

Porn cash for schools gave fodder for No. 1 edit

We are rerunning this editorial, which first appeared in November 2005. It won first place in the Editorial Writing division of the National Newspaper Association's Better Newspapers Contest. This was the second year that editor Steve Haynes has won this award in the contest for weekly newspapers under 3,000 circulation. The bill failed, by the way.

Of all the dumb ideas. The same people who have been trying to get grand juries to investigate porno shops down along I-70 now want the state to have a 15 or 25 percent tax on pornography.

Excuse us. Wouldn't the state wind up having a vested interest in pornography, even as it has bought into gambling, liquor and other once-forbidden vices?

And once hooked on the revenue, wouldn't the state then have to protect and promote its porn industry to keep the schools open?

Get real. There have got to be better ways to raise money for the state of Kansas.

Pornography supporting our schools? Wouldn't we have a hard time telling kids not to buy the stuff if it was good enough to pay their teachers?

You have to wonder what kind of world we live in when people come up with that kind of stuff.

We don't have much porn up here, and it's probably just as well. In the cities, and along I-70, though, it's a flourishing trade.

Why porn shops appeal to interstate travel-

ers is a mystery, but the highways in other states are loaded with them. Kansas has but a few. That's enough to offend some people around Abilene, who have been pushing county attorneys to investigate, call a grand jury or just prosecute the stores.

The Supreme Court has made it pretty difficult to prosecute porno dealers, though, and even grand juries are having a tough time finding any traction.

Discouraged, perhaps, by the legal morass, the anti-porn forces came up with the tax scheme. It's similar to the way the anti-saloon movement gave up and proposed a stiff tax on liquor.

You can't have it both ways, though. You're either against pornography, or you think it's a good revenue source. If the state taxes the stuff, it in effect becomes a partner with the makers.

So Kansas winds up in bed with the porno industry?

That's a funny place for the state to be. The state doesn't need money that badly.

Let the porno shops alone. Keep them out on the freeways and out of towns, away from schools and churches.

If people want to buy that stuff, in a free society, who are we to say no?

But should the state have a vested interest in the porn business?

No.

It's not exactly clean money, is it?

And Kansas has bigger fish to fry.

— Steve Haynes

Hunters push house along

My momma said, "Always expect the unexpected."

That's why I shouldn't have been surprised when we got a phone call from another set of pheasant hunters, these from Colorado, looking for a place to stay on opening weekend. I explained our circumstances and said it would be up to Jim to decide if we could be ready for them.

Remember, last week I wrote that our initial bunch of hunters had to cancel and we kind of eased off our push to get the house ready. Now, we had to decide if we could kick it back into high gear again and meet the deadline.

Jim said we could. So now we are painting and packing all at the same time. Every trip from "The Inn" across the yard to the new house sees us carrying a load of personal items. Where does all this stuff come from?

I swear, I am not moving again until the kids have to put me in a nursing home.

—ob—

The good news is all the plumbing is done, the gas is hooked up so we have heat and the electrical is all done. I'm painting trim and closet built-ins, sweeping floors and washing windows. It won't be done, but we're moving in anyway.

Last night, we "christened" the new Jacuzzi bathtub. It was wonderful. I felt like a wet noodle when I finally turned off the power jets.

Perhaps it could become a new revenue center. I could rent it out to the neighbors by the hour.

—ob—



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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Two years ago, we got rid of our last old hen. And we have missed them ever since.

I didn't miss the chore of gathering eggs every day, plus feeding and watering. But I did miss those delicious eggs. Homegrown eggs just "stand up" in the pan better. They taste better, too.

Recently, I've been getting my eggs from a farmer who delivers to my office. They have been exceptionally good eggs — for a good price.

But when a friend offered us 10 laying hens, we jumped at the chance. Perhaps not the best timing in the midst of our move and all, but I can almost taste those big, yellow-yolked eggs now.

—ob—

Our granddaughter, Taylor, is almost 8. She has some musical interest, so her Aunt Halley, our oldest daughter, bought her a set of digital drums. They have a headset so only the drummer can hear the noise.

Did I say noise? I meant to say rhythm.

Halley was watching Taylor one afternoon while she practiced her drumbeats. Taylor said, "I'm going

to do this beat three times." Halley said she repeated the beat exactly the same way three times.

Then Taylor said she would do a different beat two times. Again, she duplicated the beat perfectly, two times.

Taylor announced, "Aunt Halley, I'm going to do this next one really good."

"OK," said Halley. "Let's hear it."

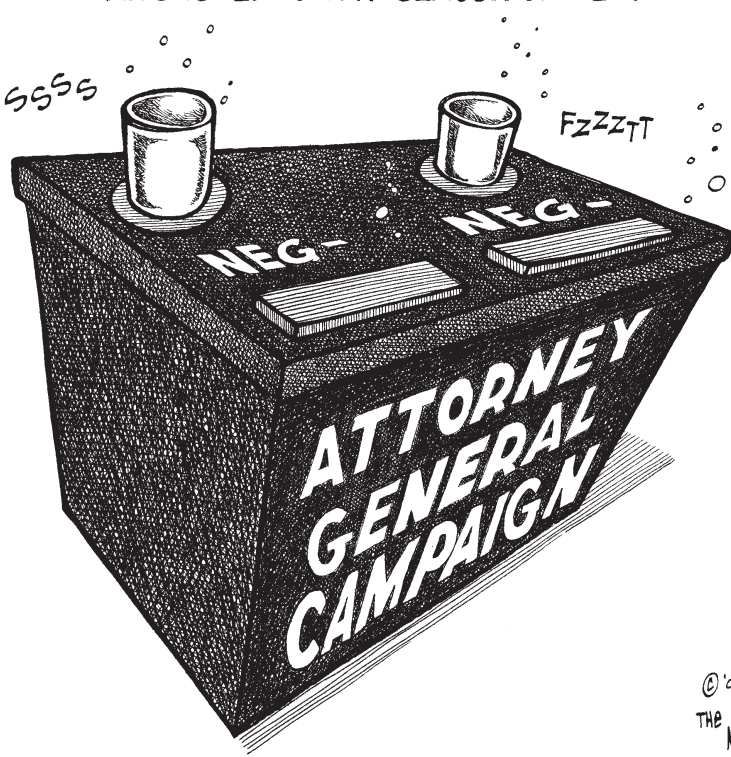
Halley said Taylor squinted her eyes, crossed her drumsticks over her head, and with the aplomb of a hard-core rocker shouted, "One, two, three!"

Well, there go my dreams of Taylor becoming a doctor or a physicist. Maybe she's destined to become the next drummer for the Rolling Stones.

From the Bible

Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation.
Psalms 67: 19

KANSAS ELECTION SEASON BATTERY



Dirt really is red in Oklahoma

Driving through Oklahoma. It's a nice enough place, but I'd like it better on a sunny day.

Like Kansas, it's a pretty state, but you have to know where to look.

On the Mother Road, old U.S. 66, west of El Reno, you start out with the federal prison. Once known as the United States Reformatory, and now just FCI El Reno, for "federal correctional institution," it's a stark and foreboding old pen with high fences and lots of wire. It makes Leavenworth look warm and welcoming.

Farther west, the business route curves back to the freeway and the Mother Road angles straight for Amarillo. The old slab has weathered 30-some years of light traffic well. And it's busy today; must be lots of people going to town.

The road cuts across farm country, straight as an arrow, then curves and dips through a pretty valley. Dirt is red.

How'd they do that, anyway? The dirt isn't red in southern Kansas. Cross the Red River and climb the next hill into Texas; the dirt is brown. East to west across Oklahoma, the dirt is red.

My brother says, only half in jest, that they just drew a line around wherever the dirt was red, and said: "That's not worth anything. Give it to the Indians."



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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Of course, if we'd have known about the oil, we'd have kept the mineral rights.

We think of Oklahoma as plains and rolling hills; at least I do, but the place is lousy with mountain ranges, from the Ouachitas and Ozarks in the east to the Wichita and Quartz mountains of the southwest. It's not just flat.

There's plenty of hill country in between. In the south are the Arbuckles, almost mini-mountains that exhibit perfectly the folded rock layers from your high school geology text.

The only way to really see them is from the train to Fort Worth, along the river, which cuts deepest through the range.

Out west, toward the Panhandle, the country is empty, grand and desolate. Trains fly through, carrying boxes from the Orient to Chicago and trailers full of packages for Los Angeles. They no longer stop to take water or pick up a load of cattle,

not if they can help it. What passes for mountains out there are barren mesas that stretch for miles, rugged and impressive, but not the Rockies. Not even the Ozarks.

The drive goes on forever — really forever if you want to traipse through the Panhandle, that largely empty strip of land that Texas had to forego because it was north of the Mason-Dixon line. It's all vast spaces and distant hills and big valleys with little sandy rivers.

And then you are in Kansas, in hill country that's good for raising cattle and little more, but beautiful all the same.

There's history out here in the red-dirt country, from trail drives to Indian reservations to one of Custer's first stands, where his troops massacred the Cheyenne and Comanche along the Washita.

Lots of beauty. Lots of space. I'd go back some day, but it was good to be past the red dirt.

Campaign item upsets writer

To the Editor: A postcard dropped in Johnson County by gubernatorial candidate Jim Barnett attacks the governor for signing a school finance bill that was not supported by the Johnson County delegation in the 2006 session.

The attack accuses the governor of signing a bill that takes Johnson County tax dollars and sends them out west to support schools in western Kansas. It shows an image of a train loaded with rolls of cash heading into Dodge City.

The implication is that with Jim Barnett as governor, Johnson County could retain all of the tax money collected there to spend only on Johnson County schools.

A few facts:

- Taxes are collected for the benefit of Kansas and all Kansans.

- While Johnson County enjoys a robust economy based on industry, biosciences and technology, western Kansas is an agricultural economy suffering under a prolonged drought.

- Johnson County, as the "economic engine" of Kansas, does send tax dollars throughout the state to support state services. In this way, the property tax burden as measured in mills is kept relatively equitable for all Kansans.

- If, as suggested in the postcard, Johnson County did not send tax dollars to the state for distribution to

Letter to the Editor

western Kansas (and other areas), then western Kansas would be forced to either cut services, including schools, or raise property taxes to the point that many rural residents would likely lose their farms and homes.

- Sen. Barnett is now campaigning in Johnson County on a platform that would result in school consolidation and school closings in western Kansas. The impact would also be felt in other rural regions of the state.

- Kansas legislators wrote the school finance bill and a majority of them voted in favor of it. While no one considers this bill perfect, it is the result of legislative compromise. Rural school districts saw a decline in low-enrollment weighting while Johnson County schools got the opportunity to raise additional money for use only in Johnson County.

- Sen. Barnett's postcard is either a desperate bid to collect votes in densely populated Johnson County or a reflection of his disdain for the rural, agricultural heritage of Kansas.

- Sen. Barnett has attacked the governor previously for having no school finance plan; in this attack he calls the legislative plan "The

Sebelius School Finance Plan." Sen. Barnett tries to spin his attacks both ways.

- The Sebelius family is a western Kansas agricultural family. Gov. Sebelius works to be a governor for all Kansans. She recognizes the importance of Johnson County as our economic engine and she respects the agricultural heritage of Kansas.

Johnson County residents should not be fooled into believing that every tax dollar collected in Johnson County could remain there. Courts throughout the United States have determined that equity is necessary in school finance.

Equity can be achieved only through sharing of resources. Johnson County residents and legislators know this. They have long supported the notion of shared resources while arguing eloquently for additional authority to make their own schools exemplary.

In this state where excellence for all has long been established as the right thing for which to strive, Dr. Barnett's suggestion that Kansans should embrace an attitude of "I got mine; the heck with you" is offensive.

Michael McVay
Colby

Readers support write-in candidate

To the Editor: The voters in District 1 for county commissioner have choices, and write-in candidate Marcia Lohofener is one of those choices.

Marcia brings years of commitment and service to community and church. Her work includes 30 years in the medical field, six years as

manager of Wheat Ridge Terrace. Marcia was manager of the Chamber of Commerce and director of economic development for four years. She promoted business, representing Decatur County at legislative sessions in Topeka, trade shows, the state fair and at meetings statewide. Marcia has served the

community in a professional way. Marcia deserves your consideration and has the commitment and skills we need.

If Marcia is your choice, write her name in and fill in the oval beside it. Correct spelling is not required.

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