

CITY FUNDS FRISCO FORAY

BY BARRY SHALINSKY

How would you like a trip to San Francisco with air fare, hotel, and meals paid for by the taxpayers? That's just what thousands of city officials from all over the U.S. did in early December, including four from Lawrence. They were attending a meeting of the National League of Cities.

City Commissioners Marnie Arger-singer, Don Binns, Jack Rose and Assistant City Manager Mike Wildgen made the trip at a cost of about \$2,500, according to estimates by Wildgen. A comparison of other area cities shows that Lawrence used reasonable restraint in playing with tax money.

Lawrence officials travelled coach, the same as most cities surveyed. Hotel rooms were \$150 per person for five days at the Mark Hopkins, less costly than some Kansans who stayed at the Hilton. Registration of \$125 was the same for everyone.

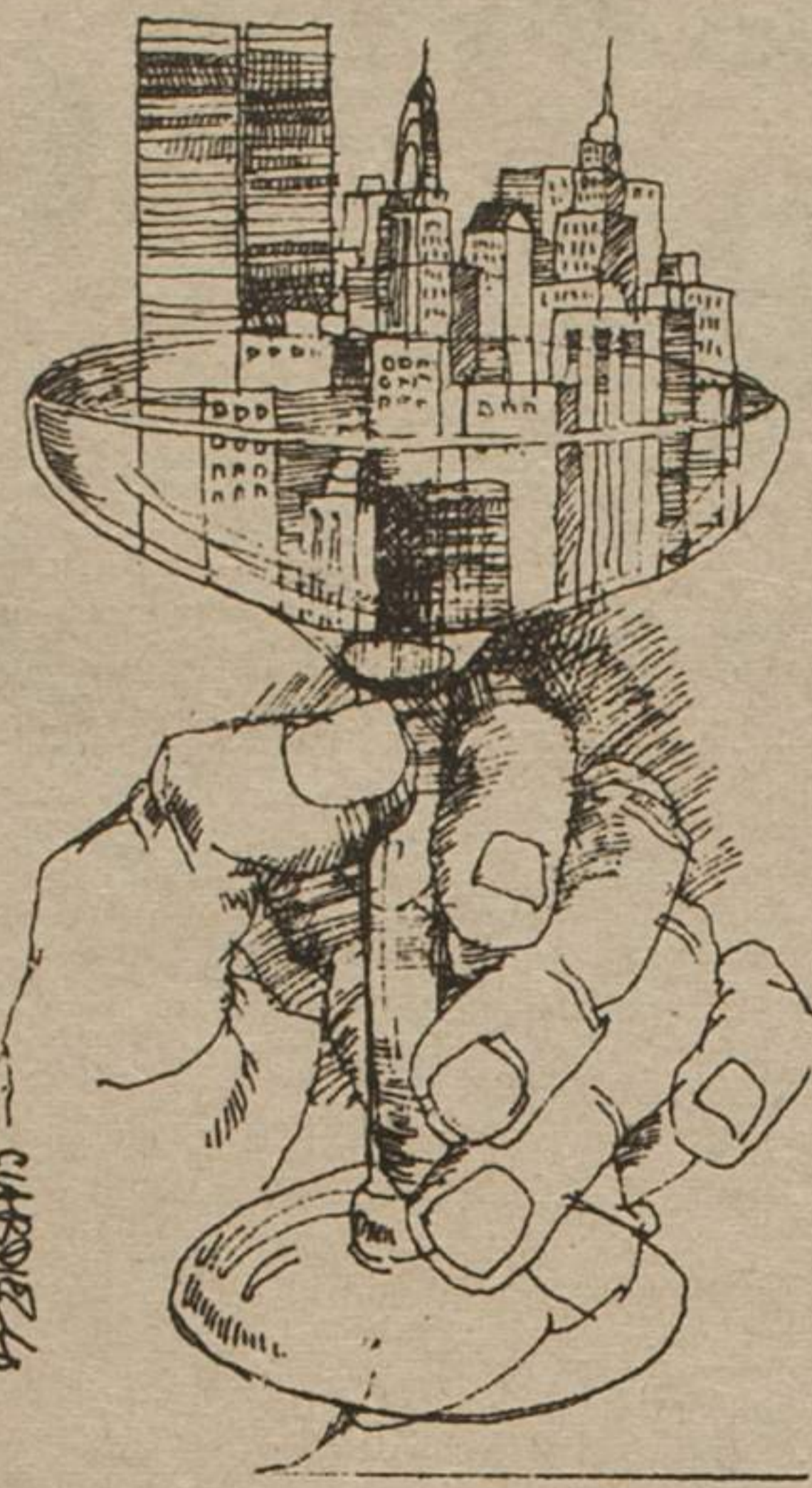
The largest disparities were on meals. According to Wildgen, Lawrence officials were given an allowance of \$8 to \$10 for lunch and dinner, somewhat less for breakfast.

"That is the cost of a moderately priced meal in San Francisco," Wildgen said. "We could have spent more, of course, but the difference came out of our own pockets."

Vouchers for meals haven't

been submitted.

By comparison, one councilman from Johnson County reportedly plans to turn in \$15 to \$20 meal vouchers. But according to another K.C. area official, "I spent about \$150 of my own money on food, tips and trans-



portation. I do not intend to turn in any more than \$40 in vouchers (\$8 a day). I don't find that unreasonable. I just don't see any tangible benefit to the taxpayers to justify them paying any more."

Was it really necessary for Lawrence to send four people to San Francisco? Manhattan and Emporia each sent only one. However, Junction City and Leavenworth each sent 7, Liberal and Overland Park each sent 8, and Great Bend sent 9 city officials. Perhaps the folks in the "sin capital" of Kansas should consider renaming their town "Junket City."

The question is not whether Lawrence was excessive in comparison with other cities. Clearly the city was not. The real questions are what did these people do and did we get our money's worth?

According to one small town Kansas delegate, "Binns was on the floor part of the time. I saw Marnie there more often. Binns seemed to be more into what was going on. Neither of them voted for gun control." As to Wildgen and Rose, this Kansan stated, "I didn't see them at any meetings except parties. They may have been there, but I don't recall seeing them."

Wildgen says that as a non-voting delegate, he could not get onto the floor. However, there were workshops in different "tracks." Wildgen attended workshops in the "policy leadership track," dealing with commercial and industrial development, employer-employee relations including compulsory arbitration and right to strike, community development and municipal liability.

Wildgen said the commercial and industrial development workshop dealt with how to revitalize the downtown areas of larger cities so that housing rehabilitation and neighborhood preservation would follow. Sounds a lot like the plan to redevelop the 600 block of Massachusetts.

On the question of arbitration, the assistant city manager said, "It's good to be informed on how things are done in other cities. We may use what we learned in spring negotiations and we may not. It depends on if there are parallel situations. Unions want arbitration. Cities don't because labor asks for top demands and when it doesn't get them, cries immediately for arbitration. This takes power from the city and puts it in the hands of a third party who doesn't care. He (the arbitrator) gets paid no matter what. And they (labor) get at least one-third to one-half of their demands."

Apparently, the workshops reinforced ideas the city has in dealing with its employees. This is hardly surprising, considering the professional managerial credentials of some of the panelists. Many of the workshops presented more than one side. Although Wildgen was impressed with Jerry Wurf of AFSCME a union of government employees, Wurf did not convince anybody from Lawrence.

Undoubtedly, the Lawrence delegation went to workshops and came away with \$2,500 worth of knowledge. But some Lawrence citizens might find fault with what they learned. Its cost to us might be far greater than air fare and hotel bills. We may find ourselves paying for an airport and downtown luxury hotel.

Movin' on...

UTILITIES FORM UNITED FRONT

In their quest to retain high profit margins, Kansas electric companies are joining together for the first time in a new lobbying association with a former state senator as the director.

Electric Companies Association of Kansas includes the Kansas City Power and Light Co., Kansas Power and Light Co., Kansas Gas and Electric Co., Central Kansas Power and Light Co., Central Telephone and Utility and Empire District Electric Co.

D. Wayne Zimmerman, a former state senator from Olathe, who lost in the 1976 general election, serves as director and lobbyist for the association.

"Zero" Zimmerman, as he is known by his former legislative colleagues, was decidedly pro-business when he was with the legislature. The association is operating full time from its Topeka offices rather than just during the legislative session.

Zimmerman was appointed to the State Ethics Commission last session of the legislature by President of the Senate Ross Doyen, who is now in trouble with the Ethics Commission for 1976 campaign violations.

Most knowledgeable observers thought Zimmerman's appointment was similar to the fox to guard the chicken coop. But a law

forbidding former legislators from accepting posts on any state commission that were created during their tenure in the legislature prevented "Zero" from accepting that position.

Dues to the association are based on the volume of business and size of the member companies. A spokesman for KP&L and Zimmerman has refused to disclose the budget of the association.

A proposal, introduced by Sen. Arnold Berman (D-Lawrence), and adopted by the Interim Energy Committee, would prohibit lobbying expenses and exorbitant executive and advertising costs from being included in future rate increase requests.

The move by the utilities to lobby more effectively shows the depth of concern that these companies are viewing the present legislature with. With an increasingly Democratic and independent Kansas legislature bunch the companies are for the first time scrambling to retain their "competitive edge" It remains to be seen, though,

whether "Zero" can influence many of the more independent and/or newer legislators who have retained their objectivity through the distracting haze of free cocktails and dinner.

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