Casino withdrawal affects community, state government

by Mary Rupert

The withdrawal of the application for a casino at the Kansas Speedway last week by Kansas Entertainment may have a ripple effect on the state government and the local community.

State legislators already have been talking about drastic cuts in projects because of the faltering economy, and with an expected decline in future state revenues because of the delay in the casino opening, they may look for even deeper cuts.

“We’ve got to cut $4 billion in spending over the next 2.5 years,” said State Sen. Chris Steineger, D-6th Dist. “I believe it is possible without a tax hike. That will be my position.”

Besides trimming spending, the Legislature may look at selling the state’s assets, including the University of Kansas Hospital in Kansas City, Kansas, Steineger said. State-owned land around the edge of the Edwards Center campus in Johnson County, an extension of the University of Kansas, also could be sold, he said. He also mentioned selling...
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Forbes Field, state-owned property in Topeka that is vacant.

Selling KU Medical Center to a for-profit business would generate a lot of property tax in Wyandotte County for property that is currently tax-exempt, Steineger pointed out.

School districts here are preparing themselves for potential cuts in their budgets after the first of the year. Piper Superintendent Steve Adams told his board Dec. 8 that state officials could be thinking about cutting the education budgets for kindergarten through 12th grades, even though that area has been protected from budget cuts in the past.

The $705 million casino project in Wyandotte County was withdrawn Dec. 5 because of the financial markets, according to the developers, a partnership of the International Speedway Corp. and the Cordish Co. Developers said they were prepared to launch the project in phases, but the contract they made with the state called for them to complete the entire project by 2011. The developers are receiving their $25 million privilege fee back from the state.

Kansas is keeping the $25 million privilege fee from the Boot Hill casino in Dodge City, being built by Butler National Service Corp. of Olathe, according to a spokesman.

That casino project moved forward Dec. 5.

In a statement, Kansas Entertainment developers said they would reapply for the casino project here with a proposal to build it in phases at the same site. The reapplication process is expected to take at least nine months. The process will be reopened from the start, and different casino sites and plans could be proposed by other developers. A lengthy process, with changes in the economy as the months elapsed, has been cited as a drawback by some.

"My biggest problem is with the Cordish group," Sen. Steineger said. "They really led us on. Even four to six weeks ago, they were saying they were ready to start, and they didn't do it."

He said the developers knew all along the financial markets were "headed south" and they have been "a little disingenuous." He said he felt that the state was misled.

He said he didn't think the Kansas system of state-owned and operated casinos, and contracts with developers, was at fault.

"The legislation was crafted with a lot of public input," he said. Lobbyists for casino developers did not express any problems then with the state ownership and contract process, he said.
Books, music live on through ages

On days when I despair of getting everything done that I had planned both for the day and for my life, I comfort myself by thinking of Percy Bysshe Shelley’s short poem “Ozymandias.” The poem recounts a desert scene where a traveler confronts the spectacle of large broken pieces of a large statue amidst drifting sand. On the remnants of a broken piece of stone, there is an inscription that declares:

“My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!”
But, the traveler observes that:

“Nothing beside remains: round the decay of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,
The lone and level sands stretch far away.”

I was introduced to this poem in my middle school years, thanks to a wonderful teacher, and it impressed me so much that it has remained with me all my life. When I get overwhelmed with my tasks and feel like I’m spinning my wheels hopelessly, I think of old Ozymandias and smile. He managed to conquer a host of people and build huge monuments, but in the end, all of his work came to nothing but lumps in sand. So, if I don’t quite measure up with my relatively minor tasks, I might feel frustrated today, but in an eternity of struggle, it means little.

And in the end, I don’t really give the proper respect due to our world’s leaders, military and political, that I perhaps should. There have been many great generals and conquering heads of state in my relatively brief lifetime. However, those who have influenced me most tend to be gentler folk, who may never have given an order or picked up a weapon. Think of Shakespeare, Leonardo da Vinci, Bach, Beethoven, Rembrandt and many other writers, artists and musicians. They aren’t remembered because they physically overwhelmed anybody; they are remembered because of the beauty and wisdom they created. They haven’t damaged bodies and razed the foundations of huge buildings. Their words, pictures and music soothed our souls and inspired us to accomplish the better deeds in our lives.

When I left my remote Kansas farm home to go to the University of Kansas, my world opened up, and I came into contact with many exciting new ideas and influences. I began learning about people and movements espoused by fellow students. My roommate, an honor student from Wichita, introduced me to her interests in music. I learned to appreciate the beauty of operatic singing as well as folk singing, ballets and modern dance. I spent weekends going to see various performing artists brought to Strong Hall by the University.

One of the artists I learned to love through my roommate’s record collection was Odetta. She had a powerful voice enhanced by classical training. As I listened to her singing lullabies such as “All the Pretty Horses,” I was saddened to learn that it was a lullaby sung to children of the Master by African American nannies separated from their own babies to take care of the children of those men who claimed to own them. When she sang “No More Auction Block for Me,” tears came to my eyes. And, I felt transformed when she sang “Ain’t No Grave Can Hold My Body Down.” The pathos in her voice, its depth, its power touched my soul. She touched others. She was a major influence on Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Harry Belafonte, Janis Joplin and even Bruce Springsteen. She was a favorite of Martin Luther King. Her music provided the soundtrack for the Civil Rights Movement of the 20th century. She died Dec. 2, but had last performed on Oct. 25.

Her music and soul will live on in the hearts and minds of those who heard her. It will resound down through the ages and be there long after her body has returned to the earth.
Parman, Waldschmidt to have alternative break

Sixty-three University of Kansas students will spend a week during winter break volunteering at sites across the United States.

KU's student-run Alternative Breaks program centers on service-learning trips that provide opportunities to include volunteer efforts in a student's educational experience. Following their selection for the program, students attend two-hour weekly class sessions to prepare for their trip.

Students will work Jan. 5-9 with agencies in Arizona, Florida, Illinois, North Carolina and Texas that focus on human rights, health care, environmental preservation and rehabilitation, education and help for people with disabilities. The program costs participants $275 and covers transportation, housing and meals.

Natasha L. Parman, of Derby, daughter of Craig and Dena Parman and senior sport science major, will be working with United Cerebral Palsy of Metropolitan Dallas in Texas.

Derby student Heidi R. Waldschmidt, daughter of Gary and Dianne Waldschmidt and senior human biology major, will be working as a site leader at Give Kids the World in Kissimmee, Fla.
IN OTHER'S WORDS

End of an era

The Lawrence Journal-World said this in a recent editorial:

Being the chancellor of a major state-aided university is a tough, mentally and physically challenging job. The average tenure of a chancellor or university president these days is between five and six years.

Robert Hemenway announced Monday he intends to step down from the Kansas University chancellorship effective next June after 14 years in this high-pressure position.

Hemenway, 67, came to Mount Oread from senior positions at the University of Kentucky, and prior to that, the University of Oklahoma. He is bound to be tired.

He has done a good job for KU. In fact, in a recent survey about the state of the university, KU alumni and friends said the school had enjoyed successful years recently, both athletically and academically, but they were concerned about the future and the vision and leadership of the institution.

Hemenway will be leaving the chancellor's office with the best wishes and appreciation of those interested in the welfare of the school. He is a good man who has conducted himself in a manner that reflects credit on the university.

He is well thought of by his peers, as evidenced by his recent service on the National Collegiate Athletic Association board and as a member of the executive committee of the American Association of Universities.

It always is better to leave a position, such as a chancellorship, a bit earlier than expected rather than to stay too long. It's far better to leave while on top rather than being engaged in a nasty or ugly public debate.

It is interesting, if not unprecedented, that KU, Kansas State University and Pittsburg State University all are looking for new leaders.

Hemenway plans to take a sabbatical next academic year to work on a book he has had to delay and then return to the KU campus possibly to fill an endowed chair that would allow him to teach and do scholarly research.

The timing of Hemenway's announcement should provide ample time to recruit and select a replacement to move into Strong Hall soon after Hemenway's departure.

Much will be written about Hemenway's resignation and his record at KU, but now the important — more than important, but rather, critical — task is to search the country for an outstanding individual to help lead the university to even greater heights as one of this nation's truly outstanding state-aided academic institutions.

The challenge is great, but so are the opportunities with visionary, inspiring, courageous leadership.

The Monday announcement was not totally unexpected, but it probably came as a surprise to most KU alumni and friends. As noted above, Hemenway has done a good job for the university and state, with record enrollments and sizable increases in research funding. He deserves thanks and appreciation for his work and commitment to KU.
Thomas creates official Kansas state ornament

LAWRENCE — The official Kansas ornament on the White House Christmas tree this year was designed by Greg Thomas, professor and chair of the design department at the University of Kansas.

Thomas, who also designed the state’s new pink Driven to Cure license plates that benefit the KU Cancer Center, was chosen by Sen. Sam Brownback, R-Kan., to design the state’s decoration.

The ornament, a 13-inch sphere, was designed to be viewable from either above or below because placement on the tree, a 20-foot Fraser fir grown in North Carolina, was not known in advance.

The tree is displayed in the White House’s Blue Room and decorated with ornaments made by artists from across the United States.

The top of the ornament showcases a blue Kansas sky; the bottom features the Kansas sunflower. At the equator, a white ribbon is accented by seven photographic icons of the state’s top industries, including agriculture, aerospace, biosciences and education.

Thomas attended the Holiday Open House on Dec. 2 at the White House.

The National Christmas Tree Association has presented the official White House tree since 1966.
PHS grad helps plan KU variety show

A Paola High School graduate helped to select five skits for Rock Chalk Revue, the annual variety show produced by University of Kansas students.

Mike Thompson, a senior in communication studies and English preparing to study law, is a member of the show's advisory board.

He helped choose the skits for the 60th anniversary show scheduled to take place March 5-7 next year at the Lied Center.

The board announced the winners Nov. 24 at a ceremony at Liberty Hall, in Lawrence.

Thompson is the son of Jeff and Shelley Thompson.

—Brian McCoy
Western Insurance Company is placed in the history books at KU

BY MICHAEL POMMIER
The Fort Scott Tribune

Memories of the Western Insurance have been preserved thanks to the son and daughter of Clifton Crain Otto.

The Clifton Crain Otto Collection of Western Insurance Companies was gifted to the Kenneth Spencer Research Library at the University of Kansas by Otto’s son David Otto of Fort Mill, S.C. and daughter Marie Kliwer of Omaha, Neb.

The collection consists of career papers of Clifton Crain Otto contain records of the Western Insurance Companies of Fort Scott. Included are histories of the Western Insurance Companies, as well as annual reports, company publications, event programs, news and journal articles regarding the Western and Otto, photographs, and other memorabilia bearing the Western Insurance Companies' name and logo.

The items come mainly from Otto’s time in leadership with the Western Insurance Companies, but also include a 1921 signed original letter from the founder, Oscar Rice.

Also included are records of honors received by Otto post-retirement, as well as his 1997 obituary.

Clifton Crain Otto was born March 1, 1911 in Bates County, Mo. and moved to Fort Scott in 1917. Otto went to work for the Western Insurance Companies in 1928. Following a series of promotions Otto became President of the Western Insurance Companies in 1955. In Otto’s 14 years as president, the Western quadrupled in size, growing

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from a small company to one of the nation’s premier casualty insurance carriers. In 1969, Otto was elected Vice Chairman of the Board and Executive Committee Chairman, serving on the board until his retirement in 1976. Otto authored a history the Western titled The Western Story, which was published in 1976. In 1986, Otto was honored again being named to the Kansas Insurance Education Foundation’s Hall of Fame. Otto died in Fort Scott on June 6, 1997.

To access an inventory of the collection online visit spencer.lib.ku.edu, then click Search The Library’s Holdings to perform a search. Next click New Search Manuscript and Archival Collections Finding Aids, in the Search Finding Aids box type “Western Insurance Companies” with the quotation marks included.