

## Other Viewpoints

### Aircraft proposal could be good deal

Especially in light of Hawker Beechcraft's latest layoffs, elected officials of Wichita and Sedgwick County should jump at the chance at a \$52.7 million expansion of Bombardier Learjet and 450 new jobs – and help make the case to the parent company for why the project belongs in Wichita.

Announced before consideration at a recent Wichita City Council meeting, the deal involves \$1 million each from the city and Sedgwick County to pay for new parking at Wichita Mid-Continent Airport that would be leased to Learjet. The Wichita Airport Authority would seek another \$2 million from the U.S. Economic Development Administration to help fund the new parking area. In addition, Learjet would get property-tax abatements for new and expanded facilities at the plant, and is negotiating with the state for more incentives. The proposal would accommodate specialized engineering design services for Bombardier military projects and regional jets and airliners, centralized information technology services for Bombardier operations throughout the United States, an expanded Bombardier Flight Test Center, a new aircraft delivery center, a new production flight center and a new Learjet 85 paint facility.

The proposal is all the sweeter because its high-paying jobs would come on top of the 2009 agreement with the state to assemble and finish the Learjet 85 in Wichita, which represented 600 new jobs.

It's appropriate that the new agreement, which was crafted with the help of the Greater Wichita Economic Development Coalition, calls for Learjet to repay some or all of the money if the company falls short of its commitments regarding capital improvements and jobs. Similarly, in light of its 2010 public incentives deal with the state and local governments, Hawker Beechcraft will face penalties if its employment drops below 3,600 in the state – a figure it remains far above, even after the recent 300 job cuts. As these companies fight to recover from the recession, taxpayers deserve to know that their investment in such deals is protected.

Some individuals on and off the City Council and County Commission may argue that Bombardier Learjet should pay for its own parking lots, rather than ask taxpayers to do it. But such thinking ignores the competitive realities of both aircraft manufacturing and business site selection.

As Gov. Sam Brownback recently told the Wichita Metro Chamber of Commerce: "I think we have to fund the incentives to keep competitive in the game. In an ideal world, you wouldn't have any incentives. You'd just all compete on a business and economic basis. That's not where we are."

Like Brownback, local elected officials need to help Wichita and Sedgwick County not only play the game of economic development but win it as often as possible, especially when doing so means protecting Wichita's venerable – and vulnerable – status as Air Capital of the World.

The Learjet deal promises to do so, as it grows and strengthens the roots of a planemaker that has proudly called Wichita home for 50 years.

– The Wichita Eagle, via The Associated Press



AMERICA VOTES

### How silly is the Mayan calendar?

Sitting at this desk is a little like sitting beside a river. You look upstream and something floats into view around the bend. Pretty soon it's right in front of you. Before you know it, there it goes downstream and out of sight.

Some of those topics floating by are big and serious, but really have nothing much to do with our little corner of the world beyond happening on the same planet.

Others are big and serious and generally the subject of very polarized debates in which lots of people get angry and few people change their minds. Those issues need to be looked at, but in a thoughtful, quiet format where there's a way to calm the shouting – like a referee. Our small-town newspaper is generally pretty shallow water to float a boat that big, so on they go.

Some topics fall in the "educational" category, and a few get fished out of the stream for our use – mostly because they caused me to say, "Hmm, I didn't know that" or "People need to be reminded of this every so often."

Some are downright silly. A fair number of these get dragged in, simply because we all need to laugh.

One silly piece that caught the eye of several in the office last week was the ad campaign saying, in effect, "The world is ending. Stock up big because this is the last Christmas ever."

A little background here. Apparently, ac-



**Marian Ballard**

#### • Collection Connections

According to the Mayan calendar, the world will end on Dec. 21, 2012. This would be the calendar of a pre-Columbian Central America civilization which never heard of Christmas. Christmas – Mayan End of the World – Christmas... Mutually exclusive concepts. Maybe I just can't think outside the box.

On a more serious note, the U.S. Postal Service is issuing a plea – to return all those plastic tubs in which mail is carried to and from businesses with a lot of mail. Places like newspapers. But also, places like schools, churches, shopping centers and other large businesses and organizations.

You've seen them sitting around. They wind up in stock rooms, or filled with supplies in janitor's closets, or holding the overflow from someone's desk. They are handy to hold things. Sometimes, they even get filled with mail and taken back to the post office.

They problem is, the Postal Service – which is quite visibly going broke – keeps having to buy them, largely because they are so handy

they keep disappearing. The Postal Service says it spent \$50 million last year replacing mailing equipment that was stolen or inadvertently taken off postal property. That sounds like a drop in the bucket compared to the size of the other problems it faces, but it's a pretty big drop. In fact it's a hole in the bucket that probably gets larger each year.

So to echo the pleas of charitable organizations galore this holiday season, give back – the U.S. Postal Service property you find. (It's illegal to have it, anyway.)

In other news, it seems that some stores are rethinking the whole Black Friday thing. Apparently, having people get trampled to death is really not good publicity for the store. Personally, I can't see the appeal anyway. Why not shop reasonably all year round, rather than contribute to a culture where frenzied spending is demanded for a holiday honoring a baby born as a traveller who couldn't even find a decent motel room. Really, talk about fleabag accommodations – a manger is really the pits.

But then, why should people who believe in the Mayan calendar worry about it anyway. If the world is ending, surely there's a luggage limit on what follows?

*Marian Ballard has collected careers as counselor, librarian, pastor, and now copy editor for the Colby Free Press. She collects ideas, which are more portable than other stuff.*

### Protect the prairie for all

Like the grass, wind, tumbleweeds, tornadoes and drought, prairie dogs have long been a part of the northwestern Kansas landscape. At the same time, farmers and stockmen have lived and thrived in this short-grass environment for more than a century.

In the early 1900s, the first landowners and settlers broke out some of the native, short-grass prairie to grow crops. Many introduced livestock into this region to eat the nutrient-rich grass and provide the world's finest beef.

During this same period farmers and stockmen who lived in Logan County controlled the prairie dogs on their land so the cattle could remain productive. Left unchecked, prairie dogs breed, overpopulate and soon destroy the native buffalo grass. It is replaced by weeds or other plant species livestock find less palatable than the grasses that were replaced.

When the prairie dogs continue to thrive and reproduce the ground sometimes remains bare and the precious topsoil blows away in the wind. There are accounts of numerous days that are reminiscent of the Dust Bowl days of the '30s on some of this barren land.

Located in Logan County the region of grassland runs from the western edge of the county to the eastern border – approximately 40 miles. It stretches nearly eight miles wide along this band – more than 280 square miles of grass. Buffalo, blue grama, side oats and little bluestem grasses thrive here on the High



**John Schlageck**

#### • Insights Kansas Farm Bureau

Plains – all favorites in prairie dog town.

Like many of his ranching neighbors, Logan County stockman Lynn Kirkham knows prairie dogs are vagabonds and cross roads, under fences and into new territory. He understands they continually move, thus exacerbating the problem.

"Prairie dogs come in and establish their colonies, dig holes and eat the vegetation," Kirkham says. "When the prairie dogs come in here and establish themselves it almost looks like a moonscape."

In Logan County, an average cow/calf pair requires 10 acres of grassland. In a pasture with prairie dogs, this number can increase to 15 acres to feed each cattle pair.

"With prairie dogs on your land, you can't run as many cattle because there isn't as much grass," Kirkham explains.

Another western Kansas stockman, Cameron Edwards, Logan County, is a fourth generation farmer/stockman. Like so many early inhabitants of this part of Kansas, Edwards'

great-grandfather purchased their land to serve as a ranch and to raise cattle.

"We've tried to do everything we can to keep the prairie dogs out," Edwards explains. "They eat the grass that our cattle should be eating. Prairie dogs are to grassland like weeds are to cropland."

Not only do they compete for the grassland but they damage the environment and surrounding beauty of this unique High Plains landscape. So it comes down to those who do not want prairie dogs and ferrets versus those who want to use them in this region of Kansas.

What is the solution?

The key is to have a good control method for the prairie dog, and to keep the native grasses in place that also allow for livestock production.

"We've had prairie dog out here as long as I can remember and we've been able to keep them at a manageable population until now," Kirkham says. "If everyone out here would control their prairie dogs, we wouldn't have a problem."

*John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm near Seguin, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.*

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### Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley



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