

Mayor needs to listen to voice of the voters

Kansas law requires a vote of the people most time to authorize a bond issue, reasoning that taxpayers should not wind up footing the bill for a big mortgage for a building, a bridge or a swimming pool without a say in the process.

So, to, sometimes taxpayers get the final say on a tax increase if someone files a protest. Same for many government decisions.

Oberlin voters are in an unusual situation, however. They approved a new swimming pool and a sales-tax hike to pay for it by a 2-1 vote last year.

The opposition, including some City Council members, raised legitimate objections to the plan, based on the city's relatively high debt and its need for other capital projects. The people spoke, however, and they said "Build the pool."

You could argue both sides all year. However, the pool is something the people of this town want and said they are willing to pay for. It will be used, not by a small percentage of citizens, but by every family with children—or grandchildren.

There was no uncertainty in this decision, no quavering of the people's voice. They said yes.

Some council members have continued to vote against issues required to advance the pool. That is their right. Now, the mayor says he's considering a veto. Most people

probably didn't even know our mayor had veto power. Surely, it's been done, but not in recent memory.

We do not make light of his concern over increasing the city's debt. The city faces many needs and may need to borrow again to fulfill some of them. Already, the "water project" has expanded from \$4 million, at last count, to as much as \$7 million.

And like the sewer project before it, the water system improvements will have little direct benefit for the citizens of this fair town. It's just required to meet ever-changing "federal regulations," which could change again before the city's loans are paid.

The pool, however, will be full of children all summer for decades. It will be money well spent.

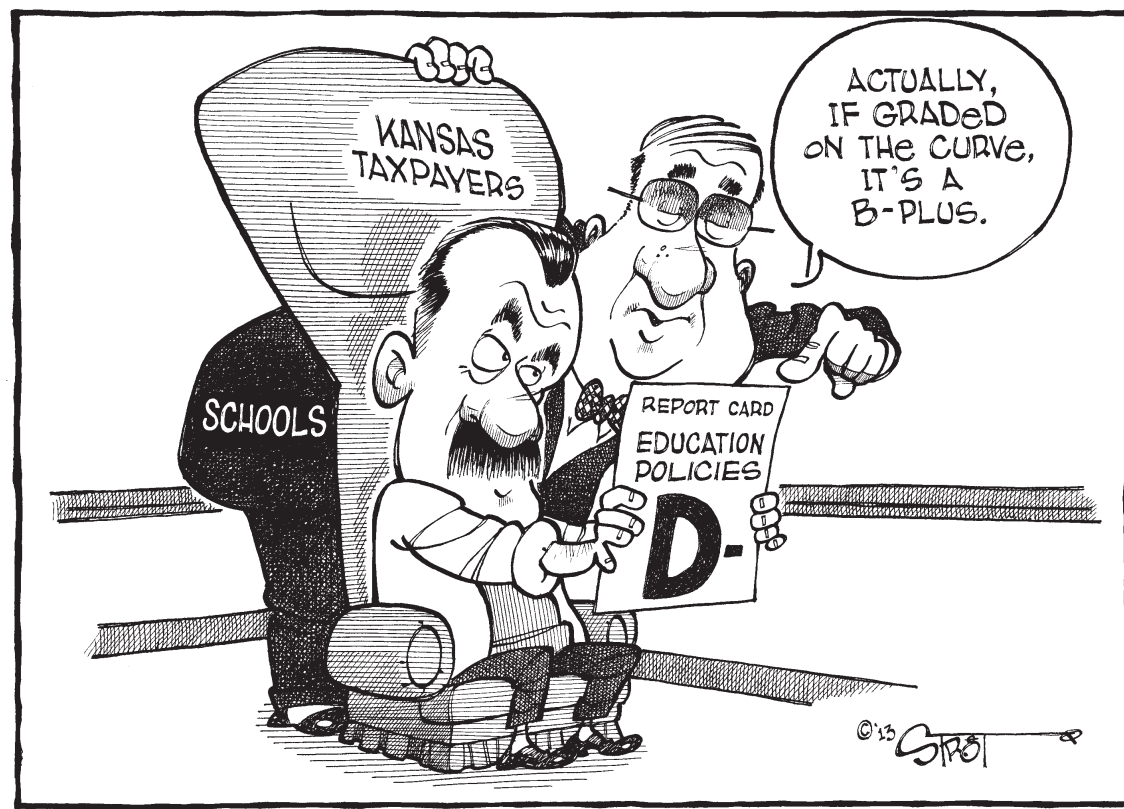
Given that \$2.1 million is a lot of debt, should the mayor veto the pool?

How could he, given the way the town feels? Given the command the voters presented the city? Otherwise, why have the election?

The pool will be built, we're sure, veto or no. If the present council does not override it, the next one will. The pool mothers will see to that. Their project will survive.

The mayor, if he goes against them, might not. He should listen to the voters, and if he cannot approve the pool resolution, just let it go into effect without his signature.

— Steve Haynes



Pool project is nothing new

To the Editor:

Several years ago, Gary Shike (the city administrator at the time) and the Oberlin City Council began receiving loud, angry complaints about the city Swimming Pool. The council's reaction was to establish a Pool Commission to determine:

- If the pool was safe.
- If the pool was deemed unsafe, was it feasible to fix it or must a new pool be built?
- If a new pool was built, where would be the optimum location?
- Would it be possible to build and maintain an indoor pool?
- Were the majority of citizens in favor of building a new pool?
- Was there any grant money available for the pool?

The Pool Commission, after a year of hiring experts, research, surveys, meetings with council members for direction, as well as fund raising, made its final report for the building of a new pool. No grants were available, so it would be necessary to go to a vote by the people on whether to raise taxes for a pool. Suddenly, the council declared the city "might be up against their bond limit soon therefore the project is being put on hold." The council would look at building the pool as soon as a couple of projects were completed.

Letters to the Editor

The architectural information, plans and drawings were left with the city for when that time came. The city then summarily threw all of that information, literally, into an actual trash can. (Thank goodness the money our community donated during this time for a new pool was kept in an account not accessible by local government.)

Several years went by. Those knowledgeable about the unhealthiness of swimming in our pool opted to swim in a different town's healthier, safer, well-filtered pool. Younger parents whose children are now swimming at the Oberlin pool began to complain loudly, angrily about the dangers. The City Council reacted by establishing a Pool Commission to determine.... See a pattern?

No members from the first pool commission were selected for the second commission. Both pool commissions were set up by the council. Both commissions looked at liners, fiberglass, smaller pool dimensions, the cheapest possible builders. Both commissions pared down options hoping for later donations for extra perks. They came up

with the same answers. The only real difference is that if the council had built a pool when they first committed, it could have been built for half the cost. (As we all know, this trend of building costs rising is not one that generally reverses itself. When the first pool commission was disbanded, the council was aware that costs were increasing exponentially.) This council and our mayor know that prices will continue to rise.

The majority of the council wishes to build a pool now. Oberlin citizens have spoken; they want a pool built now. A sales tax has been established to pay for a pool. A new pool is needed and is possible... but Mayor Rob McFee is contemplating throwing the decree of the people into the trash.

If this happens, are there any citizens who would actually say 'yes' when asked to be on any city committee? If so, they would be fools. Is there any reason to encourage our young people to vote? Absolutely not!

Anna Shaw, Oberlin

Life full of peaks and valleys

If you get Christmas/New Year's newsletters mailed before Jan. 31, they still count, don't they?

Every year, Jim and I say, "We ought to write one of those family newsletters for our Christmas cards." And every year we don't do it. I enjoy getting newsletters from our friends, so I thought they might like to receive the same from us. We have many long-distance friends and family. Some we only hear from at Christmas.

This year, I actually wrote the letter. After a few re-writes, we were both satisfied. Newsy, but not too many details. You know, just hit the highlights.

But here's where I got bogged down. The technical side. I didn't know how to get the picture on my desktop to the letter, then how to get it to print on the cute stationery I've been saving for years. We have three printers in our office. Do you think I could get the letter to print on any of them. The letter has been written for weeks, and I felt time slipping away.

I swallowed my pride and made a phone call to my technical support staff (son James). A push of a button here, a "drag" there and soon everything was ready. The letters are printed and neatly stacked on the dining room table waiting to be addressed and mailed.

Now comes the real test. Taking that address book and putting pen to paper. Because, even though I wrote a newsletter, I still hear my mother's voice saying, "You can't send cards with just your name signed at the bottom. You have to write a little something." So it may take me until next December, but everyone



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
cplotts65@gmail.com

who sent me a card is going to get one back and it will have a personal note, too.

-ob-

Our lives are a series of peaks and valleys. A phone call from the ministry group we go to Mexico with informed us they wouldn't be needing our services in Juarez or Acuna this March. We have led a team every March for the past 10 years. That was a valley.

The peak soon followed when the Casas por Cristo coordinator said, "We have something else for you two. How would you like to go to Guatemala and Jim can train two groups in how to lead teams and how to build the house?"

Our reply was an instant, "Yes!" followed by, "But we've never built the kind of house you build in Guatemala."

"That's OK," said the coordinator, "We know Jim can figure it out."

So Jim's in charge of the physical stuff. I am in charge of getting us there. I Googled what kind of immunizations we need to go, and the list is long. We need to get started soon. I have a million other questions for the Casas staff. Like, "Is there any plumbing/electricity in the town where we will be staying? Do we need mosquito netting?"

Will anyone meet us at the airport? Does anyone speak English? Will it be hot or cold? Will I be able to do laundry there? Will my curling iron work?"

You know, all the important things.

My Spanish is progressing (slowly), but I am nowhere near able to communicate beyond the basics. I can say hello and good-bye; ask someone how they are and where the bathroom is (which might be a moot point, anyway); ask how much something costs; and I can ask how to say something in Spanish.

Will that get me by? Don't know. But I have six weeks to kick my language lessons into high gear.

So if I say "Hola" instead of "Hello" to you, forgive me. I'm just trying to get into the spirit of the adventure.

From the Bible

And they went in Capernaum; and straightway on the sabbath day he entered into the synagogue, and taught. And they were astonished at his doctrine; for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes.

— Mark 1: 21-22

Members ask voters to city meeting

To the Editor:

Members of the Promote Oberlin Outdoor Living (POOL) Committee at the Jan. 17 meeting of the City Council had come to the meeting with bated breath. We had expected (at long last) to see our hard work come to fruition with a final decision on how the pool project would be financed.

We anticipated celebrating our success for a moment and then getting back to work with our fundraising efforts. Instead, we left the meeting incredibly disappointed. The mayor now has the option to disregard the democratic process and veto the pool (though the majority of council members voted in favor of it) due to a law allowing one person an overreach of authority.

We recognize that this is one more layer of debt for the city to take on. However, this is a debt only until it is paid for, which, as we have shown, will be easily completed in 20 years.

If the sales tax is not used for the pool project, it is just another burden our citizens must bear with nothing to show. We must preserve our community for future generations.

tions.

Citizens, you voted for a pool. You understood the full ramifications of the pool project, cast informed votes and have placed your faith in having your voices listened to by city officials. Our great democratic process worked, and elected officials need to honor and follow through on the due process.

Kansas was founded on the backs of small communities that embraced whatever challenges they faced. Communities that open their arms to progress have thrived throughout our history while those that were

timid withered. Ours is withering and in time will die because we have some leaders too timid to embrace the challenges they face. It is our generation's task to carry on what those pioneers began.

Citizens, you voted for a pool. You did not vote for a sales tax for any purpose other than a pool. Attend the City Council meeting at 7 p.m. on Thursday and let your voice be heard — "I want a pool!"

Rachel Johnson, Danielle Leitner, Susan May, Valisha Raile, Shayla Williby
Oberlin Pool Committee

Teenager pleads with mayor

To the Editor:

I have attended City Council meetings and I don't exactly understand why the mayor won't say "yes" to a new pool. If you compare the pool project to scoring points in a football game, and we build a new pool, it's like making a touchdown.

When you only "fix" the pool we have now, you're only going halfway down the field and will

eventually have to go the other half, or you'll just have to start over. To me, it seems like it would just take a longer amount of time and money if we just patch up the old pool.

I think it would make more sense to build a new pool now, instead of spending more money later. Please ask your mayor why he won't pass the pool resolution.

Emily Howland, age 13
Oberlin

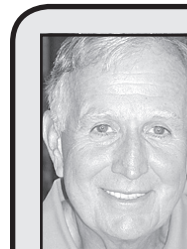
Controversial matters on agenda

The correspondence I have been receiving this year is weighted heavily toward gun control and Medicaid. There are going to be many controversial and passionate matters that will be addressed in the 2013 Legislature. This week, I will address gun control.

The core goal of legislation Kansas is looking at is to ensure that personally responsible citizens have an avenue to protect themselves without infringing on the safety and freedom of others.

In 2006, Kansas passed its first concealed-carry bill, and since then tens of thousands of law-abiding Kansans have applied and been granted a permit. To obtain the permit, they must complete a certified firearms safety training class and fill out an application, which is reviewed by law enforcement. I myself have a concealed-carry permit.

The motivation behind this type of legislation was the notion that we should not treat law-abiding citizens like criminals. Those who take the time to go to the training and fill out the necessary paperwork are not the ones who cause trouble.



Letter from Topeka

By State Rep. Ward Cassidy
ward.cassidy@house.ks.gov

To date, only 51 licenses have been revoked out of the more than 55,000 issued.

Many have said that guns should have no place in public buildings and we should keep these areas gun free. The problem is without adequate security to ensure no one has a gun in a public building, it becomes irresponsible to prevent law-abiding citizens from protecting themselves. I was a high school principal when the Columbine incident took place. Several of our area schools received threats shortly thereafter. After careful consideration, I took measures to ensure that our school would be safe and that, if necessary, force would be met with force. We followed this plan until I retired several years later.

My thought—I would do anything to protect my students and staff.

At this time, I can only see the Kansas Legislature fighting to preserve the rights given to us in the 2nd Amendment.

On a fun note, I had the opportunity to give the Oberlin eighth-grade students and their sponsors a tour of the Capitol on Martin Luther King Day. We were the only people in the building and the students had time to ask questions and go places normal tours don't get to go. They returned the next day for a picture with the governor.

Every time I have a group from northwest Kansas, I receive compliments on their behavior, and I received several nice compliments about the Oberlin group.

THE OBERLIN HERALD

Serving Oberlin and Decatur County since 1879

USPS 401-600

Office hours: 8:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. Mon.-Fri.

170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749-2243

Published each Wednesday by Haynes Publishing Co., 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749. Periodicals postage paid at Oberlin, Kan. 67749.

Phone: (785) 475-2206 Fax (785) 475-2800
E-mail: oberlin.herald@nwkansan.com

Nor'West Newspapers

STAFF

Steve Haynes editor
Stephanie DeCamp reporter
Mary Lou Olson society editor
Carolyn Kelley-Plotts proofreader, columnist
Joan Betts historian
Cynthia Haynes business manager
Kimberly Davis advertising manager
Pat Cozad want ads/circulation
Crista Sauvage advertising makeup

Official newspaper of Oberlin, Jennings, Norcat, Dresden and Decatur County. Member of the Kansas Press Association, National Newspaper Association, Colorado Press Association, Nebraska Press Association and Inland Press Association.

Subscriptions: One year, \$38 (tax included) in Decatur, Norton, Rawlins, Sheridan, Thomas and Red Willow counties; \$42 (tax included) elsewhere in Kansas; \$48 elsewhere in the U.S. Foreign subscriptions, \$50-\$250 (in U.S. dollars only) extra per year (except APO/FPO). POSTMASTER: Send change of address to 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749-2243.

