



## Other Viewpoints

### Nominee delays a bad reflection on Kansas senators

The executive branch has grown so large that it takes a new president months to staff it under the best of circumstances. But it's troubling that only 43 percent of the Obama administration's 500 top policymaking jobs have been filled — and that two Kansans are responsible for some key delays.

The way administration officials count the openings, they are ahead of other recent White House teams. But President Obama lacks his own leaders for, among others, the Transportation Security Administration; the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services; Customs and Border Protection; the Agency for International Development; and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. It's also an uncommonly bad time to be without an assistant Treasury secretary for financial markets, an assistant secretary of state for nonproliferation and an inspector general for transportation.

Part of the problem is the scrutiny required for potential appointees to such jobs....

Of most concern to Kansans this time is that Sens. Sam Brownback and Pat Roberts put a hold on the nomination of Republican Rep. John McHugh to be Army secretary, as one of 10 nominees they're blocking for top jobs at the Pentagon and Justice Department. Brownback and Roberts say this is their way of ensuring that the White House rules out Fort Leavenworth for the transfer of Guantanamo Bay detainees.

But three months to the day since Obama nominated McHugh — and with two tough wars going on — it's hard to argue with a recent White House statement "that Congressman McHugh is being held up for partisan purposes." ...

Even the conservative *Washington Times*, while agreeing with Brownback and Roberts that Gitmo detainees should stay where they are, editorialized that the senators' method "is the wrong way to keep Kansas or the country safe" or "register discontent with President Obama's policy direction."

Brownback and Roberts can and should let McHugh and the others get to work.

— *The Wichita Eagle, via The Associated Press*

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### Cool but golden end tops off summer

What a glorious weekend.

And while we had a lot to do, with three days, it seemed pretty relaxed, like the wonderful golden light that filtered down through the haze.

What more could we ask? Well, maybe a little heat. It was pretty cool. Cynthia complained, when it was 70 degrees Saturday night with a little breeze, that she was "freezing."

That girl is going to be in trouble when winter gets here.

She wasn't the only one, though. The city pool was open holiday hours, but there were few takers. Monday, there were no swimmers when the pool opened at 1, and by the time the temperature did warm up, the lifeguards had gone home.

Where were the kids? Who knows. When I was that age, I know we soaked up the pool water on the closing weekend, no matter what. Sometimes that mean blue lips, but we were dedicated to our summers.

Still, we had sunny skies, at least after the morning clouds burned off, pleasant weather and the beautiful evening light. Even, it seemed, at noon.

The cicadas actually seemed to get louder each day. Maybe they sense the end is near.



**Steve Haynes**

• Along the Sappa

Crickets chirmlo-ped. Frogs sang. By late afternoon, you could hardly hear yourself think.

It was a perfect time to read a book, and though I needed to mow, I did. Time enough for work.

The dog and I went to look for trains, we walked in town and at the park, I worked on my signal-light collection. We did some actual work, though not much.

I admit to feeling a little guilty as I looked out over the blue haze in the valleys, knowing that thousands of trees had died in California to produce that view. The golden glow on the elevator, magnified by the haze, and the glowing red ball of the setting sun both testified to the size of those fires.

Cynthia wondered if anyone would complain that Mother Nature was putting all those particulates and greenhouse gases into the air. But I don't think the EPA can find her.

Maybe, if they ever find the arsonist, they'll make him buy some carbon offsets. A lot of carbon offsets.

Strange world, where crime in California can enhance the light in Kansas. Or maybe not so strange. It makes you appreciate how small the globe really is.

We had nearly circled the old lake bed when one of us commented on the paucity of wildlife — other than the thousands and thousands of grasshoppers.

The dog loved the hoppers, by the way. She wanted to catch every one she saw, which led to a lot of dodging and darting and diving and hopping about. She even caught — and quickly ate — a few. But the chase was quite a show.

And about that time, up jumped a little whitetail buck, his spike horns barely showing above his ears as he bounded through the tall grass.

The setting sun turned his tail to gold, a fitting end to a relaxing and enjoyable holiday.

*Steve Haynes is editor and publisher of The Colby Free Press and president of Nor'West Newspapers. In his spare time, whenever that is, he like to ride and watch trains.*

### University beauty pageant an ugly affair

The media pundits' and education executives' responses to the governor's call for at least one Kansas university to be in the top 50 and another in the top 100 have all been cheerleading: "We're No. 1! We're No. 1!" (or No. 50 would be OK, too).

I have yet to see a commentary where the writer has actually looked at the criteria for making the *U.S. News and World Report* list.

The criteria for scoring high in this university beauty pageant are readily accessible on the website [www.usnews.com](http://www.usnews.com). To pursue them would drive Kansas schools away from their teaching, research and service targeted to Kansas. The criteria are slightly different for Research I versus university-masters, but they follow a similar template.

"Peer assessment" is a survey of the perceptions of the university heads and has a huge bite (25 percent) of the rating. Academic leaders take Harvard and Princeton as the "model" and try to emulate that image—thus the Ivy League "beauty pageant" factor. Try getting into that club if you are a mere second tier "state university" or a land grant university with the mission of serving the agricultural and extension needs of a rural population. Such a survey, if valid at all, should weigh no more than 5 percent.

"Student selectivity" is a major *U.S. News* factor. But Kansas was the last of the 50 states to maintain open admissions. Only in 2001 did Kansas high school seniors have to meet qualified admissions involving an ACT score of 21, a class ranking and a minimal high school curriculum.

And each regent school has a 10 percent window to allow students who cannot make qualified admission standards to enter anyway. While most regents schools have to use most of that window, KU only uses a third of it, taking far fewer low-performing students. Other states have higher, sometimes dramatically higher, admissions standards. We have many Kansas students who attempt college, and drop out, who never belonged in college in the first place.

The "Ivy Leagues" can turn out the best because they only take the best. KU has indicated a desire to tighten admissions and the governor has suggested higher admissions criteria. But Kansans have kept to a populist egalitarianism that wants every child to have a try at college. We are unlikely to leapfrog in rank on *U.S. News and World Report* in "selectivity."

"Faculty resources" consists of faculty pay, percent with terminal degree, full-time faculty, and class size factors — all "money issues." With Kansas in the midst of a budget crisis, none of these conditions is going to improve. The governor has been rightly criticized for



**John Richard Schrock**

• Education Frontlines

calling for a higher ranking at a time when the budget is only going to drive those scores lower.

"Graduation and retention rates" are also big factors in the *U.S. News* ranking. Looks like faculty need to inflate grades about 20 percent to raise that score. Since Kansas universities are admitting a lot of students who are not college prepared, inflating grades merely erodes the value of a degree down the road. But we could brag for a few years in the short run.

Kansans know their regents universities, and we need our schools for Kansas reasons. KU has many excellent graduate programs, as well as pharmacy programs. K-State conducts agricultural research and serves extension needs and has many other excellent programs as well. For aviation and aeronautical engineering, Wichita State is exceptional.

Kansas schools have looked to Emporia State for solid face-to-face teacher training, recognized by a professional audit as not in the top 100 or top 50, but in the top four nationwide! None of these weigh into the *U.S. News* criteria.

Even in the best of economic times, chasing after their beauty pageant title diverts our university resources away from being what Kansas needs.

*John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.*

### Write us

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### Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

