

Just how was that money spent?

With any luck, the dispute over disclosure of money spent by school districts to sue the state over school finance will be headed to court soon.

Kansas taxpayers deserve to know where this money — now more than \$3.2 million in tax funds — went and how it was spent.

The lawyer running this sorry show, Alan Rupe of Wichita, at first claimed his organization, known as Schools for Fair Funding, is exempt from the state Open Records Act. How that could be, given that all its money comes apparently from public school districts and thus from the state is hard to figure.

Later, Mr. Rupe reportedly offered to disclose much of the financial information if the *Topeka Capital-Journal* would just drop its lawsuit. The paper declined to do that, saying the issue is whether the group is subject to the Open Records law.

The principle here should be clear. Tax money should be accounted for to the taxpayers. Just because this money has been washed through a private corporation doesn't change that; the corporation's sole function is to do the bidding of public school districts.

Mr. Rupe apparently claims that some information is protected by what he calls the "attorney-client" privilege. (Apparently they don't teach spelling or punctuation in law school.)

It's hard to see how that applies, though. If he were working for a single school district, there's no question that his bills would be subject to public review. Matters of legal advice and strategy might not be public, but the bills are and should be.

Mr. Rupe, in a letter to the editor, charged that the paper has a broader agenda, and in that, he's on the mark.

Other supposedly private, not-for-profit groups are organized to spend taxpayers' money to lobby positions that taxpayers may or may not agree with. These include the League of Kansas Municipalities, the county commissioners' association, the Kansas Association of School Boards, and dozens of other groups formed by public officials to push their interests in Topeka.

None of them publishes a report on spending, though all of their money comes from tax funds contributed by member governments.

Many legislators doubt the fairness of allowing public agencies to spend money lobbying for more state money, let alone suing the state itself for more as the school group has done.

Back to the first principle again: If it's public money, taken from the taxpayers, then the public gets to know how it's spent.

In that case, a speedy resolution of this suit should benefit taxpayers. Either their right to know will be vindicated by the courts, as it should be, or the Legislature can fix the situation by changing the law.

Taxpayers tired of being sued with their own hard-earned dollars should like that outcome.

So bring it on.

— Steve Haynes

Thumbs Up to ...

✓ **Richard Rule**, for grading our Road E1, much needed. (via telephone)

✓ **The tree lovers**, who saved our beautiful corner trees. They know what's important in life. (e-mail)

✓ **All those** who organized the relay and were there in the rain for this important activity. (e-mail)

✓ **Mary Kay Woodyard**, on celebrating "six-oh!" (e-mail)

✓ **New Almelo volunteers**, on still another super bazaar. You really know how to do it up right! (e-mail)

✓ **Robert and Doris Winteroth**, on your 60th wedding anniversary. (e-mail)

✓ **The men and women** of the cloth, who serve our community in a very special way, in the many houses of worship. Let it be known that you are appreciated.

✓ **All first graders**, on that first big step as you begin your stroll along life's path. (via telephone)

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Slow down...and hope it all works out

A week ago today, while returning to Norton from a brief trip to Colby, I ran into one of the wildest storms I've ever encountered. It was just east of Atwood and lasted for the next 20 or so miles. I was warned by the weather guy on the radio that a severe thunderstorm was developing in western Decatur County and eastern Rawlins County. I saw the clouds form but from a distance they didn't look that threatening. Until, that is, I met up with them

The winds were fierce and at times I feared that my Ranger might be swept off the highway. A few months ago, I recalled during the battle with mother nature, a Colorado man was blown off I-70 in his similar pickup near Kanorado. That thought stuck with me until, suddenly the rain started to fall in bucket loads whipped by the winds. Actually it was a cloudburst, you could barely see beyond the hood of the vehicle. I just knew this storm also contained hail, but to my surprise there was none of that.

Behind me were at least four vehicles — at least that was the number confronting the storm head on. My speed was right at 40 miles per hour, sometimes slower. Nobody tried passing. I could make out the yellow lines in the middle of the highway and as long as I could do that I felt a bit more comfortable.

Of course when you are in such weather conditions, your mind struggles. I just knew that somewhere along the way we — me and the followers — would probably confront water running over the highway. But that was never to occur, thank goodness. Several miles west of Oberlin conditions eased, and eventually

we were out of the storm. But a glance to the north revealed more clouds building, and the weatherman cautioning again, but this time it stayed north. Several miles east of Oberlin, the weatherman issued a severe storm warning for southwest Norton County, "15 miles southwest of Norton," he said. I could eventually see those clouds — spooky, to say the least — but confident that I was not in that path.

Soon, there was Norton! Boy, did it look good! After pulling into the driveway and getting out of the pickup, I paused briefly, looked up and said, "Thanks, for driving with me."

A man was flying from Seattle to San Francisco. Unexpectedly, the plane stopped in Sacramento. The flight attendant explained that there would be a delay, and if the passengers wanted to get off the aircraft, the plane would re-board in 50 minutes.

Everybody got off the plane except one gentleman who was blind. A passenger had noticed the gentleman was blind because his seeing eye dog lay quietly underneath the seats in front of him throughout the entire flight. He could also tell that the blind man had flown this very flight

running. A couple of rugs dried in the sun the next day.

Good Evening Norton Tom Dreiling



Later he told the hubby he liked to hunt but he couldn't have a gun. We don't know what he did. It didn't matter because by then we liked him. He did good work. I believe in second chances. Not everyone has an ideal childhood. Sometimes we make poor choices. Sometimes we get away with something, sometimes we don't.

It is troublesome when the need for a second chance morphs into a third, fourth, fifth or sixth chance. But sometimes it does. Unfortunately, sometimes the first mistake destroys the opportunity for a second chance.

It made me think about how hard it is to really change. I wonder not "Why me?" but "Why not me?" Why am I so blessed? Why do I get another chance?

It rained in excess of three inches the night after the painting was done. Elizabeth had spent the day with us and we all sat on the porch watching the water rise in the field south of us. At some point the hubby realized water was going into the basement. The hubby and Elizabeth worked on diverting the stream and I surveyed the damage in the basement.

We talked Elizabeth into spending the night. The next morning she told us there was a bat upstairs. Why didn't you come tell us? Well, she thought about yelling but decided we wouldn't hear her so she just put the sheet over her head and waited until it left the room, then she closed the door. What a cool character!

As for me, my mood deteriorated pretty quickly. The hubby expressed a little disappointment in my attitude. Think how much we needed rain (maybe not three inches in two hours); think how pretty the house looks!

"Yeah," I said, "but I still have bats in my belfry plus a soggy bottom!" Honestly, I am a little disappointed in my reaction, too. I'd like to be different. I'll try. Just give me another chance!

The basement really wasn't such a big deal. The floor drain took the water away pretty quickly. We have the dehumidifier

before because the pilot approached him, and calling him by name, said, "Keith, we're in Sacramento for almost an hour. Would you like to get off and stretch your legs?" The blind man replied, "No thanks, but maybe my dog would like to stretch his legs."

Picture this: All the passengers in the gate area came to a complete stand still when they looked up and saw the pilot walk off the plane with a seeing eye dog! The pilot was even wearing sunglasses. People scattered. They not only tried to change planes, but they were trying to change airlines!

True story. Remember that things aren't always as they appear.

Well, I see where Paramount Picture's decision to give the boot to Tom Cruise headlined many papers and was even the lead in story on some evening television news shows. Why? Paramount was acting in its own interest as this arrogant actor continues to act like something that's missing a couple of pieces. Again, some news executives put Cruise right up there with events that directly impact our lives. Cruise doesn't. Poor judgment.

And I must say the words that slipped into a column in a paper I read daily certainly did little to enhance its respectability. But I guess I am just too old-fashioned because I still believe that you must show respect to your readers.

Have a good weekend. And church should be somewhere on your weekend "must do" list.

Lucky for us, we get another chance

Back Home Nancy Hagman



Do you know someone who has always positive? Who has a genuinely happy heart?

Do you know someone who has really, truly, fundamentally changed?

Our handyman told me, "I had a hard time growing up, but I have decided I don't want to live like that."

He lives near his father, he honors his father. How easy it would be to be bitter to a parent who did not provide for you when you were a child. How awesome to see forgiveness in action.

I screamed. That roused the hubby! FYI: A tennis racket is the weapon of choice when doing battle with bats. But, a broom works well also. I wish I didn't know these things but I do.

Do you know someone who is always positive? Who has a genuinely happy heart?

Do you know someone who has really, truly, fundamentally changed?

Some of us can hide our faults pretty easily. A fresh coat of paint and no one will ever guess the problems inside. Others have some really ugly things to overcome, things they can't hide. But lucky for us all, everyday we get another chance!