

Turnaround Day in the Legislature

It is hard to believe we will soon be at the half way point of the 2011 legislative session. February 25 was "Turn-around Day" which is the day bills must be passed out from their House of Origin. Following turnaround, the House and Senate then begin work on the bills that have been passed out of the other Chamber. There are a few exceptions, such as when an exempt committee passes a bill or when the Speaker requests a bill to be moved forward.

News from your legislator
Ward Cassidy



We got a copy of all the bills to move forward from the House and Senate. It is hard to believe the volume. I am just now getting used to tracking what is going on in the Senate. The first six weeks I was busy learning the process and working on my committees.

They told me the week of February 21 through February 25 would be long hours on the House Floor debating dozens of bills. Among the issues that were taken up are: Repeal of the In State Tuition for illegal immigrants, proof of citizenship and photo ID requirement to vote, increasing the speed limit on four lane highways to 75 mph, late term abortion ban, tax bills, pay check protection for workers, and a number of other bills that will run a wide spectrum of about anything you can imagine.

One of the most interesting surprises you quickly learn, as a new legislator, is that every good idea you want to address has a cost. Every time a bill is drafted the division of the budget creates a fiscal note. These notes represent a careful calculation as to the dollar cost of the proposal including the number of full or part time employees. The review also examines how the bill could affect the duties of the agency or local government referenced in the bill. These are shocking as it seems often the better the idea, the higher the cost. Another fact is the cost will increase from year to year.

The republican majority are very carefully examining fiscal notes. There is a strong consideration to not pass any bills that have strong fiscal impact and we are being even more cautious of the effects on local governments.

I saw an example of a bill that would protect Kansans from the crime of Identity Theft but we had to carefully review the fiscal note. House Bill 2008 would change the severity of the crime from a nonperson to a person felony which will require prison time. Prison time has a cost and the projection of this bill would require an additional twenty beds in our overburdened corrections system. However this is a crime which is very costly to individuals, businesses and communities alike. Last year more than 2,000 identity theft crimes were reported at an average of about \$40,000 per incident accounting to more than \$80 million in damages. We really need another prison in Kansas and ways to keep good staff in the system.

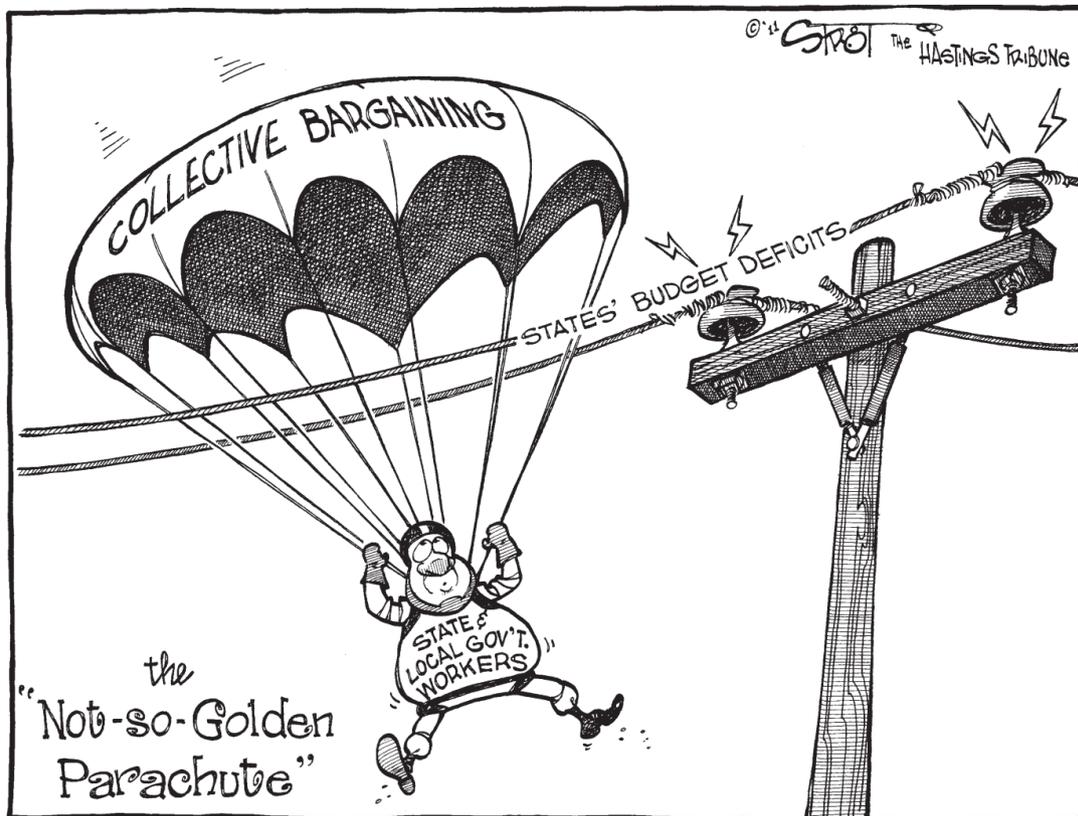
An item I mentioned, in an earlier article, was making Sudafed a prescription drug failed to make it out of committee, for many different reasons. Mainly, that the reporting being done has been effective and that it would drive up the cost to the average consumer.

The biggest development was the Workers Compensation Bill. There were several concerns issued early on in our district but the final compromise was approved by many of our county commissioners. It had been seventeen years since the existing statutes were revised.

There are so many events taking place in Topeka and I can't update you on all of them. I very much appreciate the help I am getting from our commissioners, county clerks, school superintendents, hospital administrators, and the constituents of the 120th. I am working diligently to express your concerns and trying hard to communicate. I have answered every letter and e-mail and truly appreciate the team work we need to have to fight for NW Kansas.

Two quick plugs for NW Kansas - our economic development directors are excellent and are a vital entity to promote our communities. They all help me every way they can and I am trying to do the same for them.

I heard all the budget presentations of every higher education institution in the state. The Presidents of Fort Hays State University, Colby Community College, and the Northwest Kansas Technical College are doing a fantastic job of keeping their costs to our children down and still providing a quality education. More importantly their graduates are finding jobs.



The joy of a Kansas winter

Out Back
Carolyn Plotts



It's tax time and I just finished my annual bookkeeping marathon. Every year, around this time, I vow to keep up with the accounting on a monthly basis. But, I never do. Jim says I live by the Procrastinator's Rule: "Why do today what you can put off until tomorrow?"

I still have the dream of a real office (not the dining room table) and have been accumulating color co-ordinated organizing containers for months. When my office is finally done, I may not be any more organized but, at least it will be beautiful.

-ob-

We are planning our spring Mexico mission trip against the wishes of our family. Their mantra has been, "Are you sure you have to go?"

Yes, we're sure we have to go. For some reason we have been called to do this house building work. And, if not us, then who?

-ob-

Looking back at the farmers before us

Insight
John Schlageck

Yes, with knowledge, education, patience, understanding and hard work and Mother Nature's ability to heal herself, the rich, fertile land recovered. Throughout this renaissance of the land, farmers and ranchers learned that stewardship of the soil, water and other resources is in the best interest of us all.

Without question, agriculture has yet to receive credit for what it has done to protect and to enhance the landscape and for its willingness to change and improve the few mistakes it has made.

It is important for all of us to understand what has happened in the past so we can place present events and future needs in their proper perspectives. To avoid doing so will blind us to involvement and participation in much larger efforts extending throughout a long span of time.

Incidentally, a new, modern twist may be nothing more than an old theme or something coming around after having gone around. After all human history is comprised of human ideas. And incidentally, nearly all ideas are timeless, just waiting to be dusted off, reshaped and used again.

John Schlageck is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. Born and raised on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

There's an old saying that goes something like this: Sometimes you have to look back on where you've been to know where you're going. While I'm not a fanatic about history, I believe it certainly has its place in our society today.

Whenever I take a road trip across Kansas or some other destination across our great land, I often stop along the way to read historical markers. They include details about battles, pestilence and devastation as well as discovery, success and progress.

When Mom and Dad were alive we sometimes visited a handful of cemeteries in rural Kansas and Missouri to pay homage to our relatives and friends. Below the headstones rested the remains of men in our family who spent their lives planting and harvesting behind sweating teams of horses, butchering hogs on bitterly cold days and teaching new sons about the soil.

Also down there were the remains of women who collected eggs, washed clothes by hand, cooked skillet full of fried chicken and managed to be good wives and mothers under sometimes nearly impossible conditions.

They are the ones who wove the fabric that serves as the yardstick for our new and dynamic future. What happened with these early pioneers has a direct bearing on our present successes and failures.

One such winning story revolves

around the strides agriculture and its people have made in the interests of conservation. Not everything that has happened in conservation can be limited to the last 10 or 20 years. Many of the innovations in conservation began taking shape in the years after the Dirty '30s, nearly 80 years ago.

Thousands of shelterbelts were planted in Kansas and other Great Plains states. After years of droughts and rain finally began falling again, ponds dotted the landscape holding this precious resource. Landowners learned to make the water walk and not run, conserving this water for livestock and sometimes for thirsty crops.

Terraces snaked their way across thousands of miles of farmland holding soil and water in place where it belonged. Soil stopping strip cropping created patterns and reduced wind erosion.

Slowly but surely conservation measures continued to slow the soil erosion gorilla that had stomped across the High Plains leaving in its wake gullies the size of automobiles, drifts of soil as high as fence posts, withered lifeless wheat and corn and starving livestock on barren pastures.

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Thumbs up to Gary Matson at the Norton County Courthouse for taking care of all the courthouse employees during the snowstorm by clearing off our cars and clearing paths for us. You are a sweetheart. Emailed in.

Thumbs up to the Jeremy Gregoire trio for a wonderful performance in February. Hopefully the musicians take it as a compliment that following the concert some of the selections they played were downloaded from iTunes for future enjoyment. Emailed in.

Thumbs up to Melodie Bock for cheering for our youth in their activities and for winning the Blue Jay Booster of the Year award. With this kind of support it is not surprising that so many of our youth do so well in sports and in other activities. Emailed in.