

A constitutional standard on school spending

The Kansas Supreme Court's school finance decision was no victory for the school districts looking to force another \$1 billion in state spending, but it doesn't appear to be much of a win for anyone else, either.

The carefully crafted ruling seems to have enshrined the status quo, where cuts in general school funding (and income taxes) made during the late recession survive – at least until the next governor and Legislature take a look at things.

The court, however, was careful to stake out authority over school spending, claiming a right to review the Legislature's work and to apply a constitutional standard to school spending.

It did not assert that authority in this case, as it did in the Montoy case a few years ago. It limited its decision to the equity of the school finance formula as it applies to local property taxes in two limited areas, the capital expenditure and local option funds each district maintains.

Poor districts, those with lower property valuation per student, are at an unfair disadvantage, the court said, because they cannot raise as much for these two funds as wealthy districts. That means these poorer districts may get more state money to spend, but overall, Kansas schools won't see much gain.

Gov. Sam Brownback saw the light and grabbed hold of the compromise offered by the court. He urged the Legislature to do likewise and quickly fix the inexpensive (an estimated \$129 million) equity problem, avoiding further litigation of this case, at least.

It's likely some sort of compromise can be reached. If that happens, the court will have cut off much potential support for a Constitutional amendment to change the way justices are selected. Conservatives have pushed that, claiming the way things are done now leave the selection mostly in the hands the state's lawyers.

The court left authority over the school budget mostly in the Legislature's hands, not ordering a major increase the suit and its backers had sought. The state spends about \$3 billion a year on schools now, and backers – including the state's teachers' unions – had envisioned much more. Now chances for bigger, court-controlled school budgets may have slipped away.

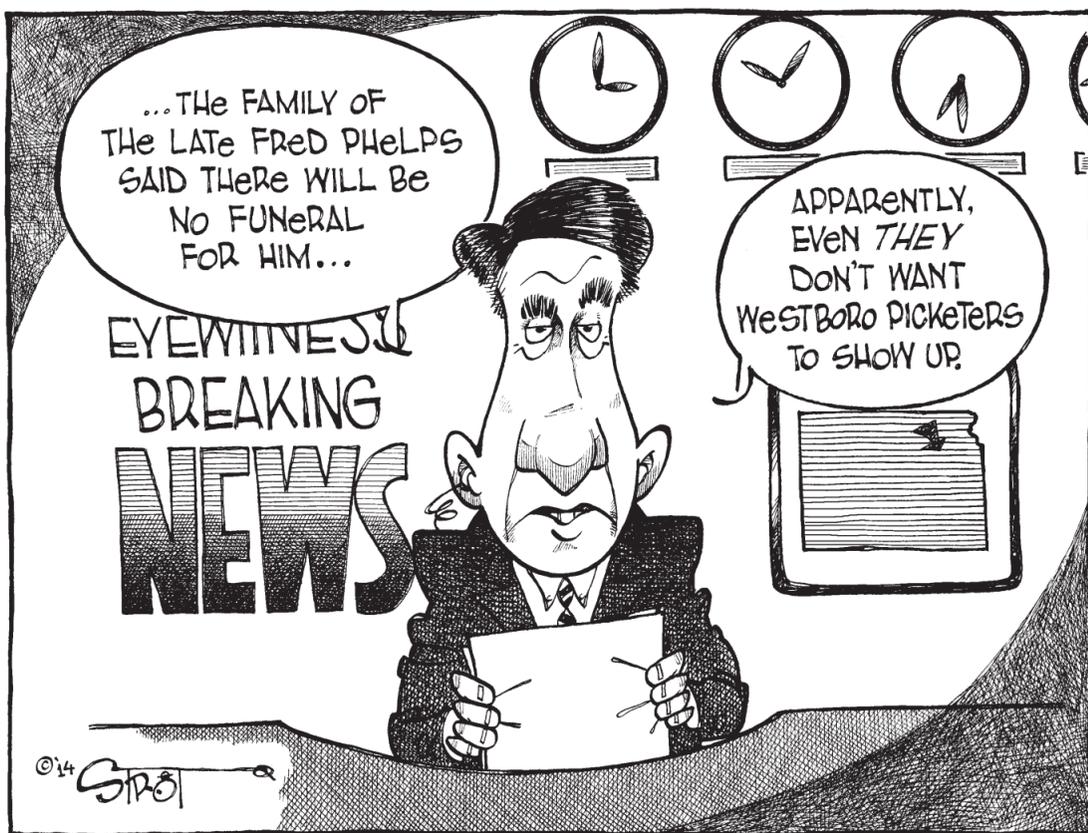
Proponents of more spending, for schools and other state agencies, now must focus more on electing a more liberal governor and state legislators.

The campaign by Democrat Paul Davis of Lawrence to unseat Gov. Brownback has support from a few more liberal Republicans, including three members of the "Gang of Six" supporting Mr. Davis' campaign. But while Davis is drawing in a lot of outside money, it remains to be seen if his movement can sweep the governor out, let alone the Legislature.

At this point, we certainly wouldn't count Mr. Brownback out, and the conservative domination of the Legislature is strong and deep right now.

The high court seems to have both sides backing down from a legal fight and focused the state back on the electoral arena. And that is where such decisions should be made.

— Steve Haynes



Keeping our community alive

Society's units share many similarities, whether it is a family, neighborhood, church, town, etc. From the very smallest, such as an individual, to the complex unit of community, each contributes to the well-being. The situations may be the same, but with more and more people the solutions become more complex.

When you look around, what makes you, your family or your town appear alive? A town's health is reflected in the attention paid to its operations. A town that reflects vitality is a community dedicated to providing the best for its citizens. Whether we are talking health care or education, library or recreation, they all reflect our commitment. We have an opportunity next week to contribute to the well-being of our town. On Tuesday, April 1st, we are privileged to cast a vote for our town in general and our children in particular.

A friend recently vocalized his opposition to the upcoming school bond. His chief complaint was spending

Phase II Mary Kay Woodyard



money on administrative offices. At first, I thought he might have a point, but then I thought back to the school of my day. There were no special education services, although we had children who would have benefitted from these programs. Those children, if they were lucky, had teachers capable of meeting their needs but no programs to help them succeed at their own level. Nothing was tailored to help a youngster progress or catch up; and no gifted programs. Some of these, regardless of your support or opposition to them, are federally and or state mandated and therefore must be documented. Not a trivial matter. It takes space and many

people to keep the required records. Sometimes, because my children are raised, I do not see the problems which face our district. One I can vouch for is the need to change the bussing area at the Eisenhower. As the saying goes, "it is an accident waiting to happen." It needs our attention now.

The presentations provided by the school board have thoroughly detailed the needs within our district and the architectural plans for their solution. If you have missed these presentations and question and answer segment, another will be held on March 30th, at 4:00 P.M. at the East Campus. There will be tours of our facilities offered as well.

The livelihood of a community is reflected in the attention it pays to its operations. Our elected School Board has studied our needs and come up with the best possible solution. A vote for the school bond not only supports our children, but reflects our community commitment. mkwoodyard@ruraltel.net

Dear Fellow Kansan,

Where does your food come from? If you're like many Americans, your answer may be the grocery store. You, I and 155 other people ate today because of one American farmer. An increase of 800 percent over the past 73 years! Where in 1940, each farmer produced enough food to feed 19 people.

We officially recognize our farmers, ranchers and all they do to make our lives better during Agriculture Week, March 23-29, 2014. This year's theme is "Agriculture: 365 Sunrises and 7 Billion Mouths to Feed." Farmers not only produce food, fiber and fuel, they contribute to a strong economy. In fact, the total impact of agriculture and agribusinesses account for 20 percent of the state's economy, according to Kansas Inc.

I am fortunate enough to be a part of the Kansas Agriculture and Rural Leadership (KARL) program. As a participant, my eyes are being further opened to the many different aspects of agricultural business and its impacts on our lives. If you're like me, you don't have to think very long to think of a hard-working ag producer who contributes to our way of life. Perhaps for you it's your grandparent, an uncle, or maybe an old friend.

The role of farmers will become even more critical with the exploding world population. We reached 7 billion people in 2011. The United Nations forecasts that world population will reach 9 billion by 2050 – and that farmers will have to produce 70 percent more food than they do today.

Agriculture is this nation's #1 export and vitally important in sustaining a healthy economy.

And it's not just the farmer who makes our food possible. The entire agriculture industries, all the way to the grocery store, are vital links in a chain that brings food to every citizen - and millions of people abroad.

Farms of every size are important today, regardless of whether they are feeding just their families or the world. Here's an interesting fact from USDA numbers released on February 19, 2013: 25 percent of farms have an average of 55 acres and sales of less than \$2,500.

Agriculture Week is a good time to reflect - and be grateful for - American Agriculture! This marks a nationwide effort to tell the true story of American Agriculture and remind citizens that agriculture is a part of all of us.

Be part of America's Agriculture, if even just for one day. Take a drive in the country with your family. There's no prettier green than winter wheat fields waking from winter dormancy. And wave if you see a farmer. I guarantee they'll wave back. For more information please visit: www.agday.org Happy Agriculture Week!

KARL Class XII Members,
Lesley Schmidt, Joseph Thomas, Matt Symms & Travis Mason



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Sewing and quilting are not the same thing

Two of our local churches have quilting groups.

By this I mean, they sit around a quilt in a frame with needle and thread melding together backing, batting and top.

It sounds peevish, but to me this is an important distinction. When people ask me if I quilt I say, "No, I sew."

Because to claim I quilt diminishes what those women do. Their skill cannot be replicated.

Machine quilting is lovely, perfect for some projects.

Others require hand quilting. The average age of the quilters in the local groups is about 85. In another 10 years who is going to do the hand quilting?

A friend presented a challenge: her mother had cross stitched some blocks for her. Mom started them as a gift for her high school graduation! My friend graduated in 1976!!!! (It's okay; we all get a little behind at times!)

My friend doesn't sew much. If you had her sewing machine you would understand why. She said, "Mom said she would pay for everything. Take these blocks and make a quilt!"

I got a top together. Then started looking for a quilter, knowing it had to be hand quilted.

Over the years I've worked on my hand quilting but I've never done anything large by myself. So I asked the group at my church. An opening came up quickly. And as it was (sort of) my quilt, I was asked to join them.

This Too Shall Pass Nancy Hagman



Another Nancy (who quilts with the other group), told me she thinks my quilting is acceptable. In other words they would not give me a spool of orange thread and rip my stitches out after I left.

So I decided to give it a whirl. One thing always leads to another. The ladies fuss about the piles of fabric squares in the quilting room. "Sure wish someone would put those together."

And eventually more pointedly, "NANCY, you should put those together!"

I'm not really looking for anything to do; on the other hand what else do I have to do?

So I took a stack home and made a couple of tops.

My artistic side cringes when looking at them. First off the fabrics are polyester. Yes, it lasts forever: the mere fact this fabric is still in existence amply proves that point.

Still are these quilts acts of kindness or charity? Isn't there supposed to be a cost of discipleship? Is it giving if

something requires no sacrifice on the part of the giver? Personally, I can't wait until those tops are out of my sight forever!

Of course, I have no idea what a needy person in another country and of another culture might consider beautiful. I also understand a person who needs a blanket will be grateful for anything and perhaps most particularly for polyester, it's heavy, warm and durable!

Yet I wish I could make each top as lovely as my friend's quilt is becoming thanks to a little group of church women.

Cindy (who quilts beautifully thanks to the class she took from Norton Counties' Pauline Poage) tells me if quilts for LWF are too nicely done, there is a danger they will be misappropriated by unscrupulous governments or even charitable agencies. Sold to profit those entrusted with distribute them.

I asked my quilting group and they said yes, they had also been told this.

How sad.

It is consolation that the money these quilters earn hand quilting also goes to charity. Each little stitch ultimately becomes part of something bigger.

I think I will continue to quilt once my friend's quilt is done. I like working with these women, learning from them.

Someday I may even feel comfortable saying, "Yes, I am a quilter!"



Letters to the Editor and Thumbs Up:
e-mail dpaxton@nwkansas.com
or to write 215 S. Kansas Ave.

Remember there is no charge for rendering a Thumbs Up. Thumbs Up are meant to give recognition for a positive person or event in the community. Also remember all Letters to the Editor must be signed.

