

from our viewpoint...

State ‘call centers’ aren’t in Kansas

Outrageous.
If you call the State of Kansas to ask questions about food stamps, you may well be talking to someone in India.
That’s because the state Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services outsourced its “call center” for food stamps to a firm that moved the work offshore.
It may seem a little weird, but with modern communications and the difference in wages, it make perfect sense for someone halfway around the world to pick up the phone and answer questions about Kansas.
It’s done every day for business. Businesses have to survive, and if they can get something done cheaper offshore, they will.
When the state does it, using tax money, though, people ought to be outraged.
The Kansas Legislature was, in fact, outraged. The House voted to ban the outsourcing and require the department to contract with a firm that would hire unemployed Kansans to answer the calls.
Then Secretary Janet Schalansky told the legislators that bringing the jobs back to Kansas would cost about \$600,000 a year, money the state does not have.
The Legislature backed down.
Here’s how ridiculous this situation is:
Social and Rehabilitation Services — the same department that is closing all its county offices — runs the state’s welfare programs. Many of these, including food stamps, serve people who are unemployed or underemployed.
The department could be hiring Kansas people to do its work, or at least hiring contractors who use Kansas workers. Then it might not have so many people on food stamps.
But the department apparently doesn’t care. It’s obsessed by an image of a streamlined organization that no longer includes jobs in Kansas, especially rural Kansas.
We thought it was awful when Secretary Schalansky started closing all the rural offices. She said Kansans would be served by toll-free phone lines and visits from the same caseworkers and others who served them before.
Eventually, the department admitted it wasn’t saving money with the reorganization or cutting its staff. It just wanted to bunch them up in bigger towns.
Then the outsourcing came to light.
It’s hard to tell if Ms. Schalansky, an appointee of former Gov. Bill Graves, is running the department well or not, because the agency will seldom discuss its operations. Everything is cloaked in a veil of secrecy when Social Services makes a mistake.
From what we’ve seen this year, though, you have to wonder why Gov. Kathleen Sebelius kept her on. If any of the department’s offices ought to be closed, it’s hers.
Why not outsource *her* work, and get someone who cares about Kansans and rural Kansas to run this department in her place? — *Steve Haynes*

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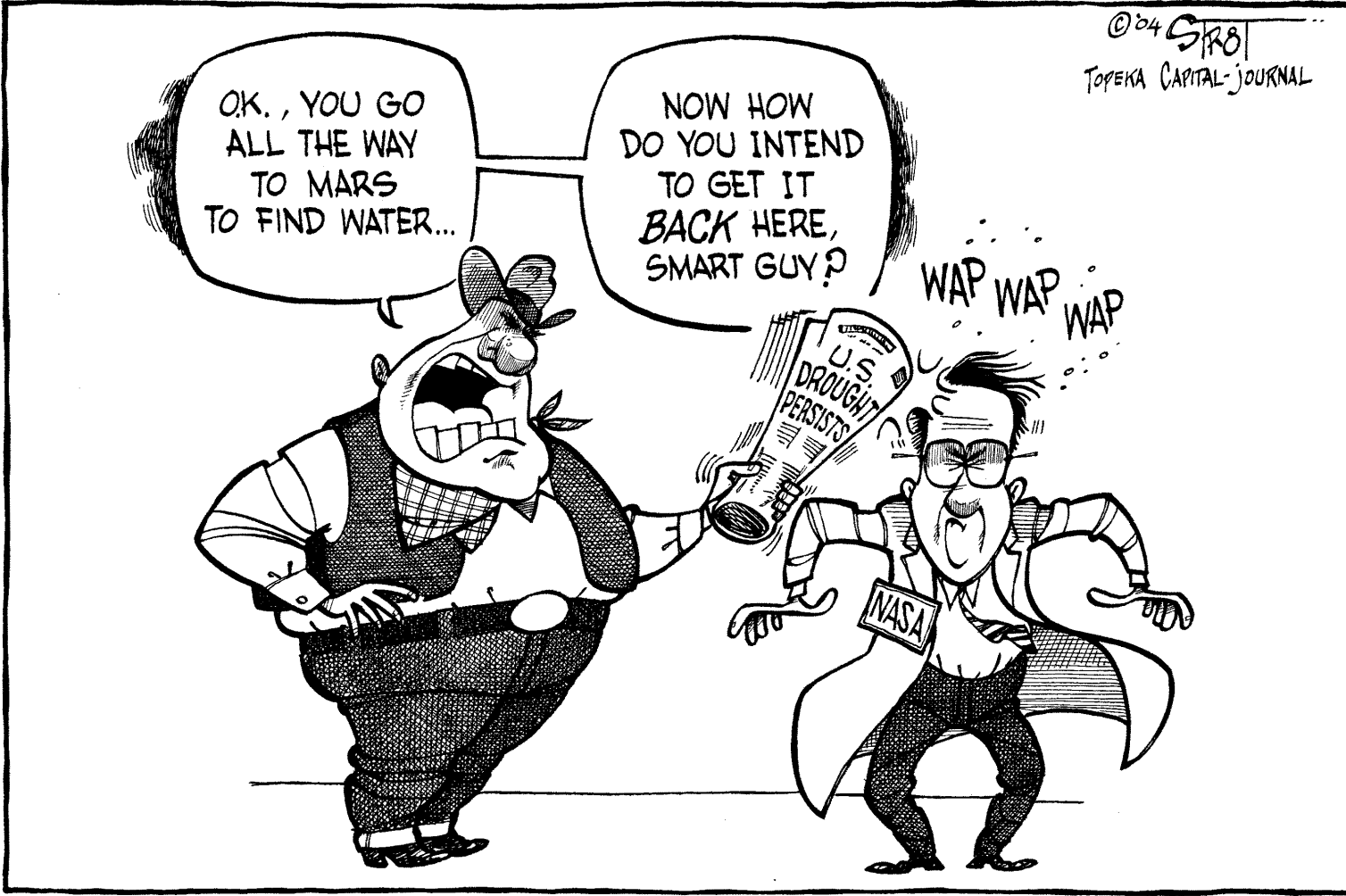
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The Cross was not an accident or surprise

I don’t know about you, but I’ve been reading about the Cross.

This is Good Friday, and we need to be reminded of the importance of the Cross.

Here are some thoughts adapted from Max Lucado’s book, The Cross:

“(The cross) rests on the time line of history. Its tragedy summons all sufferers. Its absurdity attracts all cynics. Its hope lures all searchers. History has idolized and despised it, gold-plated it and burned it, worn and trashed it. History has done everything but ignore it. How could you ignore such a piece of lumber? Suspended on its beams is the greatest claim in history. A crucified carpenter claiming to be God on earth. Divine. Eternal. Never has timber been regarded so sacred.

“The cross was no accident. The cross was not a tragic surprise. Calvary was not a knee-jerk response to a world plummeting toward destruction. It was not a patch-up job or a stop-gap measure.

“No, it was part of an incredible plan. A calculated choice. Isaiah 53:10 tells us ‘It was the Lord’s will to crush him.’

“It was no accident. Jesus was born crucified.



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Whenever he became conscious of who he was, he also became conscious of what he had to do. The cross-shaped shadow could always be seen. And the screams of hell’s imprisoned could always be heard. This explains the glint of determination on his face as he turned to go to Jerusalem for the last time. He was on his death march. (Luke 9:51).

“The ropes used to tie his hands and the soldiers used to lead him to the cross were unnecessary. They were incidental. Had they not been here, had there been no trial, no Pilate, and no crowd, the very same crucifixion would have occurred.

“Had Jesus had to nail himself to the cross, he would have done it. For it was not the soldiers who killed him, nor the screams of the mob; it was his devotion to us.

“So call it what you wish: An act of grace. A

Steps to get yourself out of debt

April has been declared “National Financial Literacy Month” and there has never been a more important time to talk about this issue. Last month’s column discussed our nation’s out-of-control spending habits and what the Treasurer’s office was doing to combat this problem for the next generation of Kansans. This month’s column will give you five steps that will help you on your quest for personal financial health.

Debt is difficult to deal with and can be embarrassing to talk about. However, the following tips will assist you in the process of digging out of your financial hole and rebuilding your credit.

1. How much do you owe?

This may seem like a simple question but you may be surprised to find out that many people do not know the answer. The first step toward getting out of debt is to be honest with yourself and know exactly how much you owe. Complete the following: 1) Collect your bills in one place. 2) List each bill from highest to lowest, including house and car payments. 3) Write the minimum payment due. 4) Write the monthly balance. 5) Write the due date for each bill.

2. What are you going to pay first?

Once you have the facts you should start with your highest balance/interest rate and then work down from there. Set an amount over your minimum amount due and pay as much as you can to knock down the total bill. It is also important that you stop spending! Before buying, ask yourself if the item/service is a “need” or a “want.”

3. Cut down or eliminate credit cards.

Credit cards are not bad things. In fact, as we



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move into a digital age they are going to become more important. However, you should try and limit your credit cards to one or two, anything more than that is unnecessary. Also, look closely at store-sponsored credit cards, as they tend to have much higher interest rates.

4. Know the facts.

It is important to know how potential lenders or other business partners view your finances. Order a copy of your credit report and review it carefully. Make sure there are no problems and that everything is accurate. If you notice an error, contact the merchant and the reporting agency immediately. An annual re-

view of your credit report will also alert you to identity theft and other harmful practices.
plan of redemption. A martyr’s sacrifice. But whatever you call it, don’t call it an accident. It was anything but that. Jesus didn’t take a wrong turn that led him to the cross. He marked the path and marched purposely to Calvary. Jesus went to the cross on purpose. The journey to the cross didn’t begin in Galilee. It didn’t begin in Nazareth. It did not even begin in Bethlehem. The journey to the cross began long before. As the echo of the crunching of the fruit was still sounding in the garden, Jesus was leaving for Calvary.

“God on a cross. The ultimate act of creative compassion. The Creator being sacrificed for the creation. God convincing mankind once and for all that God would give anything, pay any price to save his children. He could have given up. He could have turned his back. He could have walked away from the wretched mess the world became, but he didn’t. God didn’t give up.”

During this last week of Lent, during this time of emphasis on the Passion of Christ, let us be grateful. God loves us and God never gives up on us.

The cross is our proof.

view of your credit report will also alert you to identity theft and other harmful practices.

5. Make a plan.

The facts are in about your current financial situation. Now, it is important to change your ways so that you do not continue to get into more debt. Complete the following: 1) Make a budget and stick to it. 2) Organize your financial life and keep track of where every penny is being spent. There are a number of different software applications that you can use for your home computer. 3) Stick to using cash or paying with your debit card. By doing this, you will avoid racking up more debt on your credit cards.

That’s it! It is never easy to make major lifestyle changes but by following this list you should be able to save yourself a host of problems later on in life. Remember, a little effort now can pay big dividends later on.

For more financial tips visit us online at <http://kansas.tomorrowsmoney.org>.

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