The Kansas City Star, on Virginia Tech shootings: (4/17/07)

Once again, an April day has brought horrifying images of panicked students and gunfire victims rushed into ambulances.

Virginia Polytechnic Institute on Monday became the site of the nation’s most deadly mass shooting, with dozens dead and injured.

The tragedy will be engraved in the nation’s memory as deeply as the senseless killings at Columbine High School in Colorado in April 1999.

Much remains unknown about what happened and why. What’s definite, however, is that college administrators, law enforcement authorities and students themselves must take a hard look at safety on their campuses.

Students at Virginia Tech, a stately campus near Roanoke with 25,000 students and a prestigious engineering program, are right to question why many on campus had not learned about a shooting in a dormitory before more gunfire broke out in an engineering building two hours later.

Lynn Bretz, director of university communications for the University of Kansas, notes that most campuses are public places. They have many buildings, often with numerous entrances.

“It’s really impossible to screen everyone who’s on campus,” Bretz said. “You have to have a system in place to respond immediately should there be an event.”

Campus security forces must be as well-trained as any city police department. They are often responsible for densely populated communities whose residents tend to move around often and in unpredictable patterns.

Monday’s tragedy highlights the need for cooperation between campus security forces and local police agencies.

The immediate response is horror at the extent of the violence, and the deepest sorrow for the loss of innocent lives in a setting meant to prepare students for life, not for death.
Sixteen seniors at the University of Kansas received awards for their presentations at the 10th annual Undergraduate Research Symposium, held April 14 in the Kansas Union. A KU faculty member was also honored.

Award winners were selected from among 73 undergraduates who presented research projects on topics ranging from child welfare to DNA sequences. Winners were announced at a banquet following the symposium.

Mark Nesbitt-Daly, associate director of the University Honors Program, and John Augusto, research training coordinator for the Office of the Vice Provost for Research, presided at the awards banquet.

From Wyandotte County, listed with sponsor:
Dole Award recipient says political dialogue could use more humor

LAWRENCE, Kan. (AP) - Political dialogue needs a little more humor like what Bob Dole used to disarm critics and amuse supporters, Howard Baker told a Lied Center audience Sunday night.

Baker, a former U.S. senator, presidential candidate and President Ronald Reagan's chief of staff, was in Lawrence to receive the Dole Leadership Award. It is named for Dole, a former U.S. senator from Kansas, and is presented annually to someone who promotes politics as an honorable profession.


"There was no place in the wedding ceremony that we had to support the same person for president," Baker told a University of Kansas crowd of about 750 Sunday night.

But it's too early for anyone to really know how the 2008 campaign will unfold, said Baker, who ran for president in 1980. There are so many candidates, he said, and each one who stays in the race for the duration will be under intense scrutiny.

"Anybody who says they can tell you how the election is going to turn out is not realistic," he said. "I'm going to try to get a Republican to win."

Baker said he recalls feeling like a youngster before his first date with Kassebaum Baker, long after the death of his first wife.

"I stood on one foot and then the other and she came to the door: 'I feel like a 12-year-old.' She said, 'You don't look like a 12-year-old.'" The two were married in 1996, and Baker called their relationship "one of the great things that's happened in my life."

Baker told the audience he was proud of his role as ranking Republican on the Senate Watergate Committee. Initially, he said, he underestimated the seriousness of President Nixon's transgressions.

Baker retired from the Senate in 1985, but was recalled to Washington in 1987 to serve as Reagan's chief of staff. Later he was appointed by George W. Bush as ambassador to Japan.

Construction is under way at the University of Tennessee of the Baker Center, which will be dedicated to bipartisan political dialogue. He has donated a large collection of photographs that serve as a diary of his nearly 40 years in public life.
Roberts: Eastern Wyandotte could be envy of the Midwest

By PAT ROBERTS
U.S. Senator, Kansas

Readers of the Kansan see every day the exciting changes and phenomenal growth taking place in western Wyandotte County. Since its selection by the International Speedway Corporation in 1997, western Kansas City, Kan., has been transformed from open fields and pasture land to the site of the most dynamic economic growth in recent Midwest history. I am proud of the monumental efforts of the Unified Government, Kansas City, Kan., Chamber of Commerce and many others in overseeing the creation of the Speedway and Village West. Western KCK is truly the envy of cities all across the nation.

While we can all be proud of the new stature Western Wyandotte County enjoys, we must not forget the many opportunities which exist in the eastern end of the county. The longstanding commitments of General Motors, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the Unified Government, the University of Kansas Medical Center, The University of Kansas...

Please see ROBERTS/Page 8
Hospital and others have sustained KCK for many years. Yet, for most of that time, attractive housing options eluded those wanting to work and live in KCK.

Many local non-profit agencies and church organizations have stepped forward to create the type of housing that fosters the support services that transform a cluster of neighborhoods into a thriving community.

One such organization is City Vision Ministries. In their 15-year history, City Vision, under the leadership of John Harvey, has invested time, talent and considerable resources in revitalizing housing on the eastern side of Wyandotte County. From former drug houses to historic buildings, City Vision Ministries has created beautiful homes for an economically diverse clientele.

I am proud to have partnered with City Vision in transforming southeastern Wyandotte County. In 2005, I secured $500,000 in the Housing and Urban Development congressional spending bill to provide sewers, water lines and other critical infrastructure components in City Vision’s Mission Cliffs community, at 39th and Thompson in the Rosedale neighborhood. Public-private partnerships like this are crucial to revitalization projects where there are unusually high cleanup and site preparation costs. I am delighted to be participating in the dedication of this first phase Friday.

The second and third phases will complete the 115-home community within walking distance of KUMED and the KU Hospital, two of Wyandotte County’s largest employers. Mission Cliffs will serve as the first high-quality home community in Rosedale in more than four decades, and will provide first rate housing options for employees and their families looking to establish roots in southeast Wyandotte County.

In addition to expanded housing options, I am working with our local leaders to solidify our place at the bioscience table. Several years ago, I asked the Kansas Legislature to approve a $120 million bonding measure that was utilized in constructing the Biomedical Research Center on the KU Med Center campus. In January of this year, our efforts culminated in the dedication of this state-of-the-art, 205,000-square-foot facility. Initially, some 55 researchers will share the building, with several floors dedicated to specific areas of research, including liver disease, reproductive sciences, neuroscience and proteomics.

Kansas City, Kan., is truly fortunate to be associated with an impressive group of bioscience visionaries who understand that the city can become a formidable player in the field of scientific research. And I was pleased to support their efforts by securing $1.8 million in federal funds for the Hougland Brain Imaging Center at the KU Medical School. The Hougland Brain Imaging Center is located just a few steps to the east of the new Biomedical Research Center and is one of only a handful of centers in the United States with magnetoencephalography (MEG) and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) capability. These federal funds were used to purchase the state-of-the-art equipment needed for cutting-edge research in traumatic brain injury, stroke, autism, epilepsy, depression, development and learning disabilities.

So often you hear about the negative stories associated with congressionally-directed spending. Yet, I know such funds have helped create jobs and improve the lives and futures of the folks who call KCK home.

I am looking forward to a continued partnership with the Unified Government, KUMED, KU Hospital, City Vision Ministries and all the dedicated organizations that have made the commitment to make eastern Wyandotte County the new envy of the Midwest. In case you haven’t heard, the DOT is hot!

Sen. Pat Roberts, a Republican from Dodge City, Kan., is currently serving his second term in the U.S. Senate.
Governor Kathleen Sebelius gave the Johnson County Education and Research Triangle the green light when she signed a bill Thursday authorizing it to go before county voters. But it's not a done deal yet.

The responsibility of putting it on a ballot rests on the shoulders of the county commission, which hasn't been as openly supportive of the research triangle.

Annabeth Surbaugh, Johnson County Commission Chairwoman, said even though the research triangle represents "creative, out of the box" thinking, the triangle advocacy council — those supporting the project — have a lot of work to do before she would support a ballot initiative.

"I think they've got to get economic studies to see the economic benefits to Johnson County," she said of research triangle supporters.

Surbaugh added that it was up to those supporters to...
Out of the box, into the education triangle

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figure out how county voters would be accountable for the project.

The proposed research triangle would cost more than $75 million. It would include the University of Kansas Edwards Campus Business, Engineering and Technology Center in Overland Park, the KU Cancer Research Center proposed for northeast Johnson County and the Kansas State University National Food Security Research Institute slated for Olathe.

Mary Birch, spokeswoman for the Triangle Advocacy Council, said that an economic impact study for Johnson County will occur in the next four to six weeks. The universities would be asked to refine their plans over the summer. In the fall the council would present the research triangle to county groups and citizens to gain community support for the project, she said.

Then, Birch said, they will meet with community, civic and local elected leaders to gauge interest for the project.

“At that point,” she said, “we hope to have a plan because we want to have as much support as possible.”

The legislation, Senate Bill 115, allows the plan to be financed by a 2/10 cent sales tax or a 2 mill property tax or a combination of the two. The tax chosen would generate $15 million a year. It does not have a sunset date.

“Once we have the economic costs,” Birch said, “we’ll know what financing plan might work best.”

Surbaugh said she would support putting the research triangle on a ballot “if it economically makes sense for Johnson County.”

The financing, according to state Sen. Julia Lynn, R—Olathe, is the biggest problem with the bill. Lynn has concerns that taxpayers, who already pay high taxes to live in Johnson County, won’t get that investment paid back to them. She described the research triangle proposal as a “want and not a need” for local leaders.

“The bill is fraught with a lot of open ended, open check book mentality,” she said. “I think our citizens will see that and vote it down.”

Lynn also said that county commissioners need to show some leadership and decide what the priority should be for Johnson County.

The research triangle bill was initially paired with the sheriff’s proposed tax for more jail space and a crime lab. County commissioners chose to stay neutral on the research triangle and openly supported public safety initiatives. However, in her State of the County address, Surbaugh was critical of a separate public safety initiative Denning sought in Topeka.

Surbaugh said public safety had always been the first priority of the county commission. To get both initiatives passed by voters, Surbaugh said, they couldn’t compete with one another.

“The goal would be put the issues on the ballot at separate times with public safety taken care of first,” she said.

The county commission has two years from July 1, the date the bill will be enacted, to put the research triangle initiative on a ballot. That could happen by November 2008, Birch said.

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Tax proposal leaves questions

The proposal for a Johnson County education research triangle initially was given a 50-50 chance of success in Topeka. That was when it was proposed a few months ago. The plan, however, received enough Legislators’ support and Gov. Kathleen Sebelius signed it into law Thursday.

It’s far from becoming a reality. We have questions to be answered before we can support this initiative.

The triangle will consist of the K-State bioscience research center in Olathe, the KU Edwards Campus in Overland Park and a proposed KU Cancer Center research unit in northeast Johnson County. The law allows for either a sales tax or mill levy increase or both to finance the triangle, estimated at $75 million.

At first glance, this proposal seems great - who wouldn’t support an endeavor that increases educational opportunities and creates a new economic growth stream in the county? But the proposal deserves more than a glance because of the complex components involved to make it work.

One vital question unanswered is whether this tax will sunset. Its backers include several county heavyweights, including former Kansas Senate President Dick Bond, Olathe’s Ron Wimmer, Mary Birch and banker Bob Regnier. They have been reluctant to place a sunset on this tax.

This is troublesome. If what supporters say is true, this triangle should generate the economic growth and funding needed to support the three entities in the future. Voters should have the option to set a deadline for the tax.

A mill levy increase should be out of the question. With what the county faces for public safety and other capital improvement needs, the county’s mill levy could expand, the word is could, by five mills if the commission approved all the capital improvements and operational costs that goes with it. This is aside from the research triangle. We doubt this would happen, but it shows just how great the needs are right now.

The players involved in this proposal also concern us. They have influence and money. They sometimes forget that a mill levy increase may not mean much to them financially, but it does to the average family living paycheck to paycheck.

A tax proposal should benefit the whole county, not just a few select people or institutions. Is this proposal for county residents or a government subsidy to benefit a few influential people — feathers in their caps to brag about? We say this because the K-State research center was set to develop and operate in Olathe without having this tax. Now the tax is needed for it to succeed? That doesn’t make sense.

The Cancer Center already exists. A research unit
would be nice, but is it the most pressing educational health care need in the county? Why is this at the top of the list? There is a need for master’s level engineering and technical degrees, according to supporters, but how prevalent is the need? Will Johnson County businesses retain these engineers after they graduate, delivering a return on taxpayers’ investment, or will other states benefit from county residents’ investment in higher education?

Who will sit on the oversight board that will distribute the funds? Who will choose the board members? Who will establish the policies by which the board operates? Who will oversee the collection and disbursement of the funds? What type of research will be considered acceptable? Is this a backdoor ploy to get taxpayers to fund controversial stem-cell research?

These are a few of some important questions that need to be answered before the proposal goes on any ballot.

We need to hear the supporters’ answers before we will support any tax measure.
KU Names Winners From 58th Annual Rock Chalk Revue

Rock Chalk Revue, the student-run show that mixes song and dance with pop culture parody and campus satire, staged its 58th annual production March 8-10 at the Lied Center at the University of Kansas.

KU students wrote, produced and acted in each of the five original skits that comprised the show, crafting different stories and settings to portray the "Hawk Wild" theme. They competed for individual and group prizes announced during the show that recognized noteworthy student philanthropy as well as outstanding performances, videos, interpretation of theme and other creative achievements.

Connor J. Hill, son of Ed Hill of Andover, was part of the set design for Sigma Phi Epsilon's "Little Prom on the Prairie. Hill is a junior majoring in civil engineering.

Considered one of the top student philanthropies in the United States, Rock Chalk Revue includes three nights of performances plus months of volunteering for Douglas County and the Lawrence community organizations, including many of the United Way. KU students from fraternities, sororities, residence halls and scholarship halls handle leadership, community service and fundraising roles.

This year, KU students contributed 12,222.46 volunteer hours to about 30 United Way agencies as part of their Rock Chalk Revue activities. "Little Prom," which also involved by Delta Gamma sorority, won the best preshow video award.

Rock Chalk Revue activities are coordinated by a student-run advisory board that also selected a theme for each year's show. Coed groups interested in performing in the 2007 show began creating scripts in fall 2006, then submitted detailed synopsis notebooks and video presentations to an independent panel of judges. The five shows for the revue were announced in late November.

For raising the most money overall, Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity earned the most charitable organization award with about $5,000 in donations.
The tragic shooting and killings on the Virginia Tech University campus are sure to cause officials at most all American colleges and universities to give added attention to their own campus security systems, as well as to how they would respond if a similar situation occurred at their schools.

In addition to colleges and universities, school administrators at all levels probably are reviewing their security programs, whether it's at a K-12 school, community college or any other type of teaching center.

Frankly, only so much can be done, but that is no excuse for not examining every possible weakness that might give a deranged individual the opening to commit a violent crime.

All those in the law enforcement business want to do whatever they can to be of help in the post-Virginia Tech period, and, in most every instance, in every city, the police chief, sheriff, school security personnel and university police officials point to measures, such as television monitors or 24-hour patrols, in use at their respective sites to try to curb or lessen the chances of violence.

Here in Lawrence, the individual who should be sought out for advice is Lawrence Police Chief Ron Olin, a highly trained professional in the field of terrorism. Olin is a valuable asset for the community, both on and off the Kansas University campus. Olin is recognized by national law enforcement agencies for his skills and knowledge, and those charged with providing security for their schools and campuses should take advantage of his expertise.

There is no room for complacency in believing Lawrence, Kansas, is a secure, safe island in which residents have no need to worry about their safety.

Those days are long gone.
Plan for college maintenance fails

TOPEKA (AP) — A plan for giving state universities $640 million over five years to fix long-neglected buildings faced scrutiny Friday in the Senate, a day after the House rejected a far more modest proposal.

The Senate proposal mixes no-interest loans, anticipated gambling dollars and using tax credits to lure dollars from private donors. It also provides some help to community colleges, vocational colleges and Washburn University in Topeka.

Senate leaders hoped their chamber would pass it Friday and send it to the House. The final version of a repairs plan will be written by House and Senate negotiators after the two chambers approve rival bills, but so far, the House has had trouble settling on a plan.

A House plan would have set aside $100 million for university repairs over three years, but when it was offered as an amendment to a bill meant to wrap up budget issues for the year, it failed, 61-61. Some House members questioned whether the state could afford it, while others derided it as insufficient.

Universities' deteriorating buildings are a pressing issue to higher education officials and legislative leaders. The Board of Regents, which oversees higher ed, estimates that universities have a $663 million backlog of repairs and need an additional $69 million a year for maintenance to keep it from growing.

"The thing is, we know it's a huge problem. We know we have to do something about it," said Rep. Barbara Ballard, D-Lawrence, whose district includes part of the University of Kansas campus. "I think we will, but like everything else, it's not an easy process."
Beverly and Frank Gaines of Fredonia (left), KU Chancellor Robert Hemenway and Roy Jensen, MD, director, University of Kansas Cancer Center, stand with an oversized check representing the Gaines' recent donation of $1 million to the cancer research effort. Mr. Gaines is formerly of Augusta. The donation from the former state senator will fund a professorship at the University of Kansas Cancer Center. Gaines was diagnosed with cancer 13 months ago. This donation helps the Kansas Masonic Foundation Partnership for Life fundraising campaign to support such a research center.

Courtesy photo