



Free Press Viewpoint

Where have all antitrust laws gone?

One glaring fault in our economy neither party seems willing to take on. Maybe there's too much corporate money out there.

Big business, as in too big to fail. First the less-shaky banks were allowed to gobble up their less-fortunate brethren when the economy went south. Outfits like Bank of America then became "too big to fail," did they not?

There's more, though. With only three American automakers, they've long been considered "too big to fail."

Where was the antitrust division when that happened?

And airlines? We already have Delta, which was allowed to scoop up competing Northwest. Did we need an airline that big?

Now United has swallowed Continental whole, "so it can compete," and American wants to soak up U.S. Airways, itself a conglomeration of the America West (the dominant partner) under the name of a better-known corporate weakling.

Won't they all be "too big to fail"? Where was the Justice Department when all this was going on.

Yet you almost have to go back to the Nixon Administration in 1974, when a federal suit was filed to break up the AT&T telephone monopoly, and the Reagan Administration in 1984, when the breakup actually came down, to find a real antitrust policy.

Since then, it's been open season for big-time mergers. In the years since, Southwestern Bell, at first just one of a flock of Baby Bells produced by the breakup, has gobbled up three of its siblings and its former parent to become the new AT&T. Airlines, banks, other businesses have merged with little opposition.

Take railroads: today there are just seven "Class 1" long-haul carriers, where once there were more than 200. They are big, mostly efficient and mostly profitable, but what will happen when one threatens to go down?

The next time Delta goes into bankruptcy? It's not like it hasn't happened before, after all.

There's just no evidence that bigger is better. A strong economy can't depend on just a few big outfits, because the odds are, one or more of them eventually will fail.

Antitrust policy used to be based on the idea that bigger businesses could control markets and manipulate prices. That's still a valid concern, but history suggests we've moved way beyond that issue.

Today, bigness threatens the entire economy. You'd think we would have learned that lesson, but there's just no evidence anyone cares about anything except a continued flow of big-business contributions to their campaigns.

We will rue the day we let this happen. Markets dominated by a few big firms lose their natural ability to regulate themselves.

It's time to start breaking up the "too-big" businesses and letting the forces of nature and economics operate as intended. Let firms compete, let those that make mistakes fail, let new competitors spring up.

But don't let our prosperity depend on a few far-from-stable corporations. — *Steve Haynes*

AND AS THE 'FISCAL CLIFF' TENSION GREW AND HEIGHTENED, EVERY WHO IN WHO-VILLE BECAME MORE AND MORE FRIGHTENED...



'Disappearing' list just keeps on growing

What's disappearing from our lives.

A story in the *AARP Bulletin* a few months ago (yep, I'm that old) gave a list of items that it believes will be gone before long.

The story starts out with snail mail — the good ol' U.S. Postal Service. The story contends that electronic media will kill that oldest of U.S. institutions as fewer and fewer people mail letters, bills, checks, cards, books, magazines and newspapers.

Well, I disagree, but the U.S. government is trying its best to kill off the post office. While the senators argue ways to help the service, the Social Security Administration took all the millions of checks it sends out every month out of the system and went to electronic banking. That, my friends, is the government at work for you.

Home phones are also on the list, and I hate that. None of my three children has a "land line." They all rely on their cell phones, even the ones who work from home.

When I visit my daughters in Georgia, I have to go to the office supply store to get a fax because you can't send or receive a fax on a cell phone. One daughter says just have them scan it and e-mail it, but that isn't always as simple as it sounds.

Still, it isn't just the kids. Lots of my



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friends and coworkers have dropped their home phones, and now I can't find out how to spell people's names by looking them up in the phone book. To make things even worse, people have started spelling their children's names in odd ways. Take the name Alice, for example. It used to be spelled Alice. Now it could be Alyce, Allise, Ally or a half dozen other variations. It's enough to drive a copy editor to drink.

Glove-box maps are next on the delete list. I thought that maps were in trouble when the Tom Tom and Garmin became popular, but these two fancy little devices didn't prove a threat. Now it seems that these global positioning machines will soon be right up there with the highway map, as every smart phone in the country can tell you not only where you are, but where you're going and when you should get there.

Of course, when you're on the road, they usually tell you you're out of cell-phone range, and therefore, out of luck.

Personally, I still like our Garmin. It sits on the dash and is easier to use than the cell phone. I can get the Garmin to talk to me when she tells me where to go, but that gets really annoying, especially when I disagree with her. She doesn't like to give up.

One item that has almost disappeared from the landscape is the pay telephone. Again, cell phones have made this once wonderfully useful device obsolete. You can't even find pay phones in airports, train stations or bus depots anymore, although we did see one recently.

And phone booths? Poor Superman would have a hard time in today's world.

The problem of changing his clothes would just be the start. Wait until he has to file a flight plan with the government every time he takes off.

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

Consider real tree for Christmas

Now that we've celebrated Thanksgiving, and Christmas is just around the corner, many folks will be selecting a tree to adorn their apartment or home.

It's been said many times before and will be repeated again and again, "A traditional Christmas begins with a real tree."

Most of us buy a particular kind of tree based on family tradition. If we grew up with a spruce, we buy a spruce tree. If our family had firs, we buy firs. If we cut a cedar out of the pasture, chances are we still cut a cedar out of the pasture and bring it into our house for Christmas.

When I was a youngster, my family only considered one option when buying a Christmas tree — a real pine or fir tree. That all changed when a U.S.-based toilet bowl brush manufacturer, the Addis Brush Co., created an artificial tree from brush bristles. Hence, the prototype for modern artificial trees.

Today, some people feel guilty about cutting down a new tree each year. They feel better buying an artificial tree they can use over and over. Cost, convenience and environmental impact are reasons consumers opt for an artificial tree.

Given the current economic climate, artificial trees may be especially appealing for their investment value when compared with the recurrent annual expense of a real tree. Their convenience is also appealing to consumers as they don't need watering, don't leave pine needles



John Schlageck

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all over the floor and transportation from tree farm to home isn't an issue.

That said, real trees are a renewable, recyclable resource. While artificial trees contain nonbiodegradable plastic and metal, real Christmas trees provide the oxygen for millions of people while growing.

A single farmed tree absorbs more than a ton of CO2 throughout its lifetime. With more than 350 million real Christmas trees growing in U.S. tree farms alone, you can imagine the yearly amount of carbon sequestered. Additionally, each acre of trees produces enough oxygen for the daily needs of 18 people.

This year, approximately 33 million American families will celebrate the holidays with the fragrance and beauty of a real Christmas tree. There are approximately 1 million acres in production for Christmas trees.

The top Christmas tree producing states are Oregon, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Washington and Wisconsin. The top selling Christmas trees are the balsam fir, Douglas fir, Fraser fir, Noble fir, Scotch pine, Virginian

pine and white pine.

More than 100,000 people are employed full or part time in this industry, which pumps \$1 billion a year into the U.S. economy.

While it can take as many as 15 years to grow a tree of average height (six feet), the average growing time is seven to 10 years.

The secret to keeping a Christmas tree alive and healthy when you bring it into your home is to make a fresh cut on the bottom of your tree. When you place the tree in your stand, make sure it has plenty of water.

While you can spend money on additives that claim to keep the tree fresh, forego the expense and just add fresh water every day. Nothing works better.

As far as choosing a particular tree, pick a tree you like.

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Everyone has an opinion on what tree is the best. I like them all — firs, spruce, pine — the important thing is that the trees are watered after you cut them. That will keep the color looking rich and the tree looking beautiful.

So whatever tree you choose, real or artificial, have fun finding the perfect one for your family.

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm near Seguin, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

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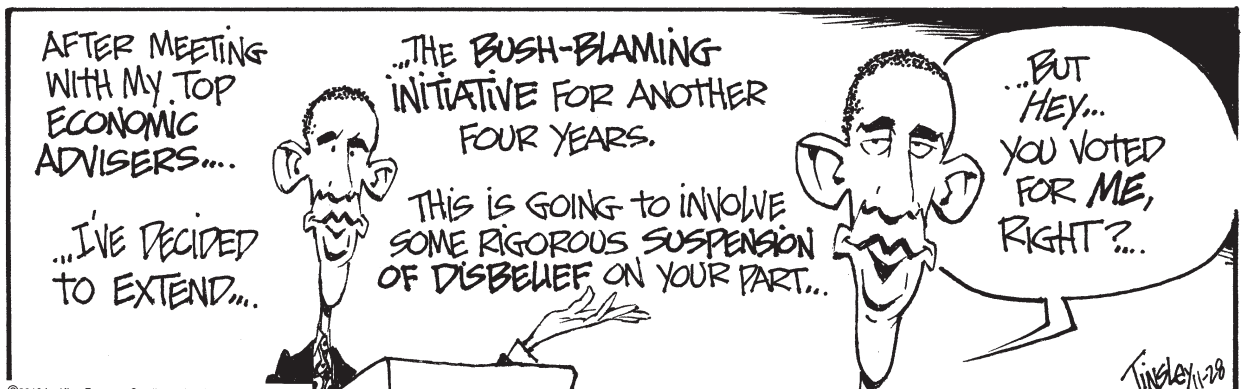
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Mallard Fillmore

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