



Other Viewpoints

Boeing’s move bitter pill for state

Kansans have reason to be disappointed by the Boeing Co.’s, decision to close its Wichita facilities within two years. The move is a blow both to the Kansas economy and to the more than 2,100 Wichita workers who will lose their jobs. Although the decision wasn’t entirely surprising, a move that Boeing presumably made for business reasons constitutes a double-cross to Kansas lawmakers. And small wonder. As Sens. Pat Roberts and Jerry Moran told the Associated Press, Kansans were stout advocates for Boeing in its protracted struggle to win a \$35 billion contract to build scores of next-generation Air Force refueling tankers. Sen. Roberts said Boeing had promised to remain in Wichita if it won that contract. Boeing had been expected to substantially boost employment in Wichita. Instead, the bulk of those jobs will go to Seattle, and many of the existing Wichita jobs will go to facilities in Oklahoma and Texas. Boeing Vice President Mark Bass said the market had changed in the last 18 months and the Wichita facility was no longer competitive. Sen. Moran wasn’t buying that. “Boeing’s announcement is that things have changed. Well, the only thing that really has changed in my mind in the last year is Boeing now has the contract. When they made the commitments (to Wichita), they didn’t.” Although state officials are still working with Boeing, Sen. Moran pointedly added, “It’s difficult to negotiate with someone who hasn’t kept their word.” For his part, Gov. Sam Brownback sounded more disappointed than bitter, but did say, “No one worked harder for the success of the Boeing Co. than Team Kansas. Our team never wavered, always keeping its commitment to the success of the Boeing Co., for the good of the state and the nation. The dedication and hard work of generations of Kansans built the success the Boeing Co. enjoys today.” While not diminishing the loss, the governor, to his credit, extolled Wichita’s superb facilities and workforce and vowed to help pursue commercial aviation opportunities, whether they involve Boeing, Airbus or other manufacturers. It’s worth noting that Spirit AeroSystems has taken over Boeing’s commercial operations and continues to make parts for Boeing in Wichita. There’s no denying the blow that Boeing’s decision has inflicted on Wichita and the state. Still, there’s plenty to build on, and Kansans are nothing if not resilient. We’ve endured the recession better than most states, and we can, and will, recover from this disappointment as well.

— The Manhattan Mercury, via the Associated Press

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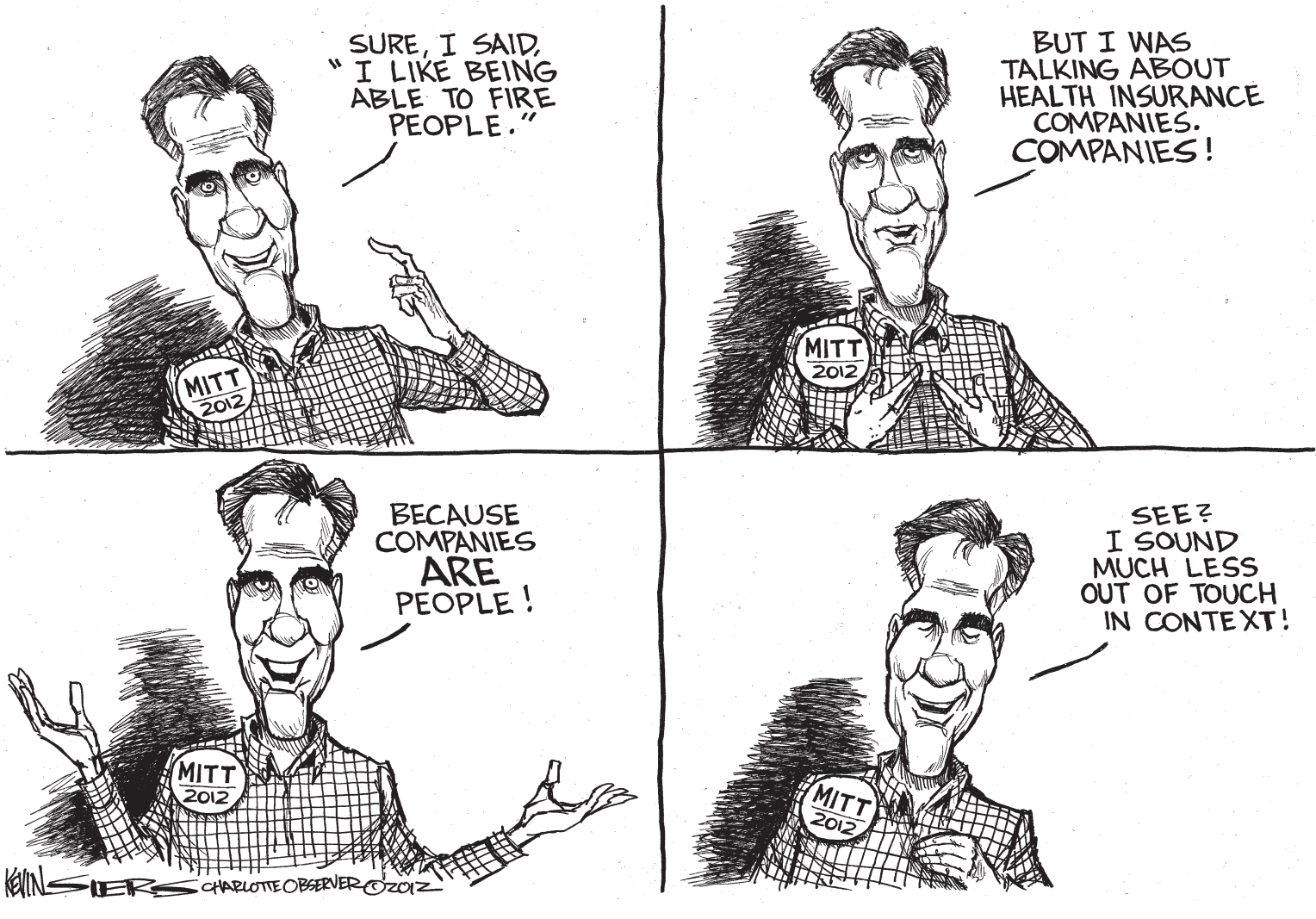
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Supporting business pays community

Back in the fall, when it was warmer outside and the snow hadn’t fallen, the Decatur County Feed Yard celebrated its 40th anniversary.

Owners Warren and Carol Weibert put on a dinner for customers, suppliers, friends, and especially the original investors who put money into the yard that first year, perhaps more out of a sense civic responsibility than any expectation of profit.

Oberlin has a long history of people supporting economic development efforts. Most came to naught, but the feed yard was the exception.

The bus plant, the boat plant, the dairy, all flourished. Not the feed yard, which was a major effort by any standard.

Oberlin area investors put up \$270,000 and borrowed another \$480,000 from county banks, backed by the U.S. Small Business Administration, to get the yard going. With wise management and good planning, it took off.

Five years later, one of the organizers, Milton Nitsch, a Pontiac-Buick-GMC and implement dealer here, bought out the other investors and brought his daughter and son-in-law in to manage the operation. In the 35 years since, the yard has earned an international reputation far beyond anything you’d expect in a small Kansas town.

Mr. Weibert has been active in state and national beef organizations, and he’s earned a reputation as an innovator in the feeding industry. Today, computers track each individual animal through the yard, all the way to the packing plant. Results can be used by custom-



Steve Haynes

• Along the Sappa

ers to improve their breeding.

The yard is one of the most successful in the industry, and certainly the most successful economic development project ever conceived in Oberlin. Forty years later, it provides 17 jobs and generates millions in income, much of it spent on grain grown within 30 miles of the facility.

None of that would have been possible without those original investors, many of whom backed the project with little thought of reward. This time, though, they were paid back, according to news reports at the time, with a 50 percent profit over five years.

At the dinner, Mr. Weibert recognized those investors, a precious few of whom were actually present. Most of us who waved to the crowd were just standing in for parents or predecessors who actually gambled on the project. It’s good that they should be remembered.

The Weiberts treated the crowd, and anyone else who wanted to come in after dinner, to a show by Red Steagall, a Texas cowboy poet, songwriter and singer who’s a lot of fun to listen to. Red entertained us for some time, but my favorite, I think, was his poem, “Riding for

the Brand.”

In it, some ranch hands are listening to an old hand named Jake “schoolin” a young cowboy in the “unwritten law of the range:”

He said, “Son, a man’s brand  
Is his own special mark  
That says this is mine, leave it alone  
You hire out to a man,  
Ride for his brand  
and protect it like it was your own.”

A lot of Jake’s stories were so much hokey, though the listener concludes:

But I got to thinkin’  
’Bout what he had said,  
And the more of it I understand,  
The more I believe.  
We’d all be better off  
If more people would ride for the brand.

After dinner, Mr. Weibert gave out “Riding for the Brand” awards to four long-time employees. But it seems to me that all those investors, the feed yard’s workers over the years and the Weiberts themselves have been riding, not just for the brand, but for the whole town. Do they give an award for that?

Steve Haynes is president of Nor’West Newspapers. When he has the time, he’d rather be reading a good book or casting a fly.

Redistricting partisanship a problem

“It’s actually pretty good,” my uncle insisted. When he asked if I had already read my Christmas gift from him, a copy of George W. Bush’s Decision Points, I joked that I had been waiting for it to come out in paperback.

My uncle and I frequently give each other books on or by political figures we hold in low esteem. They’re sort of gag gifts, but I still usually read them.

By listening to opposing points of view one can frequently learn something, and occasionally discover heretofore unknown areas of agreement. I had such an experience reading the 43rd President’s book.

Bush’s political memoir didn’t redefine for me the major points of what I believe his legacy will be for historians.

The Bush presidency will be forever tainted by two disastrous policy decisions – huge tax cuts which ushered in crushing deficits, and the invasion of Iraq, an undertaking billed to a credit card which was not worth the cost.

But in a chapter entitled “Leading,” he talks of the need to reduce the ideological extremes in Congress and proposes that redistricting be carried out by committees of non-partisan elders.

Bush argues that since so many districts are gerrymandered to favor one party or the other few districts are competitive nationally in most years. The only true competition in “safe” districts is intraparty in nature. Therefore many members run to the far end of the political spectrum to fend off primary challenges.

President Obama’s recent characterization of Congress as “dysfunctional,” hit a chord with most of his countrymen, and the institution has an approval rating that hovers around eight percent nationally. So what about former



Alan Jilka

• A Voice of Reason

President Bush’s idea?

An effort to put such a system in place in Kansas failed during the 2009 session of the Kansas Legislature. Groups in power tend to prefer to use the redistricting process to increase that power. The tradition goes back to Massachusetts Gov. Eldridge Gerry’s use of the strategy in his state back in 1812.

Such an exercise will be on full display this year in the Kansas Legislature. And one of the main protagonists from ten years ago is back to lead the effort, House Speaker Mike O’Neil. O’Neil, who recently thought a photo of Michelle Obama on a windy day with a racial insult below was so funny that he forwarded it to the entire Republican caucus, led the effort last time that, among other things, split the city of Lawrence in an effort to push Kansas City Democrat Dennis Moore out of his seat.

By law redistricting is a state function. But since the four Kansas congressmen are all Republican, they are rumored to be working on a map among themselves to present for the Legislature’s approval.

This sets up conflict between Congressman Tim Huelskamp, whose first district needs to gain residents, and Lynn Jenkins (second) and Kevin Yoder (third) who want the tradeoffs to make their congressional seats safer.

Redistricting at the state level will also am-

plify conflicts during a session in which Gov. Sam Brownback has laid out an ambitious agenda. Brownback, schooled in the hyper-partisan environment of Washington, has brought its influence back to Kansas.

Moderate Republican senators who have drawn the governor’s ire already have primary opponents. And redistricting will purposely be left for later in the session so that the administration and its allies can use its threats as coercion to bring legislators into line behind their agenda.

I think most Kansans, like most Americans, feel we need less partisanship in our political system, not more. If Gov. Brownback really wants to make a positive contribution to our state he could propose and push former President Bush’s idea of a nonpartisan redistricting commission. The move would create publicity for our state, this time for the right reasons.

Alan Jilka is a former Salina city commissioner and mayor. He was the Democratic nominee for Congress in the 1st District in 2010.

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Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

