



Other Viewpoints

Biodefense facility needs to get started

Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano says she thinks it's time "to fish or cut bait" on proceeding with construction of the National Bio- and Agro-Defense Facility. We, too, think it's time to proceed with the project. But we don't think there's any decision to be made as to whether Homeland Security should "fish or cut bait" on the issue.

The country needs the research facility and the decision to locate it in Manhattan has been made, more than once. Napolitano says Homeland Security still favors building it in Manhattan.

That's great. Now it's time to release the funding to make it happen.

Sen. Jerry Moran, R-Kan., reminded Napolitano of that fact during a recent Senate committee hearing and noted that if \$90 million already approved for the project wasn't released soon — a matter of weeks — several contracts on the project would have to be rebid.

Manhattan was selected in 2008 as the site to replace an outdated facility on Plum Island, N.Y. Delays and studies, some prompted by other states that had hoped to land the facility and questioned Kansas' suitability for the project, have cost the country four years that could have been devoted to building and opening the site, which will conduct research on animal diseases.

The latest review of the project again confirmed the necessity of such a research facility and stated the Plum Island laboratory, even if renovated, was inadequate.

The General Services Administration has even scheduled a hearing on Oct. 18 to discuss its plan to sell Plum Island after its animal disease laboratory closes. The administration and Homeland Security have recommended selling the 840-acre island but haven't established a minimum price for the property.

Some political officials in that area, however, still oppose closing the lab, which employs about 200 people. Others support turning the island into protected open space while still others support development of the property.

Frankly, we don't care what the government does with Plum Island once the laboratory is closed. What is important is that Homeland Security and the GSA know Plum Island is no longer suitable for the research to be conducted at a bio- and agro-defense facility and are prepared to close the old lab and sell it.

So it's not time to "fish or cut bait." It's time to release \$90 million set aside for the project — \$40 million for a utility plant to power the facility and \$50 million to begin construction — and get things moving.

Napolitano says she's eager to release the \$40 million. She should make it happen.

— *The Topeka Capital-Journal, via the Associated Press*

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Aliens and secrets abound, it seems

OK, it started out as a simple discussion on openness in government over the recent book by a former Navy SEAL. From there it went downhill.

How much information is being kept from us and how much is sanitized before we get it? Conspiracy theories abound, and most often are proven to be just theories with little basis in fact. For every theory, there will always be those who look at red and see green.

I know the military may feel that the "enemy" could get valuable intel from our being open, but let's face it, the enemy already has that information from all the leaks. And spies, too, maybe.

The U.S. military has hidden so many things that I think they do it out of habit rather than need.

Roswell and Area 51 are prime examples of the government protecting us, and I use that term very loosely. If aliens did in fact crash land here, what is the government protecting me from?

Full disclosure would have ended the need to continually deny and cover up what really happened. Am I more secure today because they kept the whole story from me? I doubt it. I'm by nature curious, and I still want to know that whole story.

Would I be repelled by the sight of an alien body? I don't think so. I watched news footage of the Vietnam war at my dinner table and saw the last plane hit the Twin Towers. Nothing from space could be more terrible than that.



Sharon Friedlander

• Musings

Does the military cover up its mistakes by saying that we don't need to know? As a Navy brat, I'm proud of my family's history of service, but those in the service are all just human beings. They make mistakes just like everyone else.

My dad once said that he had to jump to the apron on an aircraft carrier when someone messed up on the flight line. If he hadn't jumped, I would never have known him. So you know mistakes happen, and we are all affected to some degree.

Is national security at stake over alien landings and military successes in these times of terrorists? It will be hard to convince me of that. We have wasted more money and manpower protecting the general population from its own government than we spend educating our children.

The old joke about if two people know a secret, it will only stay a secret if one of them kills the other, may be underestimating the problems in the military. How can an entire unit keep a secret?

Did you ever play gossip? You know, start at

one end of the room with a simple statement, and each person repeats what they heard to the next. By the time it gets to the other end of the room, it doesn't even come close to being what it was when it started out.

Now, picture generals, admirals and staff all discussing any given military operation. Please raise your hand if you think that the story won't change before they have all told it at least once. I bet, like the fish stories, it grew in importance and effectiveness just in the telling.

Did the Seal violate his oath? Only the military can tell you that.

Is our national security compromised by these disclosures? Will my life change on any given day because this book was written? Will yours?

I will always be grateful that I was born in a country where we can question our leaders on their decisions and forever perplexed that they hide the most innocuous elements of everyday events from us. And I bet I am not alone in these feelings.

I can only hope that the next time aliens decide to drop in, they do it during the news and in front of the cameras so the government won't have to go to the effort to cover it up.

Sharon Friedlander, publisher of the Colby Free Press, enjoys reading, hot rods and critters. Contact her at sfriedlander @ nwkansas.com.

Blame cuts, not teachers, for flat scores

The public school attack dogs are at it again. This time they are pointing to two reports on student assessment results and ramping up their tirades against public schools in Kansas. It is alarming, they want us to believe, that ACT scores are flat and state assessment scores have declined for the first time since 2001 when No Child Left Behind began.

But is it really shocking that we seem to have run into some trouble? We are reminded of TV's Gomer Pyle, who used to point out the obvious and then shout, "Surprise, surprise, surprise!" as if we didn't know what was coming.

For most of Kansas' 150-year history, our public schools have been admired, promoted and in continuous improvement. While the funding formula has changed over the years, it generally has been improved. We have held high standards for getting a teaching license and sought to keep pace with inflation when it came to funding. We were not always successful with that funding part and twice lawsuits have put funding back on the right path, the last time in 2005-06.

In 2006 following the decision in the Montoy school finance lawsuit, our legislature increased funding over three years to almost the level that their own cost studies said was needed. By 2008, we were back on track. The Legislative Post Audit Division studied the impact of the new funding and found a nearly one-to-one correspondence between funding increases and student achievement.

Then came the economic bust. That bust was felt in Kansas as in most states and declining tax revenue meant declining school funding. The last cut — the largest ever in Kansas school funding history — was recommended by

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• Karen Godfrey  
Kansas Education Ass.

Gov. Sam Brownback in 2011. By then we had lost more than 10 years of funding increases and, when adjusted for inflation, funding was reduced to the 1992 level.

The result of these funding cuts was the elimination of paraprofessionals and support staff, administrators and classroom teachers. Supply budgets dried up, textbook purchases were put on hold and in some cases schools were closed and consolidated. We've even heard stories of schools where half the light bulbs were removed, tutoring activities dropped and summer school canceled.

At the same time, the economic crisis put enormous stresses on our communities and families as many workers lost their jobs. Today, 48.9 percent of Kansas students qualify for free or reduced lunch. The supports we worked to provide for the needs of poor and minority students, students learning English and students with special needs have been challenged, reduced and, in some cases, even eliminated.

So it should really come as no surprise that these stresses are beginning to take their toll.

Now let's not be too despondent. We don't like what's happening, but it was predicted. And despite these reports, our assessment results still outshine most of the nation. But the point is, we can now see the cracks in the dam

and they are beginning to leak. Kansas cannot afford to allow our schools to continue on the current path.

The economy is in recovery and yet legislators and the governor have used the recovery to shower tax breaks on corporations and the wealthy instead of restoring the cuts made to essential services like schools and the social service safety net. If we want to repair those cracks and get back on the path to excellence and continuous improvement, our priorities need to change.

It's time to recommit to the children of Kansas; to restore funding lost to the economic downturn and repair those cracks in that dam.

Recommit, restore and repair — it's really a pretty simple formula.

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