

from our viewpoint...

## 'Loyalty oath' won't help cause

Sometimes you have to wonder at the stupid things supposedly smart politicians do.

Take, for instance, the Kansas Republican party. No, really; you can have it.

The party is sitting in the catbird seat, or should be. The Republicans own Kansas as they never have before: All state elected offices, all but 33 seats in the House and all but eight in the state Senate, all four congressional districts, both U.S. Senate seats.

What could be wrong, then? And why would Republican leaders send a "loyalty" oath to legislative candidates, demanding that they pledge allegiance to the party's leadership in the House and Senate if elected?

The first thing you have to understand is that Kansas, for years, has had not a two-party system, like most states, but a three-party system where Republicans divide at the drop of a hat into conservative and "moderate" factions.

The conservatives hew to strict beliefs in social principles, including opposition to abortion, while the "moderates" have been known to align with Democrats on votes involving social issues and state spending.

These moderates, for the most part, aren't flaming liberal followers of Kathleen Sebelius, but compared to some of the conservatives, they can look pretty left wing.

And that chafes the conservatives, we know.

Some claim these moderate Republicans are people who would have become Democrats in any other state, but knew they'd never get elected to anything in Kansas that way.

The conservative wing controls the House and at least a share of the congressional delegation. It controls the party leadership and would like to run the Senate, too. The Senate divides more evenly, with just the eight Democrats, about 14 conservatives and 14 moderates on any given vote, plus four or five members who float back and forth.

Gov. Sam Brownback is the darling of this right wing. Conservative groups led by the state Chamber of Commerce have recruited House members to run against some of the more liberal senators.

Whatever prompted the party to dream up this loyalty oath, it's a mistake and not likely to help the conservative cause. Any legislator or candidate who'd sign such a thing would be giving up the ability to vote as his or her constituents want. And that may not be blindly to follow the leadership.

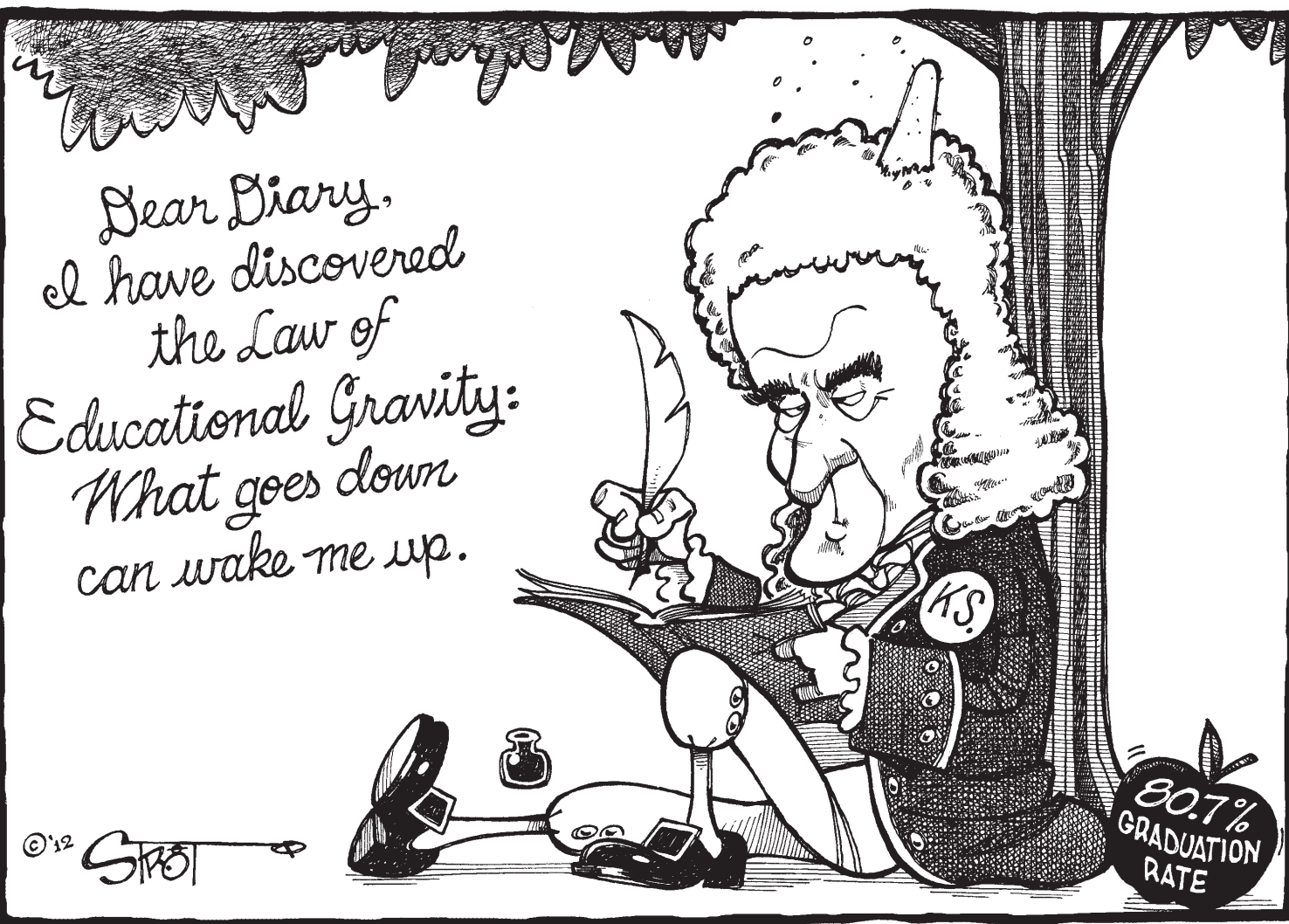
There is nothing wrong with being conservative or wanting conservatives to control the Legislature. Kansas is a conservative state, and voters gave the governor a huge majority in voting two years ago. They elected a conservative House and mostly conservative state officials.

There is nothing wrong with wanting to shift the Senate to the right, either, but there's a way to go about consolidating your position, one that might work. Then there are other ways.

And when you do something as undemocratic as putting out a loyalty oath to bind supposedly independent legislators, you've crossed a line. Like the heavy-handed plan to target all the supposedly liberal senators, it's a move that could backfire.

In August, we'll see just how successful these tactics have been, but from here, the oath in particular looks like a loser.

— Steve Haynes



## Kansas City trip an adventure

It seems like it takes forever to get to Kansas City, but we made the trek east last week to see our son and attend the annual Kansas Press Association meeting.

I was about ready to jump out of my skin waiting for Steve to finish up with Thursday's *Colby Free Press* so we could get on the road. The minor detail of missing lunch was probably mostly to blame for my bad mood and snappish disposition.

I was also afraid we wouldn't get to Lawrence in time to take son out for dinner. We had promised him several weeks ago that we would have dinner before continuing on to Overland Park, where the convention was.

I should have relaxed and had some lunch instead of waiting around until 3 p.m. when Steve finally showed up. Steve had called son, explained the problem and they had it well in hand.

Once fed and on the road, I was in a better frame of mind when we called our boy and he gave us two late-dining choices — Chinese or Mexican. Both, he assured us, were excellent new restaurants which were building good reputations for interesting and tasty food.



**cynthia haynes**

• open season

We chose Mexican, and it was tasty and interesting. The restaurant specializes in dishes from all over Mexico and was a great change from our usual Tex-Mex fare.

Son made off with my leftovers, which I would have happily taken home to have the next day — if I had been going home. Steve had no leftovers, but he accidentally left his credit card behind after paying the bill.

He didn't discover this minor detail until two days later when again it was time to pay for dinner as we were about to leave the city for home. It didn't take too long to think back to the last time he had used it, so we headed back towards Lawrence.

We had to return to Lawrence anyway because we had promised son we would bring him barbecue from one of our favorite KC

eateries — Gates Bar-B-Q.

While we had had a little trouble finding a parking place on Thursday night in Lawrence, Saturday night was a total zoo. There were people in everything from tuxes and formals to shorts and T-shirts. It was Saturday night in a college town, and it was hopping.

So, I hopped out of the car while Steve circled the block to check on the AWOL credit card. The restaurant had the card safe behind the counter, so I was able to grab it and we were off to hand over the barbecue. As we passed the Sand Bar, we noticed a bunch of folks in straw hats and paper leis getting on a bus. Seems Jimmy Buffet was playing in Kansas City. Wish we could have gone, but home was calling.

Somewhere outside of Manhattan, we pulled into a rest area and ate a picnic supper from the barbecue we had bought in Kansas City.

We got home a little after midnight.

It's a long way to Kansas City, but it you go, you might meet some nice, honest people along the way and get some really wonderful barbecue. I think I'll do it again — but maybe not until next year.

## Technical update will benefit Kansans

The first week of May will be an exciting time for Kansas as our state's Division of Vehicles drives into the 21st century with a significant system upgrade that will move all motor vehicle records into a single, modern system that is easier to use, maintain and enhance.

Tip my hat to those who have planned ahead and visited treasurer's or driver licensing office in advance of this system upgrade that will cause our offices to be closed from May 1 to May 7. Because the systems that run vehicle titling and registration as well as driver licensing will be down, state driver licensing offices will be closed for the week, but county treasurers' offices will be able to conduct non-vehicle related business.

I am excited about the new system and the benefits it will bring and appreciate people's patience as we go through this necessary step.

With a little bit of planning the upgrade will not be a major problem for Kansans.

To avoid unnecessary inconvenience, we are suggesting that people whose vehicle registra-



from other pens

• Donna Shelite

tion will expire in April — those with last names starting with C and D — should renew their tags before Monday, April 30.

For those turning 21 during the shut-down who cannot renew their driver's license before their birth date, the state provides an automatic 45 day extension which will allow them to have a valid driver's license and get their new license later in the month from any of the state's 111 driver licensing stations.

Anyone else whose license expires from May 1 to May 7 should be sure to renew their licenses no later than April 27 as driver licensing offices are closed on Mondays.

During the upgrade week we will transfer 6.8 million records onto the new system. The new system will replace three aging mainframe systems used for driver licensing, motor

vehicle titling and registration and inventory management.

While those records are being converted, state and county offices will close out of the old mainframe system, install new computer equipment, and get set up to serve customers again on May 8

This is the product of a three-year, \$40 million project that has included participation and input from county treasurers, law enforcement officers, vehicle dealers and others from across the state.

It is also the first step in the upgrade process. This fall, there will be a second week-long shut-down while the system that handles driver's license and driver control records is merged into the first phase of the upgrade. Once this is completed we will be able to see all of a person's vehicle and driving records at once.

We appreciate everyone's cooperation as we work to build a better, more efficient system for Kansas drivers and vehicle owners that can grow with our state in the future.

Donna Shelite is the director of the Kansas Division of Vehicles.

## League warns of tax proposal pitfalls

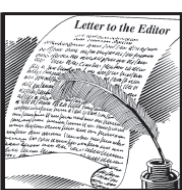
The League of Women Voters of Kansas urges fellow voters to let their legislators know that they oppose a state tax system that is balanced on the backs of the middle class and the lower-income Kansans.

Tax bills in the Kansas Legislature (currently in a conference committee) both do just that. (Senate Substitute for House Bill 2117 and House Substitute for Senate Bill 177)

The league points out that these bills would shift a major share of the budget to the most regressive taxes, the property and sales taxes. Under the Senate plan, the only income group that would see taxes increase is the poorest 20 percent of Kansans, those with an income of just \$11,000, while the wealthiest Kansans' taxes would drop \$21,087 on average.

The Kansas House plan's ultimate outcome would be to completely repeal the least regressive taxes: the individual and corporate income tax and the financial institutions' privilege tax. Though no one is saying so, the state would have to raise other taxes or cut services such as education to make up for the revenue loss. That makes the House plan is even more regressive than the Senate's bill.

Two standards of the league's position on taxation are equity and adequacy. Equity means that the ability for citizens to pay the tax



from other pens

• League of Women Voters

should be the primary basis of a fair balancing of the tax burden.

A broadly-based tax system includes a mix of income, sales and property taxes to reduce the regressive nature of taxes on middle and lower-income citizens. Diverse sources of revenue broaden the tax base, assuring widespread sharing of costs.

To find legislators, go to [www.ku.edu/pri/ksdata/vote/](http://www.ku.edu/pri/ksdata/vote/)

"Our work helps to bridge the gap between voters and elected officials," said league president Ernestine Krehbiel. "We study state issues such as taxation and funding of public services to assure that Kansas has the best government practices for all."

"After studying the tax proposals, the league opposes the reduction or elimination of income taxes and supports the exemption of food and drugs from the tax base. We support a broad-based state tax system that has diverse sources of revenue and that is equitable, provides

adequate revenue and is effectively and economically administered."

League leaders in Kansas are working to inform the public about issues such as the proposed tax plans, issues that impact lives, and to give voters avenues to express their opinions with elected leaders.

"The most basic and important avenue of citizens' power is by voting and then by contacting your elected officials with your views," she said. "It is our hope that everyone will make his or her voice heard now on this tax matter and in this election year by 'powering the vote.'"

"In Kansas, League members will be assisting citizens in this process this year by registering voters, providing candidate and election information online at [www.Vote411.org](http://www.Vote411.org) and by hosting candidate debates and forums."

The league, a nonpartisan political organization, does not endorse or oppose any candidate or political party but encourages informed and active participation by citizens in government. The league works to increase understanding of major issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. Membership is open to men and women of all ages. Go to [www.LWVK.org](http://www.LWVK.org) to learn how to contact or join your local league.

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