



Free Press Viewpoint

Bigger businesses have bigger failures

The planned merger of United and Continental to form the world's largest airline should challenge the Obama administration's commitment to the idea of doing away with "too big to fail."

For just as the collapse of two of the last three U.S. automakers produced a crisis, and just as the collapse of several merged-and-merged-again megabanks and brokerage houses threatened the financial system, so the collapse of one of these huge airlines will get us yet another crisis.

What this country, and the world, needs is not bigger and bigger businesses, each too big to fail. Because fail they will. It always happens.

Take the auto industry. Once, there were dozens of brands. A few hardy firms came to the top, buying up the competition along the way. We had the Big Four, then after American Motors failed, the Big Three.

There was competition from foreign manufacturers, then Chrysler failed, only to be bailed out. Then Chrysler and General Motors failed. And proving once again that "What's Good for General Motors is Good for the U.S.A.," Congress and the Bush administration bailed both out.

President Obama, threatened by the growing financial crisis, was only too quick to sign on to the bank and carmaker bailouts when he took over. There's little downside for him: if things go south, he'll claim it was all Mr. Bush's doing.

Now the airline industry, with the balance upset by the merger of Delta and Northwest, seems ripe for further consolidation. Ripe may be too mild; between the recession and fuel prices, hardly any airlines are making money, and none of the big ones.

United brags that it's doing better, losing "only" \$82 million in the first quarter this year. The companies expect to save \$1 billion to \$1.2 billion this year from the merger, allowing the new United to make a profit.

How the merged company will fare in the market is anybody's guess. United already suffered from bureaucratic weight and from years of acrid labor relations. Service standards were abominable, crews surly, service poor. Continental was a pretty good airline to fly. Which "culture" survives is anybody's guess, but the new company will control a lot of traffic.

It'll be too big to fail, as Delta probably is already. And you can be sure, as in other industries that consolidated past the point of no return, that one or more will fail.

What then will the government do?

Why not put our foot down now, and start enforcing the anti-trust laws? Why not return to the spirit of the Ford administration, which oversaw the dismantling of the AT&T monopoly and unprecedented growth and competition in the telecommunications industry?

The antitrust enforcement machinery touted by Theodore Roosevelt a century ago had begun to rust so badly by the second Bush administration that it was largely abandoned. The government, influenced no doubt by money emanating from megabanks and megacorporations, all but gave up policing big mergers.

But bigger has never proven to be better. Industries that consolidate their way out of competition usually wind up in bankruptcy. Airlines are there most of the time anyway, so there's no reason to believe they are different.

Why not stop this nonsense, Mr. Obama, before it costs taxpayers more billions? — *Steve Haynes*



Sleep trumps time with television

The program chairman asked us who got eight hours of sleep a night, and I raised my hand.

He asked me how I did it. I was stumped. I didn't know. I had to think about it.

I just knew that I usually go to bed and sleep for eight hours before getting up sometime between 7 and 8 a.m., depending on when I have to be at work that day.

It was some time later that it hit me. I don't watch television.

It's as simple as that. I work, fix and eat supper, go for a walk with Steve and the dog, read for a few minutes and go to bed around 11 p.m. each night. I don't waste time watching television.

I have never seen an episode of *Friends* or *Seinfeld*, either originally or in reruns.

I don't know what all the excitement is about over *Lost* and *Survivor*. I have never watched *Oprah*, *Jerry Springer* or *Jay Leno*.

I will admit to watching an occasional episode of *Are You Smarter than a Fifth Grader* while fixing supper and am happy to say that I get most of the answers right, but I don't stress over it. I turn the set off as soon as I'm done cooking, not when the show is over.



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

I remember a time when I thought I couldn't live without television.

I was in high school. By the time I got to college, there were no televisions in my dorm or sorority and I couldn't afford one in my apartment.

After school, we worked nights, then we moved to the mountains, where television signals were few and far between.

I just got out of the habit.

But I do remember. My grandparents got their first set in about 1952, and I would spend my afternoons over at their home watching Tom Mix, Gene Autry, Tex Ritter and Roy Rogers ride across the small screen. And I would dance and sing to *American Bandstand*.

In the evening, the family would enjoy Lawrence Welk, Ed Sullivan, *The Honeymooners* and *I Love Lucy*.

And the westerns, boy were there a lot of westerns — *The Rifleman*, *Wagon Train*, *Rawhide*, *Gunsmoke*, *Rin Tin Tin*, *Bat Masterson*, *Dave Crockett*, *Maverick*, *Have Gun — Will Travel*, *The Lone Ranger*, *Zorro* and of course, *Bonanza*. We watched them after school, on Saturday morning and in the evenings.

Saturday morning cartoons were a special treat. Weekdays we had *Howdy Doody*, *Captain Kangaroo* and the *Mickey Mouse Club*.

We got three snowy, fuzzy channels on our black-and-white set — ABC, NBC and CBS — and at midnight they would all play the Star Spangled Banner while showing pictures of flags and jet airplanes, and then everyone would go to bed, because watching the test pattern until 7 a.m. wasn't a lot of fun.

Now we've got two color television sets and a couple hundred channels and mostly I turn on a music channel and get something done.

Memories are nice, but who's got the time? I need my sleep.

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@nwkansan.com

Legislature back for veto session

The Legislature got back to work this week and began the daunting task of working the budget, hearing the remaining bills coming out of various conference committees and addressing any vetoes from the governor.

Governor Threatens Budget Veto — It is not too late this session to avoid making mistakes that will further our budget problems next year. It's disappointing that Gov. Parkinson, who has publicly stated that tax increases should be a last resort, has threatened to veto not only any budget that doesn't contain a tax increase, but apparently, any budget that does not contain tax increases to support his call for increased government spending.

This is irresponsible and self-defeating. The House plan balances without a tax increase.

School Spending — A lot has been made of the effect the House Republican budget will have on schools across the state. With available cash reserves and the additional \$86 million put into the budget to partially replace the lost federal "stimulus" dollars, the House budget minimizes the impact on public schools during the toughest economic time in almost a century. This is accomplished without a tax increase and will set the stage for responsible and sustainable budgeting for future fiscal years.

Based on the figures supplied by the state Department of Education and other available budget information, it would appear that:

- The total unencumbered cash balance in just Kansas school districts' contingency reserve accounts is \$141.6 million, almost 1.5 times the amount needed to replace the remaining stimulus money that the state has not replaced. The stimulus money, \$172 million last year, was one-time money.
- While the state has not drastically decreased school funding, the school districts are claiming that by not replacing the stimulus dollars, we are cutting education. However, none of my school districts has adequate reserve dollars available to help. I believe a tax



Jim Morrison

• Capitol Review

increase just may be required to help us.

- 182 districts have increased spending. 74 districts have operating reductions of less than 5 percent and 37 have reductions of over 5 percent.
- 43 of 72 of the schools participating in the new funding lawsuit have increased current operating expenditures.
- While most Kansans would consider a cut to be a reduction in what they had available to them last year, the schools' definition is different. Schools budgeted to spend \$612 million more this year, \$297 million in operating expenditures. They now report increased operating expenditures of only around \$222 million, so are claiming a "cut" of some \$75 million from their planned increase in operating expenditures.
- State aid is still currently 18 percent higher than it was five years ago and total aid is 26 percent higher.

Many schools maybe do not need a tax increase in order to provide schools with sufficient money to provide for the education our children need and deserve, but not the ones in my district.

Smoking Ban Changes — SB 342 stalled on Thursday and was sent back to committee for further review.

The bill seeks to make changes to the statewide smoking ban enacted earlier this year. Some want to level the playing field, since the ban currently allows smoking only in state-owned casinos.

The biggest change under the proposed legislation is that bars would be exempt from the

statewide ban. A "bar" would be required to sell lottery tickets and have less than 30 percent of its gross receipts come from the sale of food to qualify.

There is a strong chance that we will debate this proposal on the House floor before the end of the session.

Abortion — The House plans to undertake the veto override of HB 2115. The bill would require reports by doctors performing late term abortions. Under the bill, physicians must note the specific medical diagnosis and condition constituting a substantial and irreversible impairment of a major bodily function of the mother, or the medical diagnosis and condition which necessitated an abortion.

The original bill passed 83-36 with six members absent. To override the veto, 84 members must vote yes.

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