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1995

Looking back, wbrew, what a year.
One Kansan pined for the White House, while another took over the governor's office at the Statehouse. A politician once described as more popular than wheat announced retirement plans from the U.S. Senate, and another, Rep. Pat Roberts, said he was content where he was, thank you.
The city shed tears for a fallen police officer but was thankful that the homicide blood-

bat of 1994 didn't repeat itself in 1995. In the Legislature, they talked taxes — and even cut the ones on motor vehicles — while attention turned to which state hospitals would close and what the future would hold for those that remained open.
A familiar face was again sworn into office on the Shawnee County Commission, only to learn as the year dimmed that her Democratic rivals had redrawn her district.

In business, Santa Fe Railway kept open its big office in Topeka, putting to rest fears of the unbinkable with the completion of its merger with Burlington Northern. A landmark downtown building went boom, and the state's agriculture sector seemed to go bust.
New voices took seats on the Topeka City Council. But the biggest voices may have been those from here and out of town, compli-

menting the city on a "well done" for a wildly successful Treasures of the Czars exhibit.
Topeka public schools selected eight schools to close as part of its desegregation plan and broke ground for three new schools to help remedy racial imbalances.
Many seeds were planted in 1995 — in politics, education and countless other areas. It will be weeks, months, before it's learned what we'll reap.

1995

t h e y e a r i n r e v i e w

• Politics

Our clout in Congress impressive

In 1995 little Kansas, total population approximately 2.5 million, enjoyed political power unprecedented since it became a state in 1861.
In Bob Dole it has not only the most powerful Senate majority leader in generations but a leading presidential candidate as well.
The women in the little six-member congressional delegation each chairs a powerful committee. Nancy Kassebaum in the Senate, Jan Meyers in the House of Representatives. Pat Roberts heads the key House Agriculture Committee. Freshmen Sam Brownback and Todd Tiahart stand high in the councils of the 73 House rebels who ended the year dictating policy not only to a president but to their own leaders. And former Congressman Dan Glickman is secretary of agriculture. All but Glickman are Republicans — useful, in a GOP-run Congress.
To paraphrase E. F. Hutton's old advertisement, "When Kansas talks, people listen." But E. F. Hutton is gone now, and so, soon, will be Kansas' brief pinnacle of political power.
Kassebaum and Meyers are retiring. If Dole wins the White House next fall, half the 1997 delegation will be newcomers, with all the loss of clout implied. If Roberts were to move to the upper house, he would end up in the cellar, too.

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Both Sen. Nancy Kassebaum and Sen. Bob Dole made news on the national government scene in 1995. Kassebaum announced she was retiring from the Senate to devote time to her family. Dole announced he was throwing his hat into the race for president.

Politics

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The presidency itself, of course, remains the top prize even with today's more powerful Congress. But as a Democrat, Glickman likely would be replaced. Any way you view it, Kansas will draw less water in the Washington frog pond come '97.
Meanwhile, 1996 begins with an unprecedented stalemate in Washington.
The Republicans are now down to the centerpiece of their program: Balancing the federal budget for the first time in more than 35 years.
The Democrats have no real interest in balancing the budget, in any time span. They've given lip service to the idea, but only because that's clearly popular with an electorate grown weary of a welfare state annually more expensive and less effective. And because they have no alternatives of their own.
Even the president has been driven to endorse a seven-year balanced budget and a tax cut, though not yet to offer any realistic budget proposal of his own. Two unrealistic attempts were summarily rejected by near-unanimous House votes.

But polls continue to show that Bill Clinton and the Democratic leaders in Congress succeed simply by attacking the "extremist" Republican agenda without ever having to offer a plan of their own.
This now has led to the longest government shutdown in U.S. history. With the president persistently vetoing even their interim funding resolutions and refusing to negotiate seriously about next year's budget, GOP lawmakers simply stopped trying and went home for the holidays.
That hurts both parties. Question is, who gets hurt the worse?
Both Dole and House Speaker Newt Gingrich thought last week they had a putative deal on a new continuing resolution to reopen the government, but the 73 House Republican rebels almost unanimously rejected it on the ground Clinton couldn't be trusted. That reduced House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt of Missouri to sputtering indignation and assured the stalemate would continue indefinitely.
Like such Sen. Nancy Kassebaum, R-Kan., and other moderates on both sides of the aisle, Gephardt, D-Mo., regards politics as the art of the possible, as German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck is reputed to have said. But Bismarck also said "Politics ruins character" — and that's a quotation

more favored by the fractious GOP newcomers.
The GOP freshmen would more likely agree with John Adams, who declared in politics, "the middle way is none at all."
Perhaps that fundamental difference is why moderates are retiring from the House and Senate in '96. More than one has complained of a marked decline in civility and a near-total absence of compromise in the 104th Congress. But the respective reactions indicates why 1995 was the most remarkable year in American 20th century politics, and why 1996 may surpass it.
On balance, the rebel bloc has no choice. They have burned their bridges. They must prevail or die political death in the striving.
It's far from clear what will result. Will they succeed in changing the course of American government? Will the fight bring another — more modest — bid by Ross Perot? The smart money in Washington says the nation won't be willing to admit it's bankrupt until the turn of the century.
In any case, the struggle will keep us all on the edge of our seats and involved with government. And that's no very bad thing.

— GENE SMITH