



EARL WATT
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QUOTE OF THE DAY

“Whatever you do will be insignificant, but it is very important that you do it.”

MAHATMA GANDHI (1869 - 1948)

House passes cell phone ban for students in class

Thank you to all the firefighters, both full time and volunteer, that have responded to the massive fires we have suffered. Thanks also to the first responders, farmers and other community members that have responded with tractors, food, and aid. It's been a statewide response with firefighters responding from over 17 fire departments from as far as the Kansas City and Wichita areas. The Kansas National Guard, Kansas Emergency Management, Fire Marshal's Office, Forestry Service, Department of Transportation and other state agencies have provided equipment, personnel, and other support. At least 10 aircraft took part but their support had to be limited due to the high wind conditions. The Kansas Insurance Department is ready to help with insurance claims questions, disputes or claim delays. You can contact the Insurance Department at 800-432-2484. My prayers go out to all of you that have suffered property losses and injuries.

Week six of the legislative session has ended following an intense three straight days of House floor debates and votes. The House voted on more than 100 bills during this period, the culmination of several weeks of committee hearings and testimony combined with our work over the interim. After we return, House committees will begin working the bills sent over from the Senate. Bills approved by both chambers will then have the differences between the House and Senate versions reconciled by conference committees. Then, each chamber will vote on the reconciled bill and those that survive will be sent to the Governor for her consideration. The bills left still have a long way to go before becoming law. Next week the House will on our version of the budget bill and House Bill 2745 dealing with property taxes.

Below are a few of the bills that passed out the House this week. More detailed information on each bill and other bills passed can be found by going to the Kansas Legislature website at kslegislature.org.

Sub bill for SB 281

Banning cell phone use during school hours, prohibiting school employees from communicating with students via social media platforms for official school purposes and providing certain exceptions and requiring the adoption of policies and procedures.

HB 2412

Increasing the criminal penalties for endangering a child less than six years of age.

HB 2537

Increasing the penalties for the crime of sexual extortion when an offender is 18 or older and the victim is less than 18. Creating the crimes of aggravated sexual extortion causing great bodily

GUEST COLUMN



Shannon Francis
125th District Representative

harm and aggravated sexual extortion causing death.

HB 2374

Creating the specialty practice student loan program for medical students.

HB 2594

Removing the connection to breach of privacy from the crime of blackmail related to threatened dissemination of videotape, photograph film or image of a person who is nude or engaged in sexual activity.

HB 2491

Requiring state agencies to report to the Secretary of State with the names of and addresses of noncitizens receiving public benefits.

HB 2453

Requiring applications for advance voting ballots be filed 14 days prior to election day and extending the time for transmittal of advance voting ballots to 22 days prior to an election and for voter registration 23 days prior to election day.

HB 2591

Authorizing financial institution to report suspected financial exploitation of an adult account holder and place a temporary hold on certain transactions.

HB 2489

Requiring school districts to provide fentanyl abuse education programs and maintain supplies of naloxone in each school.

HB 2555

Regulations concerning expenditures for the Rural Health Transformation Program.

HB 2655

This was a bill championed by Judge Maxwell of the Liberal Municipal court that would give municipal courts the ability to expunge convictions when a drug court participant had successfully completed the requirements of the program. This is an authorization that district courts currently have.



MARGARET THATCHER SAID...

County dysfunction not improving, and the resignations are starting

After fighting fires and putting in long hours last week protecting the citizens of Seward County, Chief Andrew Barkley has opted to step down.

No doubt more resignations are coming.

Why? I believe it's because some of these people were expecting to see more positive change at the county and have not yet seen it after three new commissioners were appointed to fill the slots of the previous three who also found themselves out of touch with the people.

If the new commissioners believed the massive tax increase was the only reason they were appointed, they are only putting a bandaid on a bleeding artery.

The mistake made by the previous commissioners was only receiving information from one prime source.

Former Commissioner Presephoni Fuller made that statement public one night when she told the public if they wanted to be informed, they should go "to the horses mouth" to get it.

Other remarks were made to defend decisions and processes that were clearly out of step with the public.

The new commissioners have taken a stand against the 17 mill increase, but they are neglecting to realize how that was developed and brought to fruition.

They are neglecting to see how previous commissioners signed documents they never should have signed.

Many of these decisions were made on advice from administration.

Surely with three new commissioners they wouldn't fall into that same trap, right?

So far, I would say the cheese always smells good until the trap comes down.

The county recently had a challenge of fires, and it seems a bit strange that after successfully guiding his staff through the emergency that Chief Barkley resigns.

While I'm sure he will take the high road, I have to wonder if the intrusion of the county administrator and county chair into the fray didn't come into play.

We will see how other staffers respond, but don't be surprised to see more resignations because the problem with Seward County wasn't a 17 mill tax increase or challenging fires but how we are administering the issues we face.

Carolyn Huddleston went the extra mile to reach out to the State of Kansas Department of Corrections Deputy Secretary of Adult and Community Based Services Megan Milner to see why pay raises are being approved locally because the misconception being spread is that these workers are not



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county workers and are paid by the state.

Except they aren't, according to Milner.

"JCAPS/Cimarron Basin staff are still county employees," she said. "KDOC's stance has always been that local county policies and procedures are still applicable to corrections staff."

County employees. Not state. And they are governed by the Seward County Commission despite the false efforts to state otherwise.

Even Seward County Chair Steve Helm had to ask, "Are you governing body?"

He should have known that. And he should have known that some of the out-of-control salaries do not align with other jobs within the county as required.

Yes, Seward County receives state dollars to help fund these positions, but that doesn't mean they can overextend others within the county. They are supposed to be in line.

But this commission is looking for answers from within, the same mistake the previous commissioners made.

In addition, last week the commission had a work session before their Thursday meeting to discuss the budget reductions to return to Revenue Neutral.

They reached consensus among themselves, and then placed the item on the agenda at the meeting to approve the amended budget, despite KSA 79-2929a requiring public notice 10 days prior and a public hearing.

So the public, without knowledge of the budget being on the agenda, without publication of the proposed budget and without a public hearing, approved the amended budget.

Why? After Counsel Forrest Rhodes asked if notice was required, Administrator April Warden informed the commission that she had talked to Mandy Patek in the Office of Accounts and Reports at the Kansas Department of Administration, and she said since the budget was a reduction, notice wasn't required.

That's not what 79-2929a says, and I tried to contact Ms. Patek twice to no avail and no returned call. I am curious to hear how the law seems to not apply in Seward County.

And while I am sure it does, just for a moment let's say notice wasn't required. With the public being locked out of discussions

on conditional use permits for wind farms, with the public ignored by the previous three commissioners on tax increases, and with evidence of disproportionate pay being allocated by administration, it would seem following the law anyway would have been the right thing to do.

New commissioners should be reading the room.

I know they haven't had a lot of time to acclimate, and that makes them prey for those who want to manipulate to protect the status quo.

And as long as we have decided to follow the same playbook, we will continue to make the same mistakes and govern in the same haphazard way.

The question remains today just as it did in December — who is really running Seward County? Is it a group of elected officials who are listening to their constituents? Or is it a rubber stamp of administrative advice that has been proven to be suspect at best. To this day there has never been a correction to the false statement made during the RNR hearings including when the DCP refund was completed.

These are easy, provable errors, and that doesn't even scratch the surface of how the books seem to be a mess and this commission in its new budget did not include a CFO.

This commission can still do the right thing and revisit the budget process and follow the law. This commission can still listen to the public and set the county on a positive path forward.

It was recently stated by a new commissioner that there has been a lot of negativity surrounding the county in the past two months.

Pointing out the truth is not was negative. Having to point it out and not correcting the reason why is what is negative.

When the doctor tells the patient he has cancer, that's not the doctor being negative. When the patient ignores the diagnosis, you can fully expect catastrophic results.

Until we are willing to deal with the root causes of the continuing sources of bad advice and leadership, we can expect more resignations, a continued effort to leave the public out of the discussions, and voters left looking for solutions.

This isn't a time for our elected officials to get defensive and bunker down. That didn't work well for the last commission. Instead, this is a time to get out of the bunker and seek input from the people.

A good faith effort has been made to see if the ship can be steered forward. But there is no excuses now that the iceberg is in plain sight and has been for quite some time.

Talk to the public. Read the room. Seek counsel that does not have a vested interest.

I trust the people of Seward County, and I have not given up on this commission.

Let's hope they have not given up on us.



THE POSTSCRIPT

Carrie Classon
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Sweeping confetti

My husband, Peter, and I have landed in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, and already the strange seems familiar again.

One of the things that impresses me every time I am here is the attention given to jobs that I don't always think of as needing a lot of attention. Masonry work is meticulous and crafted to last centuries. Cloth is woven one thread at a time, creating utterly unique works. Gardening is done with such patience and consistency that there are blooms every month of the year. But this morning, I was noticing the street sweepers.

The street sweepers are legion. I have no idea what their actual numbers are, but in the center of the old town, where we stay, you cannot walk down a street from the first light of morning until well after dark without encountering a person dressed in red, with a homemade broom and a sturdy dustpan affixed to a stick. Litter does not stand a chance in this town. Stray leaves are corralled as they fall. And, to me, the most amazing thing is how they sweep up the confetti.

In San Miguel, there are a lot of reasons to celebrate. There are weddings every weekend, the city throws a party every week, and quinceañeras—the special 15th birthday party celebrations for girls in enormous poofy dresses—occur nearly every day. And most of these events involve confetti.

But between Valentine's Day and Easter, cascarones are sold on the street by the boxful. Cascarones are just ordinary eggs with the insides blown out, filled with confetti. Children throw them at each other. Lovers smash them over each other's heads. Everyone runs and laughs, hurling confetti-filled eggs at one another. It is a huge amount of fun. It is also terribly messy.

And so, every evening without fail, the street sweepers are out, sweeping every fleck of confetti and eggshell off the streets, a job that would be tricky under any circumstances, but is made much more difficult because the streets are made of brick and cobblestones.

They sweep up after parades and wedding processions. After the young quinceañera has hiked up her hoop skirt and moved on (usually revealing a pair of sensible sneakers beneath her voluminous skirts), the sweepers move in.

This morning, I was out earlier than usual, and I saw a pickup truck filled with street sweepers. There was a white fence around the pickup bed, and the sweepers were standing in the moving truck, talking and laughing as they were deposited at whatever street corner they were scheduled to start work. And I thought how much I have to learn from the street sweepers.

It is easy to sweep up the big messes. A lot of folks do it, in one way or another. They get paid for doing the bare minimum and that is the end of it. But to do a job—particularly a job that few people truly appreciate—to do that job really well takes a special kind of dedication and, I believe, repays the sweeper in a special way.

Showing up earlier than absolutely necessary, smiling at the person I am working with, doing a bit more than is required just to make the next person's work a little easier—there is an intrinsic value to these things that brings joy and a sense of accomplishment.

The sweepers show me the value of a job well done, whether one is creating something that will last for decades, or sweeping up the confetti that will surely fall again later that day.

To see photos, check out CarrieClassonAuthor on Facebook or visit CarrieClasson.com.



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