

Free Press Viewpoint

Keep competition in phone business

Should the government allow AT&T to gobble up T-Mobile, the American cell-phone subsidiary of the German telecommunications giant Deutsche Telekom?

In a word, no. The American phone Goliath claims it needs T-Mobile's towers and frequencies to shore up its system, which it says could otherwise start to collapse as it runs out of "spectrum," or frequencies, in major cities.

No one believes the proposed megamerger will have smooth sailing. It faces opposition from the U.S. Justice Department and many states. The Federal Communications Commission, state regulators and other agencies will have a say.

So far, AT&T seems to be the only one behind the buyout. The telecom began life as Southwestern Bell as part of the old AT&T empire, then was SBC Corp. after the monopoly broke up. It finally bought the shell of its old parent and adopted the famous name. Along the way, SBC bought up Southern Bell, Alltel and other companies, becoming one of the biggest players in the phone and Internet business.

Today's AT&T may be as little loved as "Ma Bell" was in her day, a corporate giant without the soft veneer of the big old phone company. No one is lining up to support claims that the firm's cell phone system might strangle without T-Mobile's frequencies.

The deal would increase AT&T's share of the wireless market from 32 percent to 43 percent, reducing the number of nationwide carriers from four to three, including another former "Baby Bell," Verizon, and Sprint, which grew from an independent phone company, Kansas City based United Telecom.

But T-Mobile is the last remaining low-cost national carrier. Eliminating the German firm from the market would likely have a major impact on wireless prices for everyone, experts say.

The guiding principle should be avoiding a situation where any business is so concentrated that its members are "too big to fail." Our economy can't stand any more such corporate giants.

And with 43 percent of the national cell phone market, AT&T would approach that status.

The Obama administration sued to block the merger in the first real test of its new antitrust policy. This newspaper has long stood for a more aggressive stance on antitrust, fearing the results of even more megamergers among firms in any industry.

Look where having bigger and bigger banks got us. Look at the bankrupt major airlines, which continue to merge. Look at the bankrupt automakers. The list goes on and on.

Government's role in business should be limited, but preventing monopoly domination of an industry certainly is a valid goal, both to protect the market and to protect us from big failures.

Word is the AT&T merger is in trouble. We hope that's true, for the sake of the economy and the sake of the consumer. Bigger is most often *not* better. — *Steve Haynes*

Write us

The *Colby Free Press* encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of general interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

COLBY FREE PRESS

155 W. Fifth St. (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963
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Send news to: colby.editor@nwkansas.com

State award-winning newspaper, General Excellence, Design & Layout, Columns, Editorial Writing, Sports Columns, News, Photography. Official newspaper of Thomas County, Colby, Brewster and Rexford.

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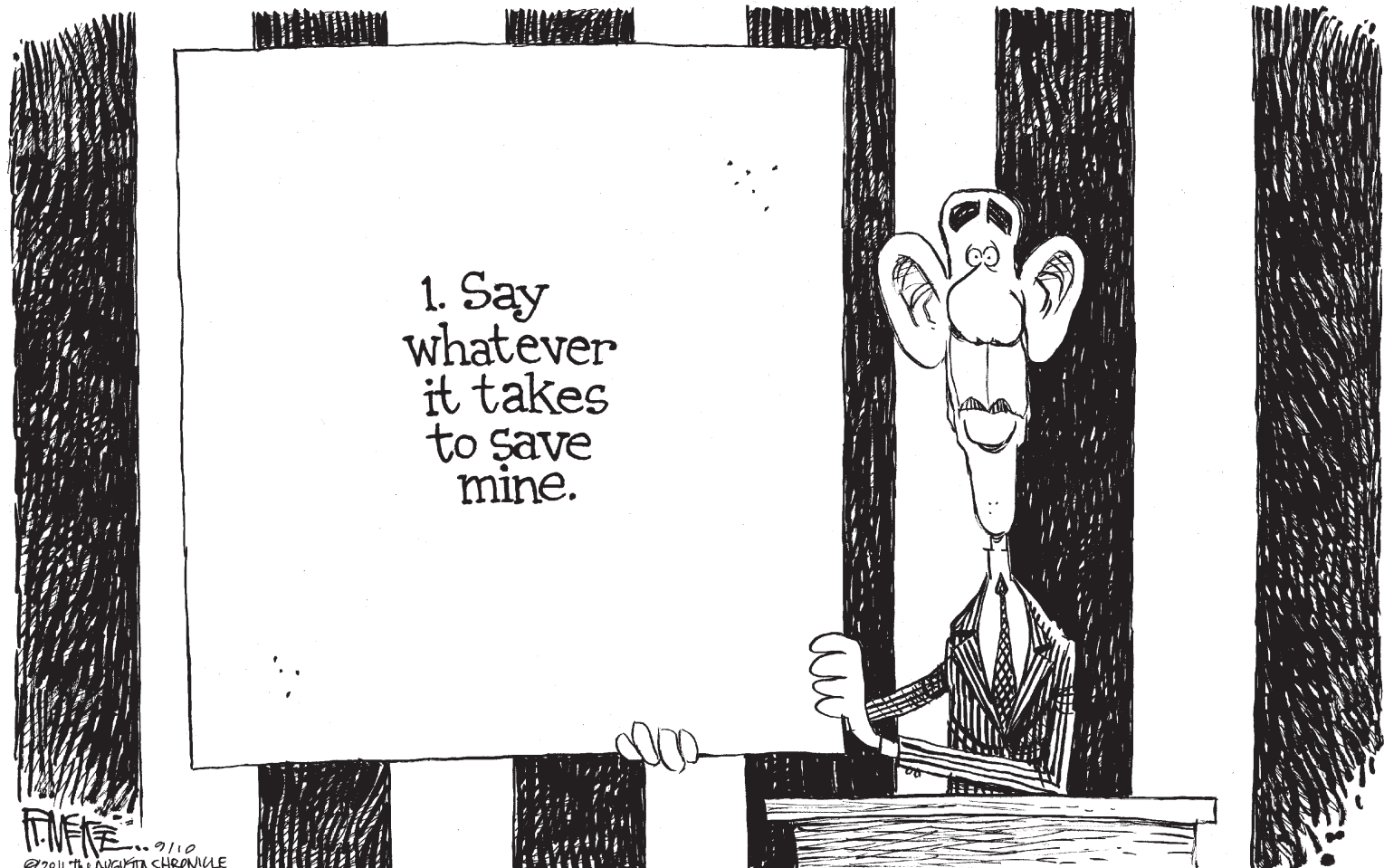
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THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the days observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by NorWest Newspaper, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

PERIODICALS POSTAGE paid at Colby, Kan. 67701, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday to Friday, closed Saturday and Sunday. MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, which is exclusively entitled to the use for publication of all news herein. Member Kansas Press Association and National Newspaper Association.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: In Colby, Thomas County and Oakley: three months \$35, one year \$85. By mail to ZIP Codes beginning with 676 and 677: three months \$39, one year \$95. Elsewhere in the U.S., mailed once per week: three months \$39, one year \$95. Student rate, nine months, in Colby, Thomas County and Oakley, \$64; mailed once per week elsewhere in the U.S. \$72



The PRESIDENT'S JOBS PLAN

Cat crisis means big bucks fast

I always swore I would never spend a fortune on a sick animal.

But what do you do when your cat is convulsing on your lap and nothing you've done has helped? And you know she can be saved if she gets the right care, right away.

We were on our way to Lawrence and Emporia to see our son and Steve's family, and to spend a couple of days on the lake. We decided to take both Annie the dog - she loves the lake - and Molly the diabetic cat - so she could get her insulin shots.

But at a stop between Hays and the middle of nowhere, we realized Molly was in trouble. She couldn't stand and she started having convulsions. We figured she was having an insulin reaction, but we weren't really sure what to do to help a cat.

We called Uncle Pup, Steve's brother the vet. He said it sounded like hypoglycemia, or low blood sugar, and to get some sugar down her. The only sugar we had was a baking mix, half Splenda and half sugar. We pried her mouth open and shoveled it down. No good. We tried again and again until our arms looked like sugar donuts and we were as sticky as kids with cotton candy.

The cat got worse as we drove east. She was literally dying in my lap.



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

Finally we stopped at a convenience store, bought a bottle of honey and washed off the sugar. Steve suggested we call vets in Salina, which by then was only about 10 minutes away. He figured one would be open, and he hit pay dirt on the first try. We rushed to the clinic, which was really an all-night emergency room for pets.

By the time we arrived, Molly was in a diabetic coma. The young vet rushed to put her on an IV of normal saline and dextrose, a kind of sugar. Her blood sugar was 23, when normal should be about 100. Her temperature was low and she was in bad shape.

The vet said come back in the morning. She should pull through.

We spent the night in Salina and just before 8 a.m. picked up Molly. She was wobbly and blind, but the vet said both conditions should clear up. The vet suggested we take her straight

home to our regular vet and get her some more fluids. Then the receptionist gave us a bill that would rival the national debt. (OK, so it would rival what the national debt was when I was a kid, not now.)

That was Friday. Our vet gave her about four more ounces of IV fluid and sent her home with instructions to cut down on her insulin dose and check her blood every so often.

Which is why we spent all day Saturday and Sunday stabbing our cat in the ear. That poor baby's ears are like swiss cheese, and we're going through those expensive blood-checking strips like they were candy.

The good news, however, is she can see and walk normally again and has been really good about having her ears stuck.

At this rate, the cat is going to be more expensive than the house or car. Gee, I wish I'd thought to put her on my insurance as a dependent.

I wonder if I can take her medical expenses off my taxes?

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of NorWest Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes@nwkansas.com

No public money for faith-based program

After holding a closed-door meeting regarding a faith-based marriage initiative, the Brownback administration is asking the federal government for \$6.6 million to fund their program. How many dollars will be committed from our state revenue? They are your tax dollars, either way.

My biggest problem with Brownback's "faith-based" marriage counseling is the hypocrisy of his program.

We turn down grants for a health care program that would do very much to overcome issues that create stress in families that end up in divorce. We cut off government assistance - welfare - programs, because that is invading the church and individual responsibilities. But, we can take tax dollars and give it to the churches to let them put their theology into the program. And, that isn't invading the church member's responsibility?

Hmmmm - I don't have to open my hand when the collection plate passes if the government foots the bill. I'll guarantee, we do put theology into the program. Theology determines who the church thinks deserve help and who should take care of themselves. It is theology and philosophy that upset people about how the government picks and chooses and how much the government gives certain individuals.

The government can pay for a marriage certificate but it can't pay for a sandwich to feed a hungry child, or pay a medical bill for a single mother.

Separation of church and state does not eliminate individual theology. It does eliminate any individual's - or single group's - theology as being absolute in the program.

The authors of our Constitution were intent upon preventing either a majority or a minority from forcing their theology on everyone. Our government is representative of all and that should mean a proportional representation of all religious or nonreligious social standards.



Ken Poland

• Ken's World

Then - if the legislative body is operating properly - a simple majority can put together the program that covers the most compatible wishes of the diversified majority.

That won't always satisfy the vocal majority of any particular sect or group, religious or otherwise.

The Constitution's authors didn't all agree, but the majority apparently didn't think the government should be responsible for setting religious laws governing the individual's relationship with their God or gods.

It seems to me a vocal minority in society has forced a partisan minority - only 40 percent - in the Senate to frustrate the legislative process. Single individuals from all partisan parties have been able to demand incorporation of their agenda into bills before the bill can even be presented to the plenum. This has always been evident in past history, but it has become far more troubling in the last few years.

What does Brownback think about the fact that church people, including his Catholic friends and my chosen denominational affiliation, have the same statistical divorce rates as those who claim no religious (church) affiliation? What is going to make his "faith-based" program more successful than any other? Can his government appointees do a better job than your pastor or teachers?

Oh - I remember now how it works. His appointees will decide whose pastor and teachers get to do the counseling. Government-sponsored religion is on its way in Kansas. I won't

have to worry, though. They won't be selecting a religious freedom advocate like me. I can go into full retirement. (Some of you wish!)

Religious institutions can refuse membership or excommunicate individuals who don't comply with the institution's standards. Thus, they keep their purity. But isn't that a failure of their system if that is the only way of maintaining their purity?

They will have no homosexuals, adulterers, drunks, wife beaters, or whatever else that group determines is an abomination to God. Furthermore, those outsiders are not allowed to be a part of or have any say in civil society. That practice also relieves God of having to make judgment at the end of life. The church will have already taken care of that for him.

The moral majority and religious right will make it illegal for you to sin. And when they have any division of ranks, we'll settle it with religious war. Might will make it right.

Freedom of choice is no freedom at all, if there is only one choice. Freedom of religion is nonexistent, if there is only one religion allowed.

Ken Poland describes himself as a semiretired farmer living north of Gem, a Christian, affiliated with American Baptist Churches, and a radical believer in separation of church and state. Contact him at rcwinc@cheerful.com.

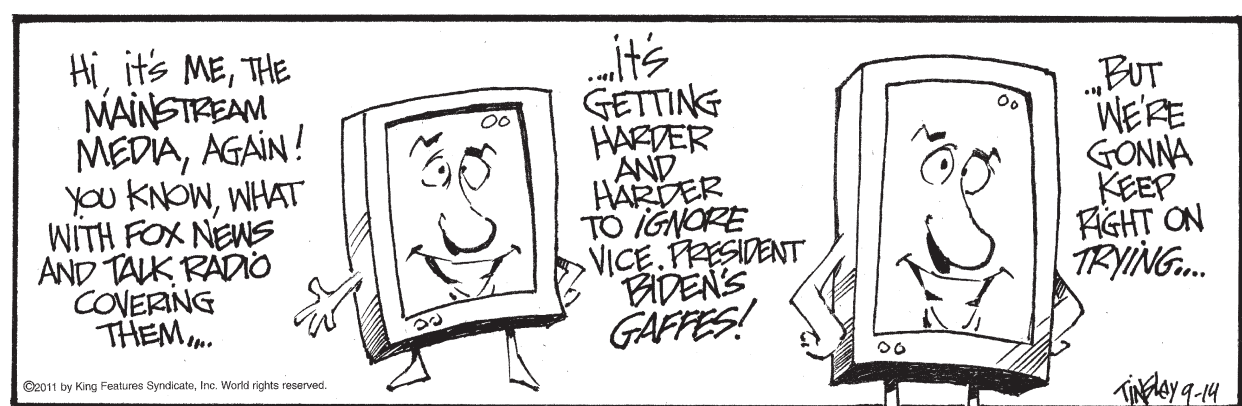
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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



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