



Other Viewpoints

Audit makes sense for Motor Vehicles

Problems with the state’s new, \$40 million motor vehicle registration system have been vexing county officials and vehicle owners since it went live more than two months ago. Exactly what troubles the system isn’t known – although there is no shortage of theories among those who have had to deal with it in one fashion or another – but the state’s legislative post audit committee has decided to find out. The committee earlier this week approved, at the urging of Sen. Laura Kelly, D-Topeka, an investigation into the system’s implementation. The audit is expected to begin in December and be completed in the spring of 2013. Given the scope of the system’s problems and the number of people affected by its balkiness – and that list keeps growing – the post audit committee made the right decision. It’s worth noting that the audit doesn’t have the appearance at this time being of a witch hunt, even though it is designed to identify how and where things went wrong, and it shouldn’t become one. The audit is necessary, Kelly said, to prevent the same thing from happening again. Everyone should be able to endorse that, especially Donna Shelite, director of vehicles for the Kansas Department of Revenue. Before the state shut down vehicle registrations in every county across Kansas for a week to install the new system, Shelite, in a letter to the editor published in this newspaper, asked vehicle owners for their patience and extolled the virtues of the new software and how it would make the registration process more efficient. Shelite wasn’t trying to blow smoke at anyone. She believed what she wrote then and still does. It’s just that something went wrong somewhere along the line. Learning how and why things got off line is the smart thing to do, and the information could be beneficial the next time a new system is introduced. To date, we know the new computer system apparently worked well in Sedgwick County, which participated in the development phase. Problems erupted when the system went online statewide on May 9. Reasons for delays and shutdowns that happened after that date have been attributed to a lack of training in some jurisdictions, quirks unique to specific counties and bugs in the system. The department of revenue has acknowledged the system isn’t perfect and is withholding the last payment to the vendor, 3M, until it fixes the system’s response times, availability, bugs and maintenance. It’s apparent the system isn’t performing as expected. Conducting an audit to determine why makes sense. – *The Topeka Capital-Journal, via the Associated Press*

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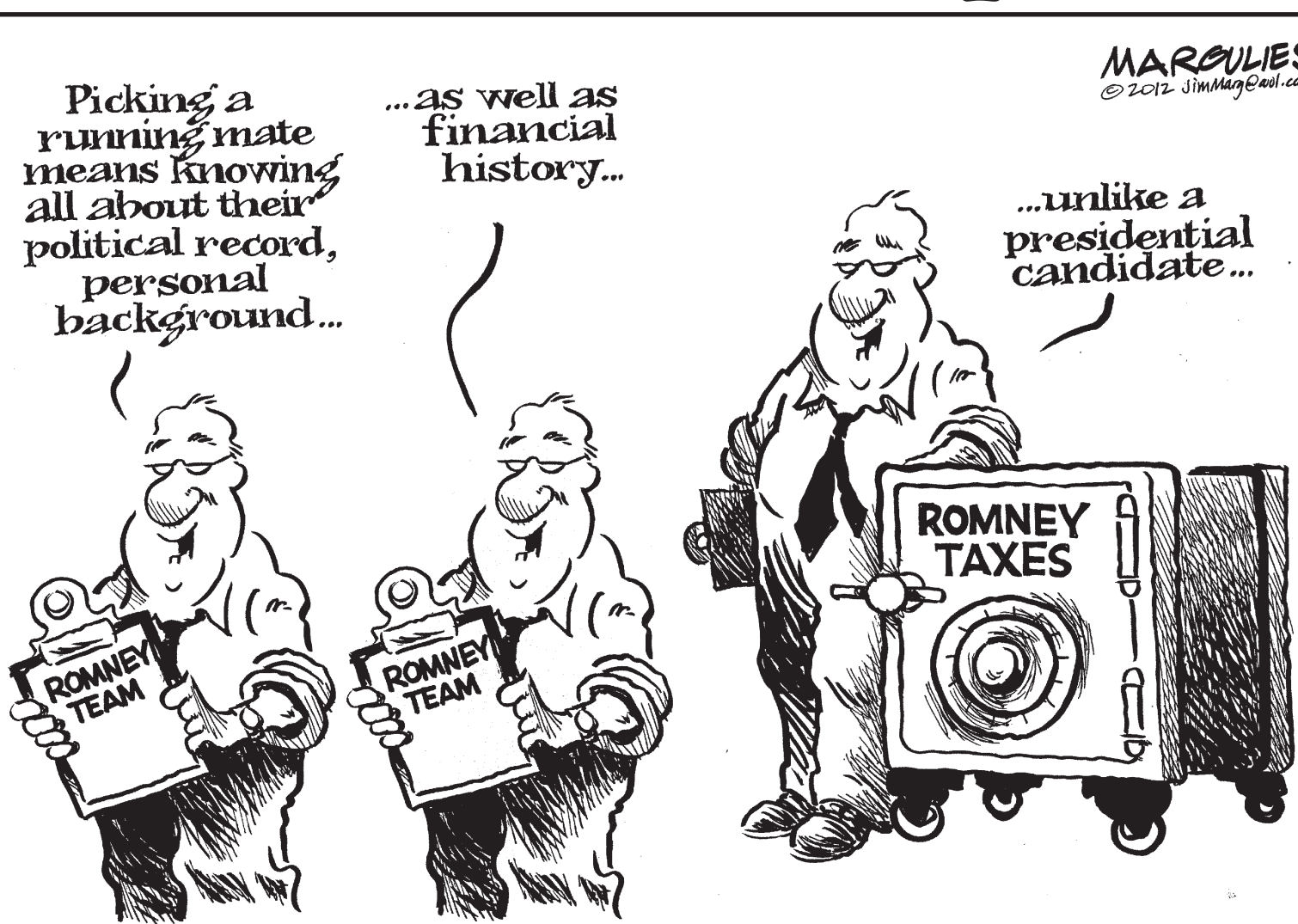
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Birds house shopping in July?

Jim and I were so excited last week when two little birds, a male and a female, were seen going in and out of the bird house Jim made last year.

Jim had painted the little house red and made the hole in the front small so large birds and squirrels couldn’t get into it. He hung it in the maple tree in our front yard so we could see it out the front picture window.

We watched it off and on all last summer and the birds paid no attention to the little house whatsoever. We were really disappointed. That’s why, when we saw the little birds actually going in and out of the house last week, we were so enthused. Finally, the house would have a family living there.

The little male bird was dark gray with a light gray breast that looked rather blue when he was in just the right light. Beneath his beak there was a black spot that looked like he was wearing a black bib. The female wasn’t as deep in color as the male and didn’t have the bib. Both birds were small and rather long and lean with tails that came to a point, and they had little short beaks.

I instantly got out the bird book to see if I could identify them. Even though I searched and searched the entire book I wasn’t able to find any pictures that looked like them. They slightly resembled the coloring of the Sociable Sparrow shown in the book, but were much smaller and leaner.

The next day we no longer saw the female bird, but the male stayed around the house like he was guarding it. Jim and I decided that



Marj Brown

• Marj’s Snippets

the birds had built a nest in the house and the little female was nesting while the male stood guard. Even though we were surprised that birds would be nesting this time of year instead of in the spring, we were still excited.

When a blue jay landed on a nearby branch, the little male bird hid on a lower branch until the blue jay left. One day, a squirrel climbed up the tree and attacked the birdhouse by climbing all over it trying to find a way in. He remained in the tree the rest of the day just lounging around, and the little bird stayed away.

The next day the little male bird was back on guard duty. We noticed that he would occasionally go into the house for a second or two and then come right back out. We wondered what he was doing. I said, “Maybe he’s taking in food for the female.” Even though we never saw him with anything in his beak, we finally decided that must be what it was doing, because he continued to go in and out often.

After seeing the bird in the tree for three or four days, we noticed he was no longer around. We imagined all sorts of things: perhaps he had been chased away or even killed by a squirrel or a larger bird, or maybe the eggs hatched (we

had no idea how long it would take) and he left. Or maybe he had a squabble with the female and they got a divorce.

The following week, Jim decided, since the birds were no longer around, he would climb up a ladder and straighten the wire that the house was hanging from and level the house. He had wanted to do that for some time but I didn’t want him to disturb the little family of birds.

When he looked inside the house, he expected to see the remains of a nest. What he saw was nothing at all but a large amount of bird poop. That little bird was using Jim’s little house for an outhouse. The reason he was going in and out every once in a while, was to go to the toilet. When Jim came in to tell me what he saw, he was rather irate that a bird would treat his house like that.

I said, “Well, that’s life. That’s how it goes some times. You try to do someone a favor, and....”

I’m thinking that the bird brought his wife over that first day to check with her to see if she liked the house. When she agreed to nest there next spring, he began to mark the house for next season. You know, like dogs mark their territory with urine. I guess we won’t know until next spring, but we’ll be watching.

*Marj Brown has lived in Colby for 62 years and has spent a good deal of that time writing about people and places here. She says it's one of her favorite things to do.*

The private sector is not doing fine

It’s become a tradition for U.S. presidents to redefine the English language. President Clinton taught us there are multiple definitions of “is” and President George W. Bush took the art to a new level. Last month, President Obama taught us that the definition of “doing fine” depends upon whether it is applied to government or the private sector.

He said, “The private sector is doing fine. Where we’re seeing weaknesses in our economy have to do with state and local government. Oftentimes cuts initiated by, you know, governors or mayors who are not getting the kind of help that they have in the past from the federal government and who don’t have the same kind of flexibility as the federal government in dealing with fewer revenues coming in.” Apparently “flexibility” now means “massive deficits.”

The basis for his statement is that the private sector is slowly recouping some of the eight million jobs lost during the Great Recession but state and local government jobs are declining a little. Only one who puts government interests ahead of the private sector could look at these facts and conclude that the private sector is doing fine.

Since private sector employment peaked in 2007, state and local government employment has only dipped below the baseline in the last year, finishing 0.8 percent and 1.4 percent below 2007, respectively. Last year the private sector recouped some of the eight million jobs lost but there are still over six million fewer jobs – about the same number of jobs as the entire state of Florida.

If a net loss of six million jobs is “doing fine,” that might explain the party atmosphere at the General Services Administration since

Other Opinions

• Dave Trabert  
Kansas Policy Inst.

federal employment has grown steadily after adjusting for census staffing.

No one wants to see people lose jobs, but the recent minor decline in state and local government jobs is only trimming a bit of the excess growth. State and local government jobs have still grown four times faster than the private sector since 1998.

President Obama wants to spend more taxpayer money to rehire police officers, firefighters and teachers. Of course we don’t want to lose those important positions, but why would government choose to eliminate them instead of those in less critical positions? Why not cut back on excess bureaucracy, overtime, travel, etc. – or maybe eliminate some programs you’ve never heard of or are no longer necessary? Call me a skeptic, but changes of that nature would generate zero taxpayer support for higher taxes. Government has honed the either/or ultimatum to a fine art – either pay higher taxes or surrender something important.

Kansas offers many examples of how government could ease the tax burden and operate more efficiently while still providing quality service. The latest edition of “Rich States, Poor States” shows that Kansas has more public employees per thousand residents than

all but two states, with 708 public employees per 10,000 residents. The median state in that measurement, South Carolina, functions with 543 public employees per 10,000.

Kansas school districts could have saved every one of the 1,363 teachers they cut over the past three years by using some of the \$400 million they added to their cash reserves since 2005. State and local governments spend tens of millions of dollars annually on overtime. And that’s just for starters.

Extracting more money from taxpayers will only hurt private employment. It’s time government understands that it’s the private sector that drives an economy, not government.

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

