



Free Press
Viewpoint

Gobbling rivals,
airlines get too big

News that other airlines are circling the carcass of bankrupt AMR Corp., parent of the venerable American Airlines, can't be good for the economy or the consumer.

American, once the biggest domestic carrier, undoubtedly struggled to compete with its merged megarivals, United-Continental and Delta, which itself picked clean the bones of bankrupt Northwest.

All four of the big carriers washed themselves through bankruptcy premerger, shaking out union contracts, pensions and restrictive work rules, terminal and aircraft leases, anything they thought they could get away with. Common stockholders, of course, were left holding the bag, along with retirees, airport operators and others.

In the self-centered world of business, none of that counts. It's a jungle, and survival indeed goes to the fittest, or the one with the most and best lawyers. That is not necessarily wrong, just true.

Then the big airlines set about getting bigger by gobbling up the competition. That blazed a trail that others want to follow. Today, a large airline, U.S. Airways, hopes to go mega by gobbling up American. U.S. Air itself used the name of a fallen carrier taken over by America West a few years ago. The original U.S. Air formed after regional carrier Piedmont feasted on the remains of bankrupt Eastern, and so on.

There remains virtually no holdover from the "legacy" airlines of yore, the pioneering firms like Continental and American and Trans World whose founders built empires in the days of small planes and government regulation. Just names and shattered dreams.

The men and women who run today's airlines see profits after bankruptcy, but they seem to prize size above all.

Unfortunately, that will make them, like the "Big Three" automakers and the megabanks before them, "too big to fail." And the next time an airline goes down, the entire economy will suffer. Taxpayers will be stuck with the bill.

Can't happen, someone will say.

Of course it will. Just watch.

The solution, as with banks and other businesses, is for the government to enforce antitrust laws and keep big businesses relatively small. You could argue over how small, but any firm that controls more than 20 percent of an industry ought to be suspect.

The purpose is not to control business or punish business people. Let them fight it out in the arena. But make it possible for startups like the highly successful, always profitable Southwest Airlines to prosper. Maintain a level, open playing field. Then stand back and watch. That's what government should do; not control, not bail out and never play favorites.

What happens if AMR does not fall to U.S. Air? Reportedly, Delta waits in the wings. And marketing partner British Airways is said to have a stake – and say – in what happens.

But management says the firm can and will stand on its own. We believe it should have that chance, though the ones who led it into bankruptcy probably should not be rewarded with even-bigger contracts. That's a question for the board of directors, of course.

But airline customers and taxpayers – the rest of us who stand to have our pockets picked down the line – ought to favor an independent and healthy American over yet another big, big albatross just waiting to tumble. – *Steve Haynes*

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Sharon Friedlander - Publisher
sfriedlander @ nwkansas.com

NEWS

News Editor
colby.editor @ nwkansas.com

Kayla Cornett - Sports Reporter
colby.sports @ nwkansas.com

Marian Ballard - Copy Editor
mballard @ nwkansas.com

Christina Beringer - Society Reporter
colby.society @ nwkansas.com

ADVERTISING
colby.ads @ nwkansas.com

Kathryn Ballard

Advertising Representative
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Kylee Hunter - Graphic Design
khunter @ nwkansas.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Kylie Freeman - Office Manager
kfreeman @ nwkansas.com

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YOU SEEM TO HAVE
COMMITMENT ISSUES,
MR. GINGRICH!!!

DO YOU NOW,
WITHOUT RESERVATION,
VOW ETERNAL LOYALTY TO
CONSERVATIVE PRINCIPLES?



Exercise or dance, just don't overdo

I'm learning to dance.

Well, I'm taking a few lessons anyway.

I love to dance. I dance at every opportunity. Steve has learned to dance out of self defense. Today, he enjoys dancing. I love it.

I dance at home, on vacation, even at work. Turn on the radio, and I start to dance – which can be kinda disconcerting when I'm driving.

I've been known to start dancing to radio music and keep it up when the evening news comes on.

But this a little different.

While I don't normally go in for crazes, I had a chance to take Zumba lessons with my friend Mary.

Mary has done this before and said, "Come on. It'll be fun."

She was right. It was fun. Also sweaty and tiring.

We followed a crowd of women and one brave man into a cracker-box sized room. There were about two dozen of us, and not enough room for proper stretching, much less dancing. But that was the space we had, and the teacher lined us up in three long lines. Then we switched around some, as the shorter of us moved under the ceiling fans and the



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

taller ones near the walls to keep from being hurt when arms went up in the air.

The instructor was young, blond and perky – but then aren't they always?

Mary had told me that it didn't make any difference if I didn't do it "right." She said that half the people there were beginners.

She was right. Most of us didn't have a clue.

The instructor told us that she would show us the steps but that Zumba was more about exercise than dance.

Well, darn. I wanted to dance.

And dance I did.

She started us off with a warm up that had me panting.

And we were soon wiggling around like line dancers with ants in our pants.

It was fun and exhilarating, tiring and sweaty. Everything that was promised, in other words.

It wasn't pretty, mind you. While one half of the class was following the instruction the other half was going the wrong way most of the time. But we were all moving and getting into the music and the spirit and having fun.

The class was an hour long, but I only lasted 30 minutes.

Thirty years ago, I did something similar. I joined an exercise class and thought I could keep up. I hopped and bopped for an hour and could hardly crawl out of bed the next day.

That was 30 years ago, but it was a painful lesson I haven't forgotten.

I'll be taking a couple more classes and hope to get a little better, but I'm sure that I'm not going to get to be either a Zumba expert or wonderfully fit.

I'm just hoping to be able to get out of bed in the morning and be able to walk to the next class.

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

Water issues, liquor sales on Senate list

This past summer Governor Brownback had a Kansas Water Authority Task Force meeting at Colby, directed toward conservation of water to protect the Ogallala Aquifer for future generations.

The results of the stakeholder task force representing the Kansas Water Authority produced points of interest.

HB-2451: Amend the appropriation act to eliminate "use it or lose it" in areas closed to new water rights development.

SB-272: Amend multi-year flex accounts to expand water management in five year periods.

SB-310: Local Enhancement Management Plans that would provide a process for proactive conservation plans with local decision making controls and could provide corrective measures and mandatory water use reductions.

Other discussions were to amend current laws to allow additional Water Bank development and support making the pilot Water Transition Assistance Program a permanent program.

Uncork Kansas is a rising movement of



Ralph Ostmeyer

• State Senator

more than 1,700 businesses, Chamber of Commerce, local trade associations and thousands of consumers with a common goal, to allow grocery and convenience stores to give consumers the ability to choose where they purchase beer, wine and spirits.

I need to hear from all businesses involved, liquor stores and grocery stores. This issue does not seem to go away. Proponents feel they have made compromises that should satisfy all involved. I have some grocery stores that are interested but very few liquor stores in the community. Then there is some interest in selling Class A, the sale of beer only and Class B, the sale of wines and beer.

The only way to sell Class C, the sale of beer, wine, and spirits, would be to purchase a

license from an existing liquor store that would sell a license, beginning Jan. 1 through Jan. 1, 2016, after which the cap would be lifted, and the number of licenses available for purchase from ABC will be restricted.

A couple other points, starting Jan. 1, existing liquor stores will be allowed to sell any other goods or services, and 3 percent of the liquor enforcement tax revenues will be distributed to cities and counties that lose sales tax revenue due to reduced sales of cereal malt beverages beer.

Kansas Wildlife, Parks and Tourism filed a bill to do away with hunting and fishing license exemptions for 65+. Stay tuned and we will report more information later.

Finally, if you are a student 12 to 17 years old who would like to page this session, call my office and schedule a Monday. I have scheduled Mondays Feb. 15 and March 5.

Call my office soon.

I can be reached by writing to Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol, 300 SW 10th Street, Room 225-E, Topeka, Kan., 66612, or call (785) 296-7399. My e-mail address is Ralph.Ostmeyer@senate.ks.gov.

Arts editorial raises comment

To the Editor:

Just what the heck did you mean in your editorial, "Arts support plan might be a start," by your statement "Mr. Schwaller's name ought to indicate which side of the tracks he comes from, and there is the problem with spending taxpayer's money on the arts."

One might be tempted to say that name calling is childish, but I feel confident most people in this community teach their children that it is wrong to do so at a very young age. Not long after that they go on to impart that it is wrong to make disparaging remarks about other people's condition in life, that so-called "wrong side of tracks."



Free Press
Letter Drop

• Our readers sound off

No one cares to have their name made fun of, and I assume that includes you. I fail to see why you took a coherent, yet wrongheaded, editorial viewpoint and through your poor choice of words destroy any of its remaining

credibility.

You can set an example to the children of this community by publicly apologizing to Mr. Schwaller for your lapse in judgment.

Freddie Lamm, Colby

Editor's Note: No disrespect was meant. My point is that it is wrong, very wrong, for the middle class to take money from the poor (via sales and property taxes) and spend it on entertainment only a few enjoy. This money is not freely given; the middle class can and should put up their own money via donations. And Mr. Schwaller should be ashamed of himself. – *Steve Haynes*

Mallard
Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

