victory or defeat, though, those who try to retain the things that are a piece of their community's fabric exhibit the pioneer spirit. Something needed done, and they pitched in, knowing that if not them, who?

We are happy for Council Grove and its residents who decided they would not let a piece of their history slip away as the result of something like a kitchen fire. It is an example of the pioneer spirit the business' founder, who died in February 1873 at Council Grove, would appreciate.

Seth M. Hays was the first white settler at Council Grove, a popular resting point for travelers on the Santa Fe Trail, and in 1847 built a home there and opened a trading post.

After he opened his tavern and restaurant, customers reportedly included Jesse James and George Armstrong Custer.

The restaurant, known as the oldest continuously operating restaurant west of the Mississippi River, still retains some of its original features from the early days, and continues to make history in Council Grove.

It's a story we all should be able to appreciate.

— *The Topeka Capital-Journal, via the Associated Press*

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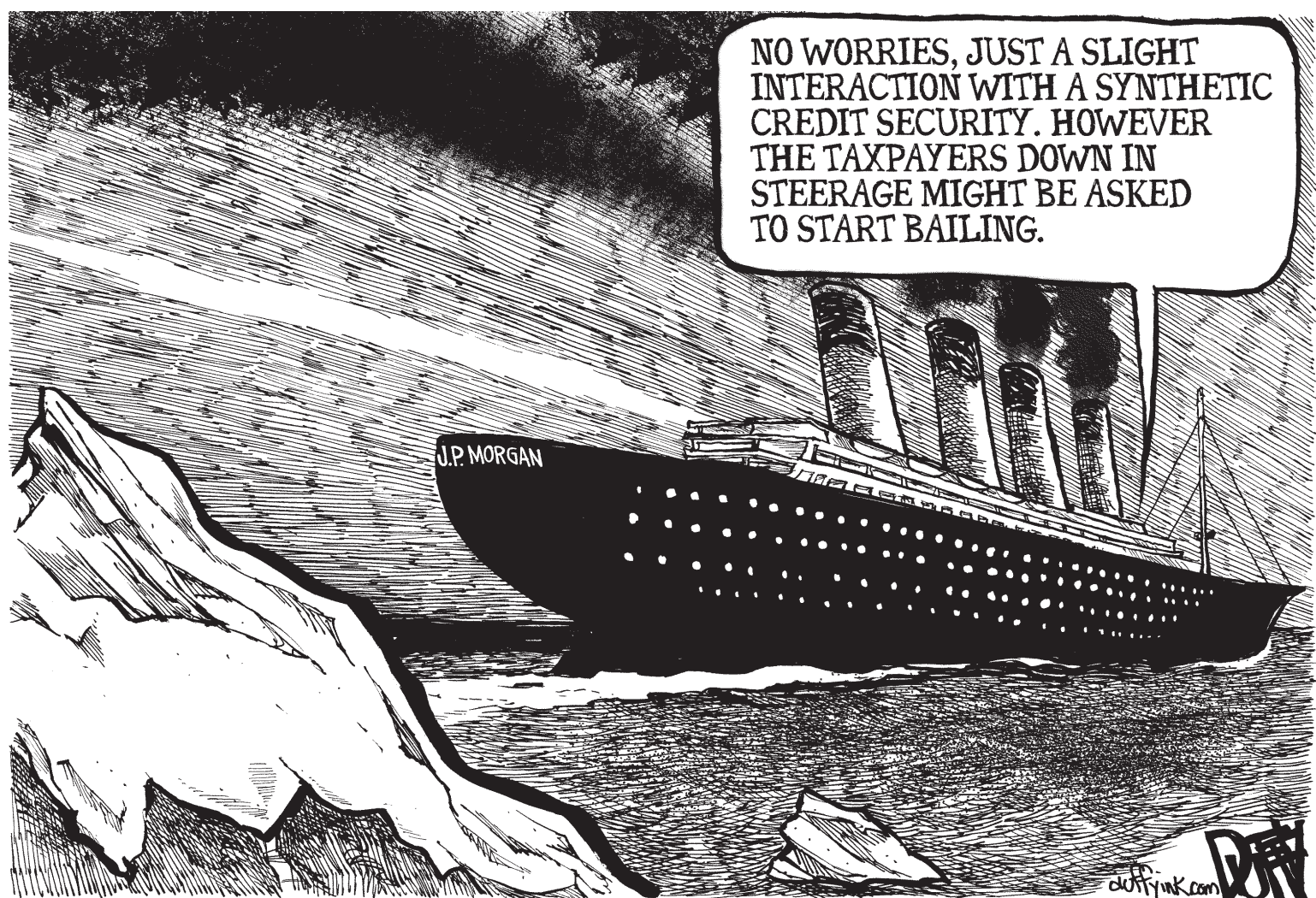
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Ball game full of wild adventures

We went to a baseball game Thursday.

It had all the stuff you could want in a nine-inning game: foul balls bouncing off the stadium, singles, doubles, home runs, foul balls off the roof, double plays, walks, a hit batsman, foul balls off the playground, clutch hits, great plays in the outfield, stupid blunders and foul balls off the parking lot.

We munched hot dogs, cold beer and pop and peanuts from great seats just two rows up from the visitors' dugout.

OK, this was low-A ball. Minor league.

The Augusta Greenjackets were playing the Greenville Drive, and oldest daughter and her husband have season tickets. Since they had missed a couple of earlier games, they were able to get us in on their tickets. We sat a row closer than they usually do, but they said they like their regular seats better because they're a little closer to the center of the action.

As season ticket holders, they each got a free blanket. It was warm at the beginning of the game, nice in the middle and cold at the end. Those blankets weren't very thick, but they were wonderful.

It was "Thirsty Thursday," and beer was just \$1 a cup, which always pulls in a good crowd.

The biggest crowd, however, stayed mainly



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

in the concession area, mingling, drinking and preparing for a big night at the bars. The stadium was only about half full.

The Greenjackets have the worst batting percentage in the South Atlantic League, according to the *Augusta Chronicle*, but on Thursday night, the boys were hot and balls were flying everywhere. Some of them even went into the outfield and a few, over the fence.

Mostly, it seemed, we ducked. Foul balls are common in baseball, but these guys fouled off enough to provide balls for all the baseball and T-ball teams Oberlin will field this year. Most of the balls went onto the roof and out onto the concourse. However, a few went into the street and one wayward bat flew into the seats to threaten the spectators.

The man sitting behind us said that at the last homestand, he and a buddy were in line for

tickets outside the stadium. A foul ball hit his buddy directly on the top of the head. The poor man had to be taken to the emergency room and put in intensive care after he developed swelling on his brain.

He was fine by Thursday, his buddy said, but he didn't want to go to the game.

The big play of the night was a two-out grand slam home run in the sixth inning by the home team. Going into the bottom of the sixth, the score had been tied at 2.

Augusta sent 10 batters to the plate that inning. One reached base on a throwing error and the next two walked. With the bases loaded, the pitcher hit the next man, forcing in a run and putting Augusta ahead 3-2.

With the bases still loaded, the next batter hit it out of the park for a grand slam. Augusta added two more runs to win 9-2 and we headed home, excited, fed and safe from the wildly flying foul balls.

It was fun, but next time, we hope we'll be watching the game at Coors Field in Denver.

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

Legislature goes into extra inning

The Kansas Constitution sets the number of days for the legislative session at 90.

Friday, the Legislature hit the 90th day, but key issues are still on the table. The Legislature began the session with an aggressive agenda, knowing the goal was to reform the Kansas Public Employees Retirement System, redraw district maps, pass a budget with a healthy ending balance and reform income tax policy within this limited timetable. Throughout the 15 weeks of the Legislative session, the House diligently discussed and negotiated each of these issues and will continue to push for what's right for Kansans. The problem remains as I have stated in past newsletters: redistricting continues to hold everything else hostage.

Redistricting

• Every 10 years, redistricting becomes a constitutional responsibility for the Legislature. It is critical that legislators pass these maps rather than relinquishing their responsibilities to the courts.

• This week the House held public hearings regarding state House, Senate and Board of Education district maps.

• After 15 weeks of the Senate refusing to pass an equitable map that represents the best interest of Kansans, the House has a duty to move forward to pass redistricting plans for both chambers so as to allow time for the man-



Rick Billinger

• This week in Topeka

datory review by the Kansas Supreme Court.

• The Senate map the House adopted was proposed by Sen. Abrams with slight changes in committee at the request of senators. All amendments offered were rejected because they did not have the support of incumbent senators whose districts they impacted.

• The only congressional map was killed by the Senate and they have repeatedly stated they would work on completing a congressional map. To date, the Senate has not passed a congressional redistricting map.

• The House is concerned with the lack of action on congressional redistricting maps. My fear is the Senate would rather let the courts draw the maps than taking the responsibility of being fair to their fellow senators.

Tax Reform Update

The "Iron Rule of Government" is the theory a government will not let funds sit idly by; they will always be spent, whether on tax cuts, education, infrastructure, public safety or a

variety of other less notable priorities. A combination of increased revenue collections and responsible budgeting practices has resulted in the state bank account achieving a sizable ending balance in a relatively short window of time. This leaves us with a rare opportunity to return wealth to citizens in the form of meaningful, growth-oriented tax cuts.

An important aspect of SB 177 is property tax relief through reinstatement of the local ad valorem tax reduction fund, which has not been in effect since 2003. Kansans are being crushed by a growing property tax burden. From 1997 to 2011, Kansas homeowners and businesses saw a 94 percent increase in their property taxes, from less than \$2 billion to over \$3.8 billion. Such dramatic tax increases suppress economic growth and prosperity. From what I have heard from most people in western Kansas, they would favor property tax relief over income tax relief.

At this point, if there is going to be a tax package, it will be decided during the extra days of this year's session.

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