

# OPINION

**THE HUTCHINSON NEWS**

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**EDITORIAL**

## Spring speaking

Their spring break's a good time to tell lawmakers what we think

Spring is in and the Legislature is out, giving Kansans two good reasons to celebrate the month of April.

After a legislative session that saw a flurry of questionable bills and various attempts to fundamentally alter many long-standing Kansas priorities, the Kansas Legislature can't do much more damage – at least for the time being. However, lawmakers will reconvene on May 8 for a wrap-up session, when some of the most critical work still will be ironed out – specifically, a tax and budget plan.

The time between now and then is an opportunity Kansans shouldn't let slip away.

As lawmakers return to their hometowns and settle temporarily into daily life, local constituents can – and should – bend elected officials' ears with concerns about this session's legislation and offer instruction on how best to finish the state's legislative work.

To let this opportunity pass by in silence is to cede it to lobbyists and special interest groups that will not wait to offer their own tainted advice and self-serving ideas for the future of our state.

In fact, this week the Topeka Capital-Journal reported that some legislative members likely will spend part of their down time participating in the American Legislative Exchange Council Spring Task Force Sum-

mit in Oklahoma City. Speaker of the House Ray Merrick and Senate President Susan Wagle both serve on the board of ALEC, which has become notorious for creating "model" legislation that lawmakers can implement in their home states.

Those who attend the conference will come back with their heads full of ideas about what is right for Kansans – all of it put there by people who don't live, work, pay taxes or raise families in Kansas. Such groups aren't shy about telling lawmakers what they want or expect, and they will spend the legislative spring break helping lawmakers clearly see things their way.

Kansans likewise should let go of their reticence and use this time to tell lawmakers what is expected from them.

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What question do you want to ask state legislators?

The Kansas Legislature finished its regular session and will begin the wrap-up session May 8. Major tax and spending decisions are pending. The News will send a survey to about 30 members of the Senate and House of Representatives from this region, and we want to know what questions you want answered. Legislators' survey responses will appear in the April 28 edition of The News. Please send your questions by April 15 to: jprobst@hutchnews.com; or by fax, (620) 662-4186. They also can be mailed to: The Hutchinson News, 300 W. Second Ave., P.O. Box 190, Hutchinson KS 67504-0190.

**COLUMNIST**

## Obama's improper remark

Dear Barry:  
 Ordinarily, I'd address you as Mr. Obama or Mr. President, in deference to your office. But we need to have us a guy-to-guy chat here, so I hope you'll excuse the familiarity, because I just have to ask:

Barry, brotherman, what the heck were you thinking? Did you really call California Attorney General Kamala Harris "by far the best-looking attorney general in the country" last week at a Democratic fundraiser in the Bay Area? You weren't, like, nursing a cold and snockered on Robitussin or something? You didn't lose a bet with Joe Biden? You actually said that, of your own free will?

Dude. Wow.

Yes, MSNBC helpfully reminds us that you've also complimented men on their looks, dubbing Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Shaun Donovan, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and the entire Pittsburgh Penguins hockey team "good-looking guys."

Want to know how much that helps you here? What's the smallest measurable fraction this side of zero?

A man, particularly a powerful man, cannot always speak of (or to) a woman, as he would one of the fellas.

This is what you forgot and what the folks who keep saying it was "just a compliment" don't quite get.

Is that a double standard? Yes. You darn betcha. A certain columnist who happens to be my mother's oldest son has, in years past, identified this as something he calls the Goliath Principle, after Wilt Chamberlain's famous observation that "nobody roots for Goliath."

The Principle holds that, wherever there is an imbalance of power – white vs. black, boss vs. employee, big guy vs. small, man vs. woman – a double standard is an automatic and inevitable byproduct. As nobody roots for Goliath, so are those with more power always constrained in the things our unwritten societal rules allow them to say or do to those who have less. The maid who snaps at her boss is cheeky; the boss who snaps at her maid is overbearing. The small man who hits the big one is brave (or suicidal). The big man who hits the small one is a bully.

And the woman who compliments her male boss's looks might

be a kiss-up or a flirt, but the male boss who does the reverse is a leech or a creep or, at the very least, the embodiment of sexism that imprisons a woman's entirety behind miscellaneous physical attributes given by God and enhanced by Max Factor. But a woman is more than her looks.

This is a truth we heterosexual men tend to stumble on. Years ago, a woman colleague asked me about famous women I found attractive. Stupidly, I began to reel off a list. It included Marina Sirtis, whom I called "an extraordinary woman."

My colleague flexed an eyebrow and asked what made her "extraordinary."

And I was majorly busted, man, because I knew next to nothing about the "Star Trek: The Next Generation" star – certainly nothing that would make her "extraordinary" – except that she's gorgeous and becomes more so when she wears her "Counselor Troi" contact lenses, the ones that turn her eyes into dark, liquid pools of compassion and you gaze into them and feel yourself falling in and know there is nothing you wouldn't tell her, no secret you wouldn't ... um ... wouldn't ...

What were we talking about again?

Oh yeah. Women and their looks and the fact that the smart man avoids discussion of same. Especially if he presides over a Cabinet whose gender diversity is comparable to that of the club that meets in Bart Simpson's treehouse.

Nor is political embarrassment your only worry. The same day you praised Harris' looks, the first lady had a faux pas of her own. She called herself a "single mother." I'm thinking it was no accident.

So, Barry, guy-to-guy, I leave you with this: Citiflowers is a florist near the White House. They're open till 6 and take all major credit cards.

Email Leonard Pitts at lpitts@miamiherald.com.



Leonard Pitts



Calif. Attorney General Kamala Harris



NICHOLAS JOHNSON © 4-07-13 HOUSTON CHRONICLE

**COLUMNIST**

## Springtime on the farm

The arrival of spring necessitates a trip to the family farm near New Cambria to see how the old home place survived the winter.

We have had worse winters, as the old-timers might say, but thanks to a foot of March snow the Solomon River Valley resembles an uninterrupted sea of green throughout an area known for fertile farmland and expansive fields of wheat.

The old farm passed its 113th birthday this year, and in these early days of spring the 70-year-old lilac bushes are budding and the 50-year-old tulips my mother planted a half-century ago are showing evidence of life.

As I drove up the driveway, I reflected on the history of a farm that was platted 139 years ago, in 1873. Soon thereafter, President Ulysses S. Grant signed a homestead deed to the property to the Cox family, who maintained ownership for 61 years (until 1934). Two more owners would precede the Shanks, who purchased the property in 1962.

Much has changed since I grew up here, but much remains the same.

Shelterbelts, a term farmers used to describe rows of trees on the boundary lines of farms, were common a half-century ago but are disappearing more each year. On the other hand, 84 trees encircle the Shank farm – about the same number that I remember from my youth. Perhaps a previous owner thought a large number of trees would provide a blanket around the house to protect the home from those cold north winds during the winter.

North winds combined with rattling windows in the living room of the house, along with unexplained creaks in the walls, providing a whistling sound and enough noise to awaken the dead from a deep sleep.

Farms in the old neighborhood were either built adjacent to the road or, if the farmer yearned for

**Community columnist**



Richard Shank

a little privacy, he might position the farmstead a few hundred feet up a driveway. The Shank farms sits at the end of a 600-foot driveway. Perhaps those hearty pioneers needed a little privacy to combat those fast-paced times of Model T Fords, electric lights and gas stoves.

Effective at the conclusion of the 2013 wheat harvest, the Shank farm will convert to no-till farming, which translates to less tillage



Courtesy photo

**Shank family farm near New Cambria**

of the soil and literally planting the next crop in the stubble left from the previous harvest. More and more farmers have made the switch during the past 10 years, and I can't help but laugh at what my ancestors might say to know there is less plowing, disking and harrowing than in years past.

This spring we are going to dust off the 45-year-old John Deere 4020 tractor. Yes, it needs a dusting after spending the winter in the 94-year-old barn in anticipation of a major facelift including a paint job, decals, a seat, front tires and new side emblems.

With that accomplished and the '68 tractor restored to new, it might be hard to drive it across a dusty field and get a few specks of dirt on the hood.

**WESTERN FRONT**

### Educate, don't imprison

Sen. Rand Paul wants to introduce a bill that would decriminalize personal use of pot possession.

As he stated, the last two presidents smoked pot and admitted to it. Evidently it didn't affect them in any ill ways because they became presidents of the USA.

If they would have been caught, they wouldn't have been president; they would have had a criminal record the rest of their lives. They wouldn't have been able to get college loans and it would have affected their ability to get a good job.

We want and need our young to get educated so we can compete with other countries on technology and creation. Why would we want to make them criminals and ruin their lives because of a small mistake?

Decriminalizing pot does not make it legal; it just protects people from laws that have destroyed so many. The computer was invented by pot smokers in a garage – by very brilliant minds. Millions are arrested from simple possession, sitting in jails and prisons for simple pot possession. States all over the country are legalizing and decriminalizing pot for the ill. It saves the government billions of dollars in arrests and incarceration.

I agree with Sen. Rand Paul: Give our young a chance at life. Live free, America. Let's educate instead of incarcerate.

DESIRAE ANDERSON  
 Hutchinson

### Pandora's box opening

I would like to ask both sides of the homosexual marriage debate one question, but before I do, I would have you recall a debate that two U.S. congressmen had some 20 years ago on the TV show "Face the Nation."

The debate was between U.S. Reps. Steve Largent and Barney Frank. The question Largent asked Franks was: If homosexual marriage was legalized nationally by the U.S. Supreme Court, what would keep other alternate sexual lifestyles from receiving the same legitimacy? Franks' answer was that it just wouldn't happen.

I beg to differ with Frank. Under the equal protection clause of the Constitution, nothing could keep a polygamist or an amoralist (those who want a marriage union to consist of multiple partners of both sexes) or adults legally marrying minors, from becoming legitimate unions in the eyes of the law.

The fact is, if traditional marriage is made devoid of its unique legal status, then all other forms of union are considered acceptable according to federal law.

If you know anything about ancient Greek history, then you know that Greece's legal system collapsed under the weight of trying to settle the legal ramifications of alternate sexual lifestyles.

As a nation, we had better think

John Deere manufactured 51,000 Model 4020 tractors between 1965 and 1971, and today they are rated as the nation's No. 1 collector tractors, ahead of the Farmall M.

The neighbors are hoping that the drought and record heat wave are over; and meteorologists are now saying that we are starting the "cycle" out of the cycle, whatever that means. Actually, we missed the annual planting of potatoes on St. Patrick's Day as a result of wet weather, but that is a nice problem to have, considering what we have been through the past two years.

To find out what is happening in the old neighborhood, I am reading the Salina Journal for ads about auctions, hoping to take in a farm sale, reputed to be a major social event in rural America. After all, there is no better place to visit

with all the neighbors, catch up on the gossip, and purchase something you can't live without. Years ago, at a neighborhood farm sale, a farmer actually bought a pile of trash that was intended for the local landfill.

This year, the Kansas Legislature took no action on legislation designed to repeal corporate farming laws put in place eight decades ago by Gov. Alf Landon. Perhaps they made a wise decision, and let us hope that the old neighborhood will continue to produce enough farm kids who will carry on the tradition of the family farm, a custom that started with the establishment of the state of Kansas in 1861.

So let us hope the April showers bring May flowers and a bumper wheat drop in June.

Driving down the driveway to return home to Hutchinson, I caught myself looking in the rear-view mirror and saying, "One can go home again."

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long and hard about the consequences of eradicating the status of traditional marriage before we act.

LARRY POPOVICH  
 Pratt

### Liberal invasion

The intrusion into our lives by well-meaning progressives has become pervasive. Who would have believed that the mayor of a major American city would try to mandate the size of the soda you could buy or that an appointed 15-person panel in Washington, D.C., would dictate the medical treatment you may receive.

Progressive liberals have one thing in common: They know what's better for you than you do. They give us utopian promises backed by trillion-dollar deficits, crony capitalism and a stagnant economy. All they ask in return for "utopia" is your freedom, while exempting themselves from the same rules the rest of us are mandated to live by.

Will New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg or the Hollywood elite be placed on a waiting list to see the doctor or denied medical treatment? Will they be forced to walk down streets with guards who are not permitted to carry semiautomatic weapons? Of course not, but these same elitists will demand this of you and your family.

GREGORY H. BONTRAGER  
 Hutchinson