



Other Viewpoints

Retirement fund needs new strength

Waiting for the stock market to heal itself won't be enough to guarantee the long-term solvency of the Kansas Public Employees Retirement System, according to its experts. State leaders will need to come up with a durable fix.

The system, which pays out about \$1 billion a year in benefits, has 268,000 members statewide, including 71,000 retirees and survivors and 155,000 active members....

As 2008 ended, the system's unfunded actuarial liability was at a record \$8.3 billion, up \$2.7 billion from 2007 — and not that far from equaling the fund's \$10 billion in assets....

"Things have improved" in some of the months since, Glenn Deck, executive director, told *The Eagle's* editorial board July 30, "but we have a long way to recover from that 2008 loss."

Estimates are that for the fiscal year that ended June 30, the system's investment portfolio saw a drop of 19.2 percent. The board and staff are doing an analysis of the system's funding status and how state leaders might improve to it. They plan to provide the governor and legislative leaders with the results this fall, so the 2010 Legislature can act....

If the state's next budget is anything like the current one, the pressure will be great to put the issue off to another day.

Meanwhile, the state is still paying on a 30-year, \$500 million bond issue meant to shore up the retirement system in 2004 — something to consider if possible solutions include more borrowing....

Even though the crisis is in the distance, our leaders should take steps soon to avert it. Kansas' past and current public employees deserve to know they will get what's coming to them.

—*The Wichita Eagle, via The Associated Press*

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Individualists must also be connected

Individualism is a trait needed by society for diversity and innovation. Yet it can cause people to neglect the problems of others due to a militant belief in the bootstrap myth.

When you take on the role of the detached observer, you see that we are all an interconnected part of a global family. The sidewalks we use, the houses we occupy, the commodities we buy and the food we eat were all created by human labor.

The people who made our chairs, tables, phones, lawn mowers and brooms are just like us. They have people they love, things they fear, hobbies they enjoy, bad habits they can't shake and dreams that they hope to one day pursue.

Today's mass-produced commodities and supermarket domination make it easy to forget how much we all rely on each other. I don't know the people who built the apartment I occupy or the fishing rods I use when I head out on the water, but I sure appreciate the time and sweat they put into creating products that give me shelter, comfort and joy.

There is something pure and authentic about visiting craft fairs, attending music festivals, watching small town parades or buying vegetables from farmers' markets that is infinitely more satisfying than going to McDonalds or shopping at Walmart.

It's refreshing to meet the people who made the product you are buying or grew the food you'll be enjoying. There is something unsullied about the human relationships between producers and consumers, no matter how minimal they may seem.

No matter what some in the media and the business world may say, an ethical, environmental and economical case can be made for championing an alternative lifestyle that features less consumption, less waste, less pollution.

This sort of lifestyle could reinvigorate local economies in both rural and urban areas where



Andy Heintz

• Wildcat Ramblings

food, water and commodities are created right there, not shipped halfway across the world. This would allow consumers to have some knowledge and control over how the products they buy or use are created.

An inconvenient truth that needs to be addressed is the naive belief that we continue to do business the same way without condemning our children, their children or their children's children to a world where many of nature's thresholds have collapsed.

We face a world with depleted forests, expanding deserts, rampant air pollution, global warming, falling water tables and shrinking fisheries. None of these problems will be fixed if the ecological costs of doing business continue to be ignored by some of the world's most powerful corporations. But this is only going to change if governments get involved or if consumers demand change by the choices they make at the gas pump or the supermarket.

Government involvement is always risky because many corporations will simply find clever ways to circumvent the system, causing the government to enact even harsher regulations that can end up choking the life out of the economy.

Lobbyists wield a lot of influence over today's politicians due to their generous campaign donations, so many of them won't be willing to bite the hand that feeds them.

But I generally have faith that if people are shown real alternatives to the current system, then we will see some change in the world.

Here in Colby, I have met some real stand-up people who believe in virtues like fairness and morality.

Some of those I met were Democrat, some were Republicans and others were independent. I don't think any of them are ardent supporters of a system that trashes the planet for short-term gains, ignoring the long-term consequences. I don't think they are happy about the inconvenient fact that if other countries polluted like America, it would take at least three planets to compensate for all the waste.

Several thinkers promote different ways of living that could be both sustainable and economical.

Many have written books outlining their ideas. Why the media has not given these people more time and space is beyond me. Americans and global citizens should be at least willing to read what they have to say.

So, for anyone curious about alternative ways of thinking about the relationship between the economy and the environment, here are several books that I would recommend:

"Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things," by Michael Braungart and William McDonough.

"The Green Collar Economy: How One Solution Could Fix Our Two Biggest Problems," by Van Jones.

"Natural Capitalism: Creating the Next Industrial Revolution," by Paul Hawken, Amory Lovins and L. Hunter Lovins.

"The Ecology of Commerce," by Paul Hawken.

"Plan B: Mobilizing to Save Civilization," by Lester R. Brown.

"Energy Victory: Winning the War on Terror by Breaking Free of Oil" by Robert Zubrin."

Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate, is sports reporter for the Colby Free Press. He says he loves K-State athletics and fishing, sports and opinion writing.

Health care reform not to be rushed

This month, I will get to spend time hearing from Kansans about their most pressing concerns. My guess is that I will hear an awful lot about health care.

Given the complexity of the legislation and the impact it will have on families, patients, business owners and providers, I am relieved that House Democratic leadership did not rush a vote on a bill prior to recess. Now, members of Congress can visit face-to-face with their constituents about this important issue. Here are several of my ideas, far from a complete list, for a common-sense prescription for health care reform:

- Emphasize wellness and disease prevention. We need to start placing as much emphasis on wellness as we do on illness. Promotion of wellness, fitness and diet help us lead healthier lives and greatly reduce health care costs.

- Prevention and wellness are promoted by giving employers and insurers flexibility to reward individuals who improve their health and manage disease. Encouraging medical students to become primary care physicians, who are essential to coordinating care among specialists and managing patient treatment, will help as well.

- Make health-care services accessible to



U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran

• Capitol Notes

every American. We need to provide incentives to low-income families to buy private health insurance that best meets their needs. This is accomplished by extending tax savings to those who buy their own coverage. To help low-income Americans, we can support community health centers and offer tax credits to obtain insurance. Also, it's important to provide financial help to those who provide for family members at home.

- Medical liability reform. We must reduce frivolous lawsuits that lead to inflated insurance premiums and the practice of "defensive medicine," where doctors order every possible test for fear of being sued. Defensive medicine costs us between \$70 billion to \$124 billion per year, over 10 percent of all health care expenditures.

- Implement health information technology. We need to upgrade our outdated health

records system through the use of new technology, which will streamline costs, reduce medical errors, and eliminate redundant medical tests.

- Incentive Health Care Savings. We need to empower people to save now for future and long-term care needs with health savings accounts and other incentive plans. These plans enable people to take ownership of their health.

- Address the Medical Workforce Shortage. We must educate and train more medical professionals and encourage these providers, through scholarship and loan repayment programs, to practice in underserved areas.

Health care reform must make quality coverage more affordable and more accessible for Americans and allow those who like their current health-care coverage to keep it.

I support common-sense reform that puts patients first and protects the doctor-patient relationship. I look forward to continuing this discussion with Kansans this month.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

