

commentary

from other pens...

Breathe a sigh of relief in redistricting fight

The Topeka Capital Journal on redistricting:

After weeks of uncertainty, Secretary of State Ron Thornburgh can heave a big sigh of relief. The primary election will go on as scheduled on Aug. 6.

Just before the July 4 holiday, a three-judge panel rejected arguments in a lawsuit brought by Attorney General Carla Stovall and others challenging the redistricting of the state's four congressional districts...

The whole exercise of redistricting was a political travesty this year, with the Republicans trying to gerrymander the districts in their favor...

So they got the national party involved in drawing the boundaries, and one ridiculous plan had the 1st stretching from the northwest corner of the state to the southeast corner.

If that's not shameful enough, they dragged the process out to the very last minutes of the overextended legislative session, thus throwing filing deadlines and indeed the date of the primary itself into flux. The congressional filing deadline was moved back two weeks.

What a mess...

Lawmakers should start the move toward a better process in 2012. Some have promised that such steps will be discussed next session. Kansans should push their elected officials to make sure that happens.

The Garden City Telegram on hospital maternity ward security:

Workers at two Kansas hospitals likely averted a real tragedy Monday when they became curious about a woman asking questions about the babies in the maternity ward.

The woman first presented herself to officials at Salina Regional Medical Center, claiming to be a doctor and wanting to tour the facility. Staffers became suspicious when the woman appeared fixated on the maternity area.

Salina's hospital could be a model for many. Its maternity area is secured and access is through a door that can only be opened by someone who knows the code.

Many hospitals have similar security measures to assure no one with ulterior motives gains access to the newborns.

Salina officials showed the woman out of the facility, and she apparently resurfaced at Via Christi in Wichita.

As one Via Christi spokesperson noted, new doctors who drop by for a tour generally ask questions about technology and would rather see the gadgets than the patients.

Even a woman claiming to be trained as a pediatrician would be more interested in the incubators than the infants.

So officials at Via Christi escorted the woman out of the facility.

As the spokesperson noted, many women unable to have their own babies will sometimes do desperate things, which makes the security measures at most hospitals a welcome relief to new parents.

It's not certain this hospital impostor was in reality a wannabe baby-snatcher. But authorities also were notified and they'd like a word with the woman to find out her motivation.

Salina and Wichita hospital officials did absolutely the right thing in this case. And the incident should serve as an alert to hospitals all over the state.

where to write

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 302 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774

U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. (202) 224-6521

U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 1217 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 225-2715

State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building Rm. 174-W, Topeka, KS 66612. (785) 296-7676

State Sen. Stan Clark, State Capitol Building Rm. 128-S, Topeka, KS 66612. (785) 296-7399



RUNNING OF THE BULL

Little stock in Bush's Wall Street speech

WASHINGTON — Both Democrats and Republicans have a room they don't want company to see.

Democrats try to hide the malcontent left that's forever demanding "change" in American life. The closer it gets to Election Day, the less their national candidates want to see media images of militant blacks, militant gays, militant anybody.

In 1992, Bill Clinton showed how to slam the door on such party-poopers. On the eve of the 1992 Democratic convention, he pulled his "Sister Soulja" number. He attacked the rap singer right in front of Jesse Jackson, the man who had invited Soulja to perform, using Jackson's Rainbow Coalition podium to do it.

"You had a rap singer here last night named Sister Soulja. I defend her right to express herself through music, but her comments ... were filled with a kind of hatred that you do not honor today and tonight." With Jackson watching, Clinton quoted Soulja: "If black people kill black people every day, why not have a week and kill white people?" and "If there are any good white people, I haven't met them."

That "Sister Soulja" gambit was central to the Clinton strategy. He wanted to triangulate, to show he was in the political mainstream, by showing he was ready and willing to shut out the trouble-stirring rappers.

This Tuesday, George W. Bush had a "Sister Soulja" opportunity but let it pass. The galloping



chris matthews

• commentary

horse of history charged the canyons of Wall Street, but Bush could not bring himself to mount him.

Certainly, it was an excellent opportunity for Bush to separate himself from the worst bandits of capitalism. He had gone to Wall Street. He was surrounded, as Clinton was, by a crowd that would suffer visibly from the ferocity of ostracism Bill Clinton had trained on his bad apples.

But, Bush failed to deliver. His message to the business world was about as tough as a Sunday sermon at a liberal church. He was telling the business world that he was on their side, that he was there not to scold them but to buck them up.

"I am calling for a new ethic of personal responsibility in the business community — an ethic that will increase investor confidence, make employees proud of their companies and regain the trust of the American people."

That doesn't sound like Bill Clinton tearing into "Sister Soulja." It sounds even less like that great Republican trustbuster Teddy Roosevelt.

When Roosevelt went after the evils of capitalism, he used language everyone heard and his targets didn't like. In 1908 he attacked Republicans

in Congress as fronts for "predatory wealth." He demanded that the federal courts go after the "criminal rich."

The Republican Roosevelt was a man of those words. He fought monopolies, cleaned up the meatpacking industry and won enactment of an employer's liability law. He was a conservationist, a tough enforcer of anti-trust, an advocate of the income tax and the inheritance tax. He wanted working people to get "a larger share of the wealth."

He was the kind of tough-minded reformer the Wall Street Journal editorial page hates most.

"We demand that big business give the people a square deal; in return we must insist that when anyone engaged in big business honestly endeavors to do right, he shall be given a square deal."

Bush could have killed two birds with one stone this week. He could have cut off the business cheats from the Republican cotillion just as Bill Clinton cut off the hate-selling left from the Democrats. He could have aped Teddy Roosevelt and become the scourge of the chiselers, a hero to the average stockholder and 401(k) holder, especially the retiree.

Instead, he gave the kind of sermon clergymen give when they don't want to offend anyone present.

Chris Matthews, author of "Now, Let Me Tell You What I Really Think" (Free Press, 2001) and "Hardball" (Touchstone Books, 1999), is a nationally syndicated columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle and the host of "Hardball" on CNBC and MSNBC cable channels.

Wittig's management big issue for Westar

TOPEKA — It's all about David Wittig.

The Kansas Corporation Commission is reviewing the finances of Westar Energy Inc., where Wittig is the chairman, president and chief executive officer. The KCC wants the company to reduce its \$3.25 billion debt and improve its financial health.

The KCC held two weeks of hearings on a Westar plan to sell one of its major assets, its 45 percent interest in ONEOK Inc., a Tulsa, Okla., natural gas firm. Westar hopes to raise \$738 million to apply to debt.

But most of the time, the hearings seemed more about the past than the future. Attorneys for the KCC's staff and consumers repeatedly focused on Westar's operations from 1995 through 2001.

They raised questions about Westar's management under Wittig. They tried to paint the CEO and his top executives as being more interested in Westar's non-utility interests — and their compensation — than electric operations that serve 636,000 Kansas customers.

"Their focus is on themselves and the personal benefits that they've obtained," said Walker Hendrix, consumer counsel for the Citizens' Utility Ratepayers Board, which represents consumers. "That is the central issue."

Westar's attorneys tried to use testimony from Wittig and questions to other witnesses to counter the image critics were trying to create. They wanted to show that the company has performed as well as or better than other utilities in recent years and that its management is sound.

The KCC must sort through the conflicting descriptions of Westar, but previously it has sided more with Westar's critics than with the company.

Last year it rejected a Westar plan for splitting its electric operations from its non-utility assets so that the electric operations could be sold. The KCC concluded that electric operations would be saddled with too much debt from Westar's other business interests.

"The commission does have a responsibility, along with protecting ratepayers, of making sure a company is financially viable," said KCC spokeswoman Rosemary Foreman. "In keeping a company financially viable, one component is good management."

Wittig left a job as co-leader of the mergers and acquisitions department at the Wall Street firm of Salomon Brothers in 1995 to join Westar as executive vice president for corporate development.

Ten months later he was the company's president. He became chief executive officer in July 1998, then added the title of chairman six months later.

During his time with Westar, the company



john hanna

• ap news analysis

jumped into monitored security services, left the natural gas service business and pursued two mergers with other utilities.

Critics question the foray into security in view of the continued annual losses of Protection One Inc., of which Westar owns 85 percent. Both mergers, with Kansas City Power & Light and the Public Service Company of New Mexico, failed.

Since 1995 the company's debt has nearly doubled, from \$1.64 billion to its current \$3.25 billion. Its stock, trading between \$39 and \$40 a share four years ago, closed Friday at \$13.61.

And since joining the company, Wittig has received more than \$21 million in compensation, according to records filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission.

That has led critics to question whether Wittig is enriching himself even as his company falters — an idea the company disputes, strongly.

Foreman said the KCC's concerns are making sure that consumers receive safe and reliable service at reasonable rates, and making sure those same ratepayers don't pick up any costs from Westar's unregulated activities.

Both require a financially sound company. "There's not a concern about an immediate financial failure," Foreman said. "But there is a concern as we move into the future about financial viability."

During testimony, Westar suggested that the company's performance has been significantly better than critics have painted.

One of its exhibits tracked Westar's stock performance along with the Dow Jones Utility Average and the parent companies of three other utilities in the region. Westar's performance matched

Letter Policy

The Goodland Daily News encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, and must include a telephone number and a signature. Unsigned letters will not be published. Form letters will be rejected, as will letters deemed to be of no public interest or considered offensive. We reserve the right to edit letters for length and good taste. We encourage letters, with phone numbers, by e-mail to: <daily@nwkansas.com>.

or exceeded all of them over the past two years.

But James Zakoura, an Overland Park attorney who represents Westar's largest consumers, compared Westar's stock performance to the performance of companies in the Standard & Poor's 500 and an S&P index for electric utilities.

The comparison showed how an investor who put \$100 into Westar and the companies in the two indexes would have fared, starting at the end of 1996. At the end of 2001, the S&P 500 investment would have been worth \$166; the electric index investment, \$157.

The Westar investment would have been worth \$79.

"It's the comparison mandated by the SEC," Zakoura said. "The Securities and Exchange Commission wants investors to be able to look at comparables."

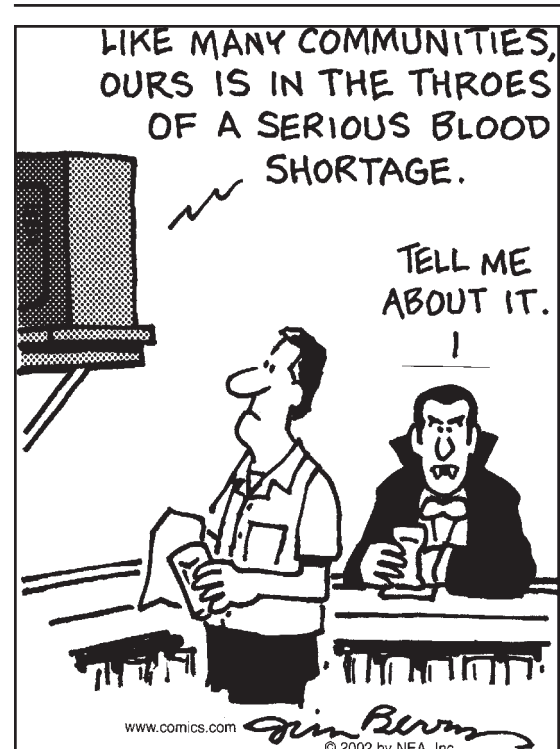
Finally, questions about Westar management became questions about Wittig because Westar executives sometimes deferred to their CEO on the witness stand.

Paul Geist, Westar's chief financial officer, couldn't answer some of Zakoura's questions about various transactions. Eventually, Zakoura asked him whether Wittig was the person to ask.

Geist said, "He would be the best person."

EDITOR'S NOTE: Correspondent John Hanna has covered Kansas politics and government for The Associated Press since 1987.

berry's world



The Goodland Daily News

(USPS No. 222-460. ISSN 0893-0562)

Member: Kansas Press Association

The Associated Press

Inland Press Association Colorado Press Association

National Newspaper Association

e-mail: daily@nwkansas.com

Steve Haynes, President
Tom Betz, Editor/Editorial Page
Rachel Miscall, Managing Editor
Pat Schiefen, Copy Editor
Doug Stephens, Sports Editor
Sharon Corcoran, Society Editor
Eric Yonkey, Bill Wagoner, Judy Harper, Advertising Sales
Skilar Boland, Adv. Production Sheila Smith, Office Manager



Nor'west Press

Jim Bowker, General Manager

Richard Westfahl Ron VanLoenen Judy McKnight
Betty Morris Mary Jo Tapparo Lana Westfahl

nwkansas.com

N.T. Betz, Director of Internet Services (nbetz@nwkansas.com)
Evan Barnum, Systems Admin. (support@nwkansas.com)

Published daily except Saturday and Sunday and the day observed for New Year's Day, Memorial Day, Fourth of July, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day, at 1205 Main St., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

Periodicals postage paid at Goodland, Kan. 67735; entered at the Goodland, Kan., Post Office under the Act of Congress of March 8, 1878.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Goodland Daily News, 1205 Main St., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

TELEPHONE: (785) 899-2338. Editorial e-mail: daily@nwkansas.com. Advertising questions can be sent to: gdnadv@nwkansas.com

The Goodland Daily News assumes no liability for mistakes or omissions in advertising or failure to publish beyond the actual cost of the ad.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: In Sherman County and adjacent counties: three months, \$25; six months, \$42; 12 months, \$79. Out of area, weekly mailing of five issues: three months, \$30; six months, \$45; 12 months, \$80. By mail daily in Kansas, Colorado: 12 months, \$115. (All tax included.)

Incorporating:

The Sherman County Herald
Founded by Thomas McCants
1935-1989

THE SHERMAN COUNTY STAR
Founded by Eric and Roxie Yonkey
1994-2001

Nor'West Newspapers
Haynes Publishing Company