

Free Press Viewpoint

Shortcuts hurt on highway work

The Kansas Department of Transportation made a terrible mess out of a project down in Abilene this fall, causing millions in damage to businesses near the town's main exit while it was closed for more than two months.

Imagine any town cut off from its major highway for two months. Think what that could do to business, and did to businesses in Abilene.

Apparently to save time and money, the department decided to just close the eastbound exit from Interstate 70 to K-15, which serves as Abilene's Main Street and the main access to tourist attractions including the Seeley Mansion and the Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum.

The only detour took drivers several miles east to a rural exit, where signs directed them to turn back and use the westbound exit. Most, apparently, just kept going.

And Abilene, with its museums, attractions, restaurants and antique stores, is a tourist town. Business feeds off that exit from I-70.

Business people said they heard little about plans to close the exit before it happened. Department spokesmen said they met with city officials and told them about the plans, earlier but merchants say the only warning they got was from a press release issued by the state a couple of days before the ramps closed.

The city manager estimates the closing had cost businesses between \$9 million and \$12 million as of a couple of weeks ago, and the interchange did not open for another week. And these are mostly small businesses that operate on a thin margin. Every dollar counts, and these businesses have lost too many.

There are tradeoffs between closing a road and keeping traffic going to businesses. If the department takes time to listen to business people, it usually finds a way to keep them going. But the department doesn't always do that.

Some projects include advance scoping sessions, where officials listen to citizen comments. Hearings and public meetings are held, comments recorded. That apparently did not happen with the \$12 million project in Abilene. It should have.

Sometimes, it seems like consultants hired to plan a project do a better job than the state itself, but whoever is running a project, citizens' needs ought to be considered. Small businesses cannot take the kind of blows suffered here and long survive.

Taking the Abilene project as an example: if the repaving costs the state \$12 million and merchants lost that much business because of it, maybe the department should have spent another million to build temporary ramps or carry traffic through the construction to K-15.

Saving money for the state - while damaging tax-paying businesses and maybe bankrupting a couple - does not seem like much of a bargain. No project like this should begin without complete and proper public input, and the department ought to realize that by now.

It seems to us what happened in Abilene should never happen again in Kansas. - Steve Haynes

We encourage comments on opinions expressed on this page. Mail them to the *Colby Free Press*, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701, or e-mail colby.editor@nwkansas.com.

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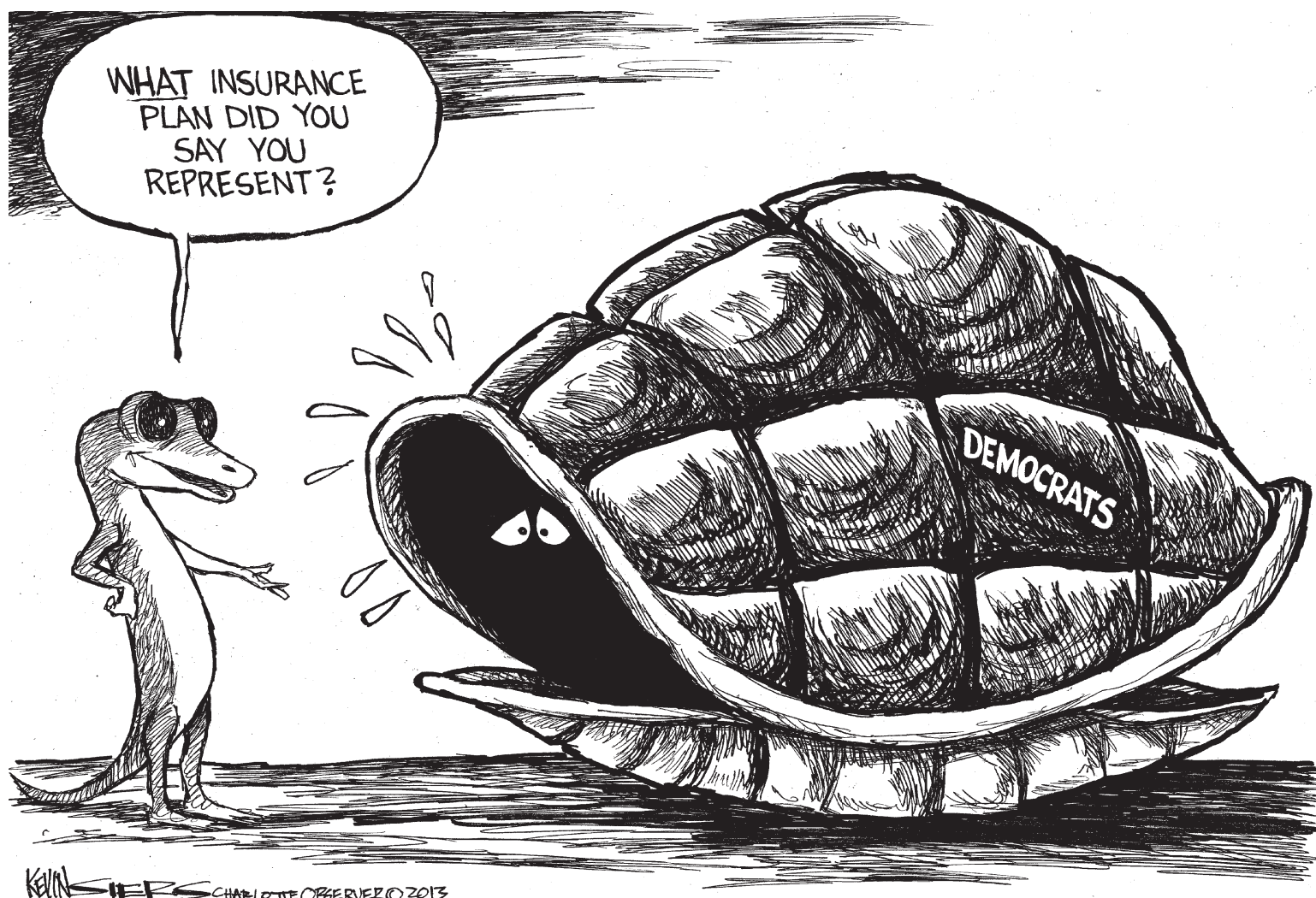
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Early Thanksgiving gathers family

We have a lot to be thankful for this year, and we started our Thanksgiving celebrations a little early.

We loaded up coolers, suitcases, an electric roaster and even my mixer in the back of the Explorer and headed off to Lawrence for Thanksgiving dinner with our son.

What started out as just us and the kid (he's only 33) ended up as quite a family celebration. Steve's sister, who lives in Emporia, heard that we were going to be in Lawrence, so she decided to join us, although her husband was on call and had to stay in town. Their brother Doug, who also lives in Emporia, was able to come too, however, and on the way to Lawrence, they picked up Doug's youngest - she's in college now - so we had quite a party.

After my mother-in-law died in the early '90s, the dining room set moved to our place in Colorado, where the kitchen had only a card table with four folding chairs for awhile.

Last year, we remodeled our kitchen and moved a glass-topped table to Colorado and



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

the old set moved on to our son's home. By then, the screws were loose and the chairs had a tendency to fall apart when you sat on them.

So last week, he glued and screwed the chairs back together, and on Saturday, six of us sat down to a Thanksgiving feast in rock-solid chairs that brought back a lot of memories.

We had cooked all day.

I put Steve and our son in charge of the turkey. They put the roaster on his tiny back porch. Lacy learned how to take the giblets out of both ends, wash the bird, stuff it with celery and onion, set the temperature and make up the browning sauce needed to keep it looking

good. And, I will say, they did an excellent job.

I made the mashed potatoes and made three pies - two apple and one pumpkin. (When I had asked Lacy earlier if he wanted apple or pumpkin pie, he'd answered, "Yes.")

When we were done, everyone helped clean up, and the relatives headed back for Emporia with a plateful of leftovers for Barb's husband, who we figured might be hungry, especially if he'd been called out.

We came back home on Sunday with a package of leftovers, but there is still lots of food in son's refrigerator for him and his friends to feast on this week.

It was a wonderful Thanksgiving dinner, and we were all thankful to be there - with at least some of our family.

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

Trustee questions article on endowment

To the Editor:

After reading the recent article in the paper, "Change in Endowment Policy," I was appalled and embarrassed with the wrong information in the article.

First of all, I'm a member of the Colby Community College Board of Trustees and do not vote on anything with the endowment. Secondly, there wasn't any vote that was taken to give the audit to the *Colby Free Press*. If the *Free Press* wanted the audit report, they should have asked for it.

Since September, I have been trying to get the *Free Press* to put a college and endowment question/answer column in the paper. I felt this was the best way to let the public ask questions to be better informed, so I would be the last person to vote to withhold information to the public.



Free Press Letter Drop

• Our readers sound off

On the issue of my "grumbling under my breath during a vote," I don't know how the representatives for the *Free Press* would know this, since I was at one end of the classroom and they were on the other.

When Vernon Hurd suggested the endowment needs to pay the students direct for their scholarships since they "can't trust the college," I did take offense to that remark, know-

ing the college will do everything in their power to apply the scholarship money properly to the student's tuition bill. I have checked with other universities, and none of them pay the student direct.

I feel if it is legally possible for the endowment to receive student information to (show they) meet the criteria for the scholarships they are giving, I'm all for letting (the endowment) select the scholarship recipient.

I wish the *Free Press* would have printed that the endowment board voted not to match the \$250,000 gift from the Embree Trust, or the information the endowment board is looking for a new member to join their team. This would have been a lot better information than reporting false information about me.

Audrey Hines, Colby member, college trustees

Colleges compete, students benefit

Lincoln College in central Illinois cut tuition costs by 24 percent two years ago. The tuition dropped from \$23,000 to \$17,500. This year Concordia in St. Paul, Minn., cut their tuition \$10,000. Converse College in South Carolina has announced they will cut their tuition by 43 percent. On Oct. 1 Newburgh Theological Seminary College of Indiana announced a freeze on tuition costs and a \$500 reduction.

Lincoln College was experiencing a declining enrollment and trying to survive a sluggish economy. The decision was to make some adjustments in order to become more competitive with colleges across the nation.

Across the country higher education has become a buyer's market. Colleges costing \$20,000 to \$40,000 a year have become out of reach for the average American. Prospective students have become reluctant to embrace a lifetime of debt when affordable education is out there with a little searching.

Neighboring colleges will be forced to pay attention. More Americans will have options. Education at a more affordable price could become a reality.

I hope the government will not notice this recent college cost cutting trend. They will fig-

Other Opinions

• Glenn Mollette
American columnist

ure out a way to mess it up. Currently there are multitudes of higher education options in America. Universities abound throughout our country. Many have maxed out their financial obligations. Competition will eventually make many of the schools cut some of their costs and offer better tuition rates.

Could our government learn something from this trend? What if we had 200 major medical insurance companies competing state to state? One big insurance company under the thumb of the government is a losing scenario for Americans. What if we only had one automaker? What if we had only one appliance maker? What if we had only one cable news network? What if we could only buy oil from Saudi Arabia? What if we only had coal and

no natural gas? Or, what if we only had natural gas and no coal?

When we are limited to one utility company, one gas station, one grocery store, one medical provider, one source of energy or just one of anything we are up the creek without a paddle.

Regardless, if it's college tuition or anything else, options and competition are good for America.

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