

Other Viewpoints

It's time to fund bio-defense facility

Getting a National Bio- and Agro-Defense Facility built in Manhattan has been a slow and rocky process – Manhattan was selected in 2008 as the preferred site for a laboratory to replace the outdated one on Plum Island, N.Y.

The journey still is far from over, but the inclusion of \$714 million for construction of the facility in President Barack Obama's proposed federal budget for the next fiscal year offers promise.

The totality of that budget isn't being hailed unanimously by Democrats or Republicans, but the facility's funding is at least in the conversation – in the midst of sequestration, no less – and the Kansas congressional delegation will be working hard to ensure the \$714 million is appropriated.

Earlier this year, this newspaper contended that the federal Department of Homeland Security's decision to award a \$40 million contract for a utilities plant in Manhattan was a small step that could be the signal of big things. It also was noted that appropriation of the construction funding should follow as soon as possible.

Now that the money is in the proposed budget, Congress should take the next step and appropriate the dollars needed to fund the facility that will be responsible for conducting vital research on animal diseases that can be transmitted to humans and animal diseases capable of causing great harm to the country's livestock production.

Obama's budget item does include a caveat that Kansas will have to provide another \$202 million toward the construction cost. The state already had approved \$105 million for construction and \$35 million to support the transition of research from Plum Island to Manhattan.

Gov. Sam Brownback has said he would work with legislators when they return to Topeka in May to approve issuing bonds for the additional funding.

That would be an unmistakable sign that Kansas is willing to do more than its share to get the research facility on line. A state contribution totaling \$342 million would represent a sizeable contribution toward the estimated \$1.1 billion cost of a new National Bio- and Agro-Defense Facility.

Granted, the facility would be a huge boost to the Kansas economy once it is up and running, but members of Congress should be able to recognize the federal government has a very active partner in the venture and is getting good value for the taxpayers' dollars.

There is no reason to further delay funding for a project that is so important to the country's security.

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

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Refreshing freedom found in Lincoln

When you walk into Nebraska's 16-story Capitol, you notice something right away. No security.

No checkpoints. No guards. No police. No metal detectors. None of the paranoia that surrounds getting into a government building in a lot of places these days.

Oh, there is security. Cameras monitor the halls and chambers, and you have to assume someone is watching.

There are guards, but on a quiet Saturday with the Senate not in session – Nebraska alone among the states has only one house – you're not likely to see one.

The statehouse itself is a monument to 1930s design – with 1930s lighting, too, and on the weekend, it can be a little tomb-like. It's filled with carvings, artwork, art deco decoration of all kinds. And it's one of only four statehouses not patterned roughly on the U.S. Capitol, with its dominating dome.

It's tempting to say the Nebraska Statehouse, the first to be built as a modern skyscraper rather than a traditional capitol, is unique, but the contemporary Louisiana Statehouse is remarkably similar. Nebraskans will sniff that it's just a knockoff, and it's true, Nebraska's was planned earlier.

The Louisiana version was rushed to completion at the insistence of then-Gov. Huey Long, the driving force for construction. The Kingfish is still there, by the way; he was laid



Steve Haynes

• Along the Sappa

to rest on the Capitol lawn, in the shadow of a larger-than-life statue, after his assassination inside the edifice in 1935. By that time, he was a controversial U.S. senator.

Louisiana may have the more usual security, as we do in Kansas. In our state, though as far as we know, no one has ever plotted to do any major criminal act in the Kansas Capitol, visitors routinely go through a checkpoint and a metal detector, run by a civilian. They must use the east ground-floor entrance below the steps. Other entrances are closed or restricted to those with passes.

Capitol police, who work under the Highway Patrol, are visible in uniform during the day.

South Dakota, by contrast, has virtually no security at its Statehouse. During the day, at least, an elderly gentleman mans a guest book by the front door. You're free to wander the halls and go look up the the governor, if he happens to be in.

But then, South Dakota's capital is Pierre, a

city of around 13,000, barely more than a medium county seat, and crime is not a big issue.

So what's the story with Nebraska? Allen Beerman, a long-time secretary of state who now is executive director of the Nebraska Press Association, says state officials debate the issue nearly every year. So far, they've shied away from metal detectors and searches.

When the offices are open, he added, a handful of armed troopers in and out of uniform patrol the corridors. Others would be only minutes away.

"Both the governor and the speakers (of the Legislature) have decided that it's the people's house," he said. "They don't want to make it intimidating to visit."

That is a refreshing outlook in a time when state officials think we need metal detectors and constant security to conduct a trial in western Kansas, when courthouses in the city are locked down and secure, when federal buildings everywhere have become fortresses.

I suppose it's just the times we live in, but with all the surveillance cameras, metal detectors, computer databases and record keeping in our world, freedom is becoming an increasingly vulnerable commodity.

Steve Haynes is president of Nor'West Newspapers. When he has the time, he'd rather be reading a good book or casting a fly.

Seek harmony with land on Earth Day

Forty-three years ago, when folks in the U.S.A. celebrated the first Earth Day, I was stationed in Stuttgart, West Germany – the country was still divided then. Back then I had little opportunity to carry signs that championed the abstract idea of protecting something as vast as our planet. Heck, I didn't even hear about Earth Day until I returned a couple years later.

Instead, I was busy marching with a rifle in Western Europe – doing my small part to keep our planet and my country safe from the Russkies so my buddies back home could celebrate the first Earth Day for me.

Well, guess what? Four decades later, I'm a writer and I'd like to share my thoughts with readers throughout Kansas and the Midwest as I pen this week's column on Earth Day 2013, to be celebrated Monday, April 22.

Protecting our planet can be somewhat of a struggle. Like each day's sunrise and sunset, we often take it for granted. Conservation of our planet can be a challenge because some regard the land as a commodity that belongs to them.

Others see the planet as a community to which they belong. They love, care for and respect the land. They adhere to an ethic that enlarges the boundaries of their community to include soils, waters, plants and animals.

There is no other way for land to survive the impact of mechanized man. Let us never forget that while our land yields fruits, grains and vegetables, it also yields a cultural harvest; one we as inhabitants all share and must nurture.

The late Aldo Leopold, who championed the conservation ethic more than 70 years ago, defined it as a state of harmony between men and the land. In his book, "A Sand County Almanac," Leopold urged us to strive for such harmony and make sure our words do not



John Schlageck

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override our work.

Let's make sure our progress does not consist of "letterhead pieties and convention oratory," Leopold cautioned.

Taking this one step further, let's make certain our educational and economic systems are headed toward, rather than away from, an increased consciousness of the land.

Today only a handful of our population makes its living from the land – primarily farmers and ranchers. Most people are separated from the land by several generations.

Few have a vital relation to the land. To many, the land is the space between cities on which crops and grass grow or cattle graze.

"Turn him loose for a day on the land and if the spot does not happen to be a golf links or a scenic area, he is bored stiff," Leopold wrote. "If crops could be grown by hydroponics, instead of farming it would suit him well. Synthetic substitutes for wool, leather, wood and other natural land products suit him better than the originals. In short, land is something he has outgrown."

As we celebrate Earth Day on Monday, let's remember land use is not solely an economic question. Let's think of it in terms of what is ethically and aesthetically right, as well as what is economically expedient.

Leopold said a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the living community. It is wrong when it

does otherwise.

The bulk of all land usage hinges on investments of time, forethought, skill and faith, rather than only capital investment. We have continually modernized our farms with equipment, plant food, insecticides and other production inputs. We are proud, as well we should be, with the abundance of crops we produce in Kansas and across our country.

We can never throw away the tools, technology and stewardship that have provided so much for so many. On this Earth Day 2013, let's renew our commitment to their successful use in harmony with our life-giving land. Let's display for all to see we have not outgrown the land.

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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