pinion



Free Press Viewpoint

New House speaker a welcome change

State Rep. Mike O'Neal of Hutchinson isn't necessarily a moderate Republican. The longtime lawmaker, who recently was elected speaker of the House, is considered a conservative, like the man he replaces.

But O'Neal, unlike his predecessor — the strong-willed and unbudging Rep. Melvin Neufeld, Ingalls — will be a thoughtful, deliberate and pragmatic speaker.

That signals a welcome changing of the guard in Topeka.

It also is to the credit and benefit of Hutchinson and Reno County to have one of our legislators in this powerful post as it was when Sen. Dave Kerr of Hutchinson served as Senate president.

O'Neal's win was an upset, of sorts. Neufeld had completed his first two-year term as speaker and expected to be re-elected. But for the first time since 1994, House Republicans, in a secret ballot, rejected an incumbent Speaker. They voted in O'Neal 41-36, a sweet victory for the Hutchinson legislator, who twice before sought the post....

Neufeld said he was surprised by the final tally. He acknowledged that promised votes didn't materialize....

That is an understatement.

The seeds of Neufeld's defeat and O'Neal's ascension to speaker likely were sown during the 2008 legislative session. Neufeld's bullying tactics were exposed during his obsessive quest for the Sunflower Electric coal plants in western Kansas. He accused Gov. Kathleen Sebelius of buying votes against the coal plants, a charge that proved false.

Neufeld ought to have recognized voter bribery, since he was caught up in such a scheme in 1994. He placed a call to the wife of a legislator to say her husband had been found in a "compromising position" with two female lobbyists. Neufeld had wanted the legislator's vote on a particular bill.

For more than a decade, Neufeld has failed the leadership test, a fact duly noted after O'Neal won the Speaker post this week.

O'Neal, said Rep. Kevin Yoder, R-Overland Park, "listens, communicates well and can articulate a vision, which I think is something we desperately need."

Indeed. Vision and leadership will be critical as legislators head to Topeka in January amid shaky and uncertain economic conditions. O'Neal possesses the leadership skills needed to spur fellow House members to action and work closely with Senate leaders. Now he finally has the opportunity to put those skills to use.

-The Hutchinson News, via The Associated Press

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"Among the latest layoffs are twelve drummers drumming, eleven pipers piping, ten lords-a-leaping, nine ladies dancing, eight maids-a-milking..."

Season combines new, old memories

Even though I'm not seeing any snowflakes covering the sidewalk or icicles hanging from tree branches, I can tell that Christmas is in the air. It's just something that I can't ignore.

I'm in the middle of an intense week of finals and papers and projects, but there have been a handful of Christmas event in Portland that I must experience while I'm here. Well, that's what I tell myself when I feel like avoiding things like homework, studying and other school-related tasks that seem to get in the way of having fun.

My first Christmas event was going downtown to watch the big Christmas tree light up Pioneer Square. I'm guessing there were thousands of people there, standing around the block, waiting for the clock to strike 6.

My friend and I had to push our way through the crowd as we looked for a good spot to see the tree. A business used the event as a promotional opportunity and gave away free buttons that had a little green light in them that would blink. So imagine thousands of little green lights flashing throughout a mass of people, who were also singing Christmas carols and hymns (which I found to be politically incorrect for a liberal city like Portland).

However, the Christmas Tree Lighters were apparently late, as everyone impatiently "Three! Two! One!" and the square was sud-



 A Moment with Michelle

background like in the movies, but it was still pretty exciting.

The next Christmas event on my schedule was the Portland Zoo Lights. Every Christmas season, the zoo is decorated with light designs that I have never seen in my life. There were animals, insects, rivers, trees, flowers. The fences were covered with blue and white lights or green and red lights. Most of the animals were put away, but we did get to see a few elephants and a little penguin, which I named

Not only were we there to see the lights, we came to infect everyone with a bit of Christmas spirit. (We had to make up for the lack of snow somehow.) See, my friends and I love to sing, and we couldn't think of a better reason to sing than to give the other zoo attendees the gift of caroling.

As we stood in line, waiting to ride the train looked at the clock until it read 6:10. But the around the zoo, we began singing every Christcountdown finally began. We all screamed mas song we could think of. Though there at Multnomah University in Portland, Ore., were many songs when we hummed more than majoring in Bible and journalism. She enjoys denly radiant with countless lights. I expected singing actual words, since we somehow had the 32 Starbucks found within five miles of her fireworks or maybe a symphony playing in the not memorized the lyrics, the people seemed campus.

to enjoy it. In fact, many started to join us. I guess our Christmas spirits were contagious.

One lady enjoyed our caroling so much that she came up to my friend and asked excitedly, "What are you guys going to sing next?!" We said that we took requests (hoping it would be a song that we actually knew), then we heard a little boy shout, "Rudolph the Red-Nose Reindeer"! That one we knew very well, and happily began singing the names of Santa's reindeer.

We ended the night at a cozy café downtown with hot chocolate and plenty of laughter as we replayed our adventure. Unfortunately, I have a sore throat, and even though singing loud for all to hear was probably not the best remedy, it was definitely worth it.

My last day of final exams was Friday, and I hoped to be home late Saturday. And as much as I love school and living the city life, it will be simply wonderful to be home, spending time with my family and friends, while savoring the opportunity to relax. So since I'll be in the neighborhood until Jan. 11, don't hesitate to say hello! And if I'm not writing about something that you wish I was, I would love to know what that is.

See you soon!

Michelle Myers, a Colby native, is a student

Bio-defense lab a boon for state

Kansas recently received news the Department of Homeland Security is recommending the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility be built on the Kansas State University campus in Manhattan.

This decision will mean a \$451 million federal scientific laboratory will accelerate animal disease research to protect our U.S. food supply and agricultural economy.

In Kansas and our neighboring states, protecting our food supply - crops and animals - is essential. This nation's economy depends on farmers and ranchers and those who work in this sector.

Agriculture provides more the 22 million jobs in the United States, even though less than 2 million are farmers and ranchers. The agribusiness sector contributes more than \$1 trillion annually to this nation's economy, 15 percent of the U.S. Gross Domestic Product.

"Farmers and cattlemen have long been asking for an acceleration of U.S. research to combat dangerous animal diseases, so we are pleased that the federal government has put that mission first in recommending Kansas as home for the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility," said Steve Baccus, Kansas Farm Bureau president and an Ottawa County grain farmer.

Kansas is ready to facilitate the facility. The charge of this facility will be to provide our nation with a safe, secure and innovative laboratory to develop research and response capabilities designed to protect our people and our nation's agriculture from naturally occurring and intentionally introduced disease threats.



John Schlageck

Insights

Kansas Farm Bureau

Kansas is the wise choice because it can accelerate the facility's research to protect the American food supply and agriculture economy. There will be no learning curve in Kansas for this work. Our state can contribute immediately with our internationally recognized animal-health research expertise, strong research infrastructure and unmatched concentration of animal health companies.

More importantly, Kansas also has a unique understanding of the importance of this mission because of its deep agriculture heritage.

Once built, the installation will serve as the nation's premier research facility for developing vaccines and countermeasures for diseases that threaten livestock and other animals. Experts consider the facility an urgent national priority due to agriculture's vulnerability to naturally occurring diseases or agro-terrorism.

These facilities are safe both for the general public and laboratory researchers, according to the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease. To date there are no recorded incidents involving outside contamination from any of the existing facilities in the United States.

This facility has the potential to position

Kansas as a leader in the medical, food and agricultural research, science and technology fields, say those close to the effort to bring it to the Sunflower State. The project could create more than 300 jobs and generate an estimated economic return of \$3.5 billion during the next 20 years.

The Kansas Congressional delegation applauded the announcement, with U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts saying, "On the merits, Kansas is the best place to conduct this much needed research to keep America's dinner table safe. We've been doing this for decades, giving us a tremendous running start, and now we're ready to get to work with the departments of Homeland Security and Agriculture to fulfill the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility

Having the facility in the agricultural heartland will be ideal for the region and certainly advantageous for the nation.

With deep roots in agriculture, long-standing expertise in medicine and veterinary sciences, abundant technological resources, dedicated citizens and a location in the center of our nation, Kansas is exceptionally well suited to be the new home for this research.

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

Mallard **Fillmore**

Bruce Tinsley



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