

Other Viewpoints

Pretty stamp shows record of resources

A colorful part of southwest Kansas now adorns a new U.S. stamp.

One of 15 new images in a Forever stamp series released Oct. 2 features a satellite view of irrigated Kansas crops.

The fields of wheat, alfalfa, corn and soybeans watered by center-pivot irrigation make for an interesting geometric patchwork design – a sight that’s nothing new in southwest Kansas, where center-pivot irrigation used to water crops in a drought-stricken region creates farm fields of full and partial circles.

The Forever stamps series features a number of spectacular shots of natural, agricultural and urban subjects in the nation. The aerial photo of land near Garden City, taken in 2011 by NASA’s Landsat 7 satellite, came about as part of a study of natural resources. Seven Landsat satellites have been launched since 1972 as part of an effort to gather information about Earth. Currently a joint venture by NASA and the U.S. Geological Survey, the Earth-observing satellite mission – the longest continuous global record of the planet’s surface from space – has contributed to the study of changes on Earth made by natural processes and human practices.

NASA’s Landsat Data Continuity Mission exists to further the understanding, monitoring and managing of vital resources of food, water and forests.

And when it comes to water resources, it’s not such a pretty picture in this part of the world.

Center-pivot irrigation did indeed lead to higher yields and food production in areas where plants otherwise would succumb to drought. The practice became an economic difference-maker in southwest Kansas and other dry parts of the country.

But as time has passed, the mining of water also has been a factor in the drain of the Ogallala Aquifer. Policymakers continue to address the practice, and for good reason as water becomes more scarce.

The new stamp, meanwhile, delivers a more pleasant picture in colorful circles of crops.

Southwest Kansans should appreciate the local slice of life featured on a new U.S. stamp. Knowing the image came about as part of an important study of man’s impact on natural resources makes the development all the more thought-provoking.

– *The Garden City Telegram, via the Associated Press*

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roberts.senate.gov/public/

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U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp, 126 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715 or Fax (202) 225-5124. Web site: huelskamp.house.gov

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Let them eat digital

“Let them eat cake,” is the classical statement by Marie Antoinette, wife of French King Louis XVI when told the people were hungry.

In the French Revolution, she was the example of the rich and arrogant. Isolated in her palaces, she asked why the citizens were rioting. When told that it was because they had no bread, she famously replied that the masses should simply do what she would do if she ran out of bread: eat cake.

This phrase reflects how the rich can be blind to the conditions of the poor.

Today’s “Marie Antoinettes” include some Kansas school administrators and U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan. His proclamation last week that American schools should convert to 100 percent digital textbooks reveals again how he is isolated from the American public classroom and economically poor students.

One presidential candidate apologized for his “47 percent” problem. This is Duncan’s “40 percent” problem.

Four out of 10 American households are not connected to broadband Internet. Access is not spread evenly. Households and schools in the affluent suburbs of Johnson County may be close to 100 percent, but that means that many western rural school districts may have fewer than half of households connected. And six percent of the most remote households, rich or not, are beyond the reach of any broadband.

The cost of buying a computer to keep up with new software and Internet speed and memory demands requires an affluent income in a recession economy.

But forget the secretary, who lives a sheltered life in FantasyLand, D.C. I am talking



John Richard Schrock

• Education Frontlines

about a number of Kansas school administrators who have this Marie Antoinette attitude. Since 2008, a flood of data has shown the growing number of school children who live in poverty. A substantial number do not have enough to eat. It should be evident to school administrators who work outside of the rich suburbs that large numbers of households lack computers and Internet connections.

At the end of August, I wrote the column “Only 60 Percent Have Internet Access.” The response I received from Kansas teachers and parents was shocking. Across Kansas, they told me that some school administrators had already moved teaching materials online, in some cases to cover a shortage of textbooks. When I ask how they are providing for the students who lack Internet at home, the response was that these students would have to work online during a study period or after school in the school computer lab.

How unfair would it be if a richer student got to take his or her books and study materials home after school but a poor student could not? Yet this switch to electronics does exactly that. The rich kid gets the advantage of homework and help from parents while the poor kid is restricted to gaps in school time.

What really bites is that Kansas parents pay

a book rental fee but now their child is not getting what they paid for. Such educational malpractice begs for a lawsuit, yet poor people are the least likely to complain.

Secretary Duncan wants electronic textbooks because Korea and Finland have decided to move that direction. But neither country has the poverty found in the U.S., and both are committed to put the electronics into every student’s hands and at home. Even they have zero proof that this will benefit students.

But some Kansas administrators adopted their electronic textbook policy well before Duncan’s proclamation last week. They live in a world that substitutes the image of progress for the substance. Many have been spending big bucks for electronic “whiteboards” for every classroom whether the teacher asked for it or not.

Unfortunately, Internet access is not equal to printed texts and does not improve test scores. In a June 18, 2010, study of 150,000 fifth- to eighth-grade students by researchers at Duke University’s Sanford School of Public Policy, home computer use was linked with lower student test scores and the problem was worse for low-income students.

In many Kansas communities, citizens have organized to provide “backpack food” to send home with poor students who do not get enough to eat.

They should not have to also raise money to send students home with a real textbook. That is the school’s responsibility.

John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher’s college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.

Listless Congress cedes power

Other Opinions

• Lee H. Hamilton Center on Congress

There’s a widespread sense, both in Washington and around the country, that Congress has just ended one of the most listless and unproductive sessions in memory.

When its members bolted town to go home and campaign, they left a long list of big issues unaddressed – immigration reform, “the fiscal cliff,” climate change, entitlement reform, cybersecurity. Even worse, they ignored the basics: a new farm bill, a Postal Service that desperately needs restructuring, spending bills to keep the government operating beyond March, a budget.

So there’s no mystery why Congress’s standing is so low not just among the public at large, but also among the people who pay close attention to its behavior.

“An unsurpassed record of failure,” is how *USA Today* characterized the session.

There are consequences to this fecklessness, most of them pretty obvious: the nation’s many challenges are not being met, and everyone is trying to plan ahead, from postal workers to farmers to federal contractors and most businesses in the country, is left in limbo. What is less appreciated is that when Congress fails to act, it unwittingly transfers even more power to the President.

You can see this dynamic in play right now on the issue of cybersecurity. A recent “denial of service” attack on six major U.S. banks – which caused Internet blackouts and online banking problems – illustrates why the issue has moved to the front burner in Washington.

Many experts believe that computer intrusions and network attacks have become the

greatest threat to our national security. Yet Congress, despite the urgent efforts of several of its leading members, was unable to agree on an approach to the issue; it adjourned without producing a bill to protect the nation’s digital infrastructure.

So the national security establishment has urged President Obama to act now, by issuing an executive order. Even before Congress adjourned, such an order was being drafted; critics have labeled the move a power grab, but there’s a widespread consensus that national security requires action now, not when Congress can get around to it.

There’s a certain logic to this. The White House even has a slogan – “We Can’t Wait” – for the long list of policies it has crafted, creating jobs for veterans, raising fuel-economy standards, halting the deportation of illegal immigrants who entered the U.S. when they were children, changing welfare policy to allow states to test new approaches to boosting employment, making it easier for students to repay their federal student loans and helping homeowners refinance their mortgages. You might argue that the White House has had

the productive session that Congress ought to have had.

But let’s not pretend that this is how things should be. Executive orders may put needed policies in place, but they are also a unilateral exercise of presidential power that turns away from the constitutional division of power between the president and Congress. By their nature, they cannot be as comprehensive and inclusive as laws passed by the time-honored, traditional legislative process.

There is a reason the framers of the Constitution invested the power to initiate legislation in Congress – that is where the American people have the greatest leverage. Small wonder the courts tend to give less deference to executive orders than they do to laws enacted by Congress.

When Congress becomes so tied up by partisanship that it cannot act, it hurts everyone. But its chief victim is Congress itself, as it foregoes its own constitutional role in our republic and hands more power to the president.

Lee Hamilton is director of the Center on Congress at Indiana University. He was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives for 34 years.

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

