



## Free Press Viewpoint

### Market economy meets bailout rules

Both businesses and wise observers are starting to see some of the problems that come with accepting a government bailout.

Bank of America, for instance, found it impossible to hire a new chief executive for the half million a year or so the government would allow. In response, the financial giant – still recovering from its force-fed digestion of Merrill-Lynch – decided to scrape up the money to repay the “TARP” loans it took from the Treasury.

That’s both good and bad. Good because it gets one big bank back on its own feet, and because it puts some of the taxpayers’ billions back into the till. Bad, because it’s sad to see stockholders have to foot the bill for the kind of corporate excess we saw over the last few years.

While the outgoing General Motors chief reportedly took down \$5.5 million last year – and that is after getting fired, mind you – GM’s former owners got nothing but the shaft. Corporate executives who fail should owe the stockholders they’ve let down something, don’t you think?

On the market, of course, talent is worth what someone will pay for it. Professional sports figures and entertainers show us that all the time. The bothersome thing is when competition makes it so we have to pay for talent that does not produce.

Shouldn’t there be some guarantees of productivity in any big contract? Shouldn’t a big-money pitcher, for instance, have to win a few games every year? Shouldn’t a big-time quarterback have to complete his passes? And why do sports teams have to pay out on contracts when the guy can’t play at all?

With executives, should the man who leaves his company broke and his stockholders without a dime for their investment get his “golden parachute,” or maybe just get a chance to jump?

In Japan, a failed executive might be expected to at least resign. Not here.

Here, they gather at the club and compare notes on their investments.

Either system has its flaws, it seems. You pay too much for talent, or you can’t hire any. Bank of America did what it had to do. The market will come closer to finding the right price for a new president than the Treasury Department bureaucrats.

We’d suggest a performance clause in his or her contract, however.

There’s another danger of government’s heavy hand on big corporations, and that is pushing them to do not what the market demands, but rather what political beliefs suggest.

Thus, GM will be under pressure to produce not cars that people want, but cars the administration and its backers think are good for them.

The real danger is not just smaller cars – a lot of people may have to kiss their big trucks and sport-utilities goodbye – but GM getting stuck again with a bunch of vehicles no one will want.

This time, taxpayers, and not the former stockholders, will have to eat the bill. A car company that can’t produce what the market wants will be pretty hard to revive.

Bank of America will be better off for redeeming itself, even if it does overpay for a chief executive. GM might want to follow suit as soon as it can.

— Steve Haynes

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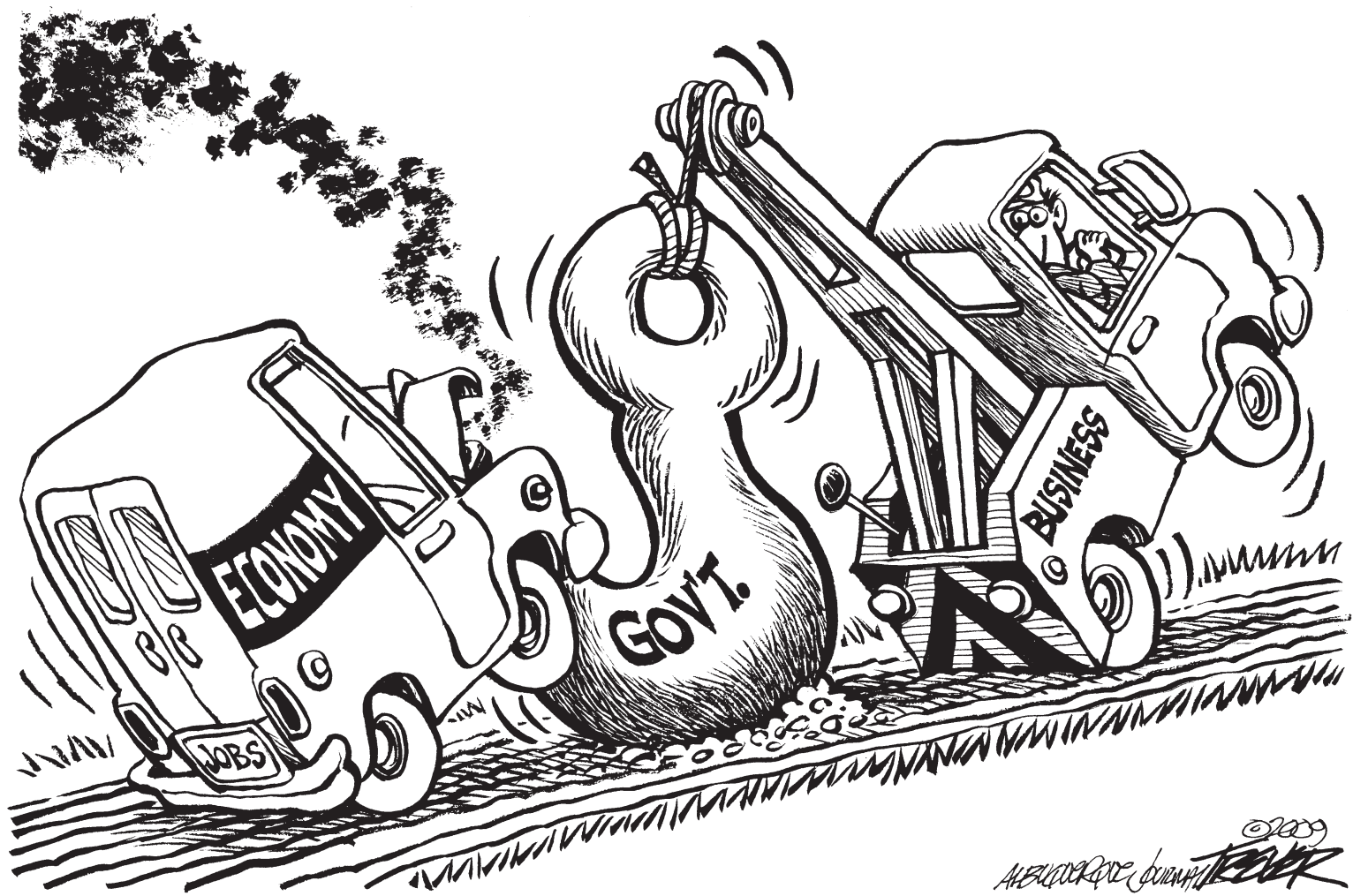
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### Modern gadgets fall victim to many ills

It’s amazing what people do to poor little unsuspecting electronic devices.

My brother-in-law Daryl and I were comparing watches the other day.

Mine is old. Not an antique, mind you, just an old watch. I bought it in 1974 after my first daughter was born and I’ve worn it most of the last 35 years.

Daryl noted that he had had a watch that he had worn for years and years but that eventually it started running slow. I asked why he bought a new watch instead of just getting a new battery.

He explained that a new battery wouldn’t help. His wife had run the faithful old watch down the garbage disposer after he had left it by the sink. While cleaning up the kitchen, it had fallen into the disposer and apparently died with a horrible grinding of gears.

A sad end, we agreed. After that I just kept falling over tales of the sad fates of other gadgets.

At a pharmacy I work at, the technician admitted that she had killed off not one but two of her mother’s digital cameras. The last one got done in by the washing machine, she said.

It seemed her young son was playing in the mud. After taking some adorable kid-in-the-mud photos, she had stripped off all his clothes and dumped them in the wash. Unfortunately, the camera got picked up with the muddy



**Cynthia Haynes**

• Open Season

clothes.

Never worked after that, she admitted.

A man across the counter offered that he had also had bad luck with electronics. His last cell phone had gotten stepped on by a horse, he said. And the one before that was eaten by the dog.

Boy, the way kids use their cell phones to do everything from text to tests, that puts a whole new twist on the old “the dog ate my homework” excuse.

Visiting eldest daughter in Augusta, Ga., I noted a couple of old computers being used as plant stands. Well, she explained, what good is a Mac Classic or SE. They’re just little boxes without much memory and can’t even be used to get on the Internet.

And this is the woman who will be picking out my nursing home some day?

I think the best story, though, is not about what had happened but what could happen.

My son-in-law smokes and keeps one of

those small butane lighters in his pockets. Daughter dutifully fishes them out when she washes his clothes — most of the time. The occasional lighter that goes through the wash is discarded.

However, one day while preparing the clothes to be washed, she fished out a lighter and put it on top of her front-loading washer. As she put the soap in the holder, the lighter fell in with the soap. When she tried to retrieve it, she found there was no back on the soap dispenser and the lighter fell into the area between the washer drum and the outer shell.

It’s still there, and she figures she’ll have to get someone to come out and disassemble the washer to get it out. In the meantime, she is washing all her clothes on cold. She thinks the washer has a heating unit and she doesn’t want to void her warranty, destroy her washer or burn her house down by igniting the butane.

Myself, I think she should stick to emptying pockets in the kitchen near the sink — where she has only the garbage disposer to worry about.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor’West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes @ nwkansas.com

### Testing achievement? Here’s how

In September, Alabama joined five other states in announcing it would move to pay for every high school student taking the ACT college-admission test. Kansas should too.

The ACT is the most common academic aptitude test in the United States. It is accepted by more colleges and universities than any other test, the other major one being the SAT. Last year, it was taken by over 1.4 million high school students. The nonprofit ACT organization provides substantial data for both the student and the state to compare statistics.

Last year, 23,147 Kansas students paid to take the ACT test. For Kansas to pick up the tab for all 43,279 students would be a big cost savings if we could, like Alabama and other states, cancel the costly assessments Kansas currently administers.

How much does the ACT cost? According to the ACT website: “The 2009–2010 basic registration fee is \$32, which includes sending score reports to up to four college choices. The basic registration fee for the ACT Plus Writing is \$47.”

More important than the money saved by reducing assessment to just the ACT and a few pre-ACT tests is the time spent both teaching to and giving the endless assessments that have multiplied under the state’s Quality Performance Accreditation plan and the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

In Kansas last year, we gave 253,325 reading exams, 254,138 math exams, 122,908 science exams, and 108,068 history/government exams! This takes up huge resources, both money in constantly redeveloping and giving the tests, and student time away from learning while taking the tests.

Currently, Kansas students lose weeks to this over testing. How much time does the ACT take? Again, from the ACT website: “...Just over 4 hours for the ACT without the Writing



**John Richard Schrock**

• Education Frontlines

Test, including administration instructions and breaks. Actual testing time is 2 hours and 55 minutes, broken down as follows: English: 45 minutes; Math: 60 minutes; Reading: 35 minutes; Science: 35 minutes. The ACT Writing Test adds 30 minutes to the testing time.”

And the ACT is only administered on six dates nationwide in September, October, December, February, April and June. Many students take the test twice, once as juniors and again as seniors. Replacing 738,439 student tests with just 43,000 ACT tests (or 86,000 if they all take it twice) will “take back the night” in classrooms, ending the last decade of assembly-line test-prep mentality.

Alabama is joining Colorado, Illinois, Kentucky, Michigan and Wyoming in providing the ACT to all of its students. In doing so, Alabama is able to dump its high-stakes high school exit exam and free its teachers to return to creative teaching rather than drill-for-the-test stuff. These states discovered that when they pay to have all students take the ACT, some students who were not considering attending college discovered they have high scores and are college ready.

The ACT provides nationwide comparative data, including subscores in English, math and reading that are useful to both students and school officials. Additional scores are available for science and writing. ACT analysis of Kansas scores found 26 percent of the Kansas test-takers were ready for college compared

to 23 percent of students nationwide. Kansas scores were higher in English and mathematics, and lower in science, where Kansas is only now beginning to implement a three-sciences-to-graduate requirement found in most states.

I am not a friend to standardization or the testing industry that has recently driven our curricula. But the ACT is an aptitude test that is difficult to teach to. And the ACT can achieve a 90 percent draw down in class time lost to testing. Right now, ending overtesting is a good place to save money.

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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Before an election, letters (other than responses by a candidate) will not be published after the Thursday before the polls open.

### Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

