

Businesses and observers see problems with bailout

Both businesses and wise observers are starting to see some of the problems that come with accepting a government bailout.

Bank of America, for instance, found it impossible to hire a new chief executive for the half million a year or so the government would allow. In response, the financial giant — still recovering from its force-fed digestion of Merrill-Lynch — decided to scrape up the money to repay the “TARP” loans it took from the Treasury.

That’s both good and bad. Good because it gets one big bank back on its own feet, and because it puts some of the taxpayers’ billions back into the till. Bad, because it’s sad to see stockholders have to foot the bill for the kind of corporate excess we saw over the last few years.

While the outgoing General Motors chief reportedly took down \$5.5 million last year — and that is after getting fired, mind you — GM’s former owners got nothing but the shaft. Corporate executives who fail should owe the stockholders they’ve let down something, don’t you think?

On the market, of course, talent is worth what someone will pay for it. Professional sports figures and entertainers show us that all the time. The bothersome thing is when competition makes it so we have to pay for talent that does not produce.

Shouldn’t there be some guarantees of productivity in any big contract? Shouldn’t a big-money pitcher, for instance, have to win a few games every year? Shouldn’t a big-time quarterback have to complete his passes? And why do sports teams have to pay out on contracts when the guy can’t play at all?

With executives, should the man who leaves his company broke and his stockhold-

ers without a dime for their investment get his “golden parachute,” or maybe just get a chance to jump?

In Japan, a failed executive might be expected to at least resign. Not here.

Here, they gather at the club and compare notes on their investments.

Either system has its flaws, it seems. You pay too much for talent, or you can’t hire any. Bank of America did what it had to do. The market will come closer to finding the right price for a new president than the Treasury Department bureaucrats.

We’d suggest a performance clause in his or her contract, however.

There’s another danger of government’s heavy hand on big corporations, and that is pushing them to do not what the market demands, but rather what political beliefs suggest.

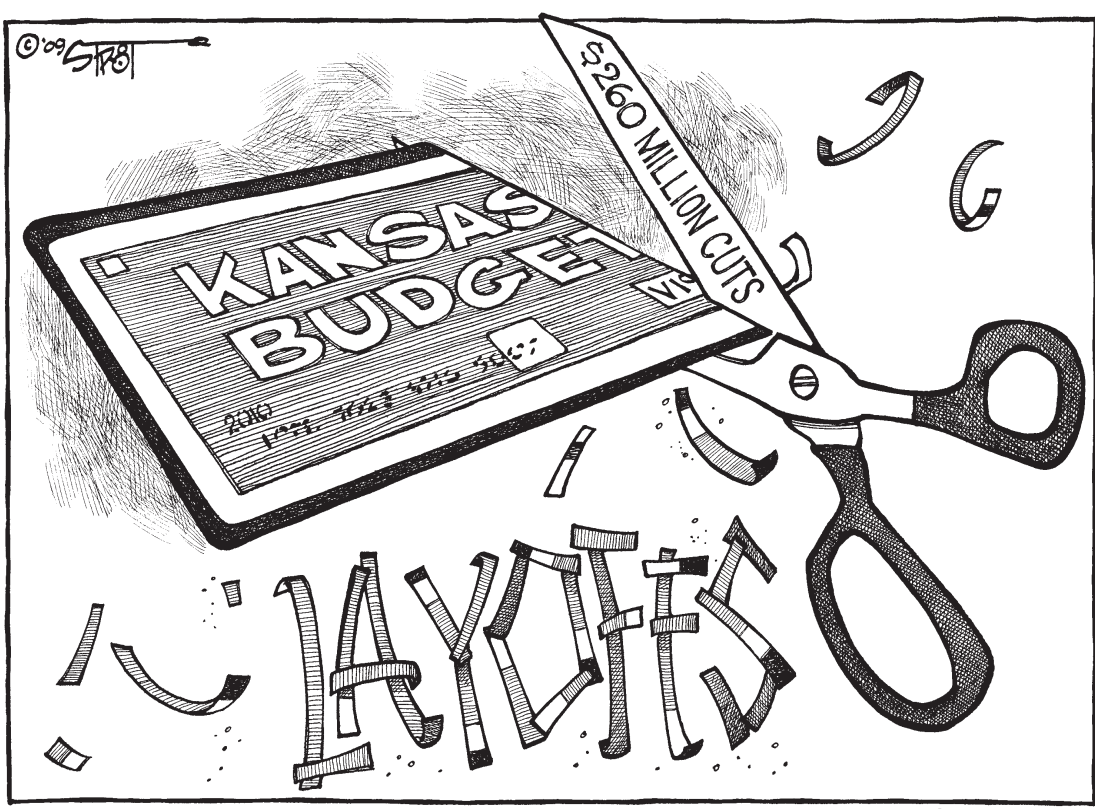
Thus, GM will be under pressure to produce not cars that people want, but cars the administration and its backers think are good for them.

The real danger is not just smaller cars — a lot of people may have to kiss their big trucks and sport-utilities goodbye — but GM getting stuck again with a bunch of vehicles no one will want.

This time, taxpayers, and not the former stockholders, will have to eat the bill. A car company that can’t produce what the market wants will be pretty hard to revive.

Bank of America will be better off for redeeming itself, even if it does overpay for a chief executive. GM might want to follow suit as soon as it can.

— Steve Haynes



Gadgets meet their demise

It’s amazing what people do to poor little unsuspecting electronic devices.

My brother-in-law Daryl and I were comparing watches the other day.

Mine is old. Not an antique, mind you, just an old watch. I bought it in 1974 after my first daughter was born and I’ve worn it most of the last 35 years.

Daryl noted that he had had a watch that he had worn for years and years but that eventually it started running slow. I asked why he bought a new watch instead of just getting a new battery.

He explained that a new battery wouldn’t help. His wife had run the faithful old watch down the garbage disposer after he had left it by the sink. While cleaning up the kitchen, it had fallen into the disposer and apparently died with a horrible grinding of gears.

A sad end, we agreed. After that I just kept falling over tales of the sad fates of other gadgets.

At a pharmacy I work at, the technician admitted that she had killed off not one but two of her mother’s digital cameras. The last one got done in by the washing machine, she said.

It seemed her young son was playing in the mud. After taking some adorable kid-in-the-mud photos, she had stripped off all his clothes and dumped them in the wash. Unfortunately, the camera got picked



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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up with the muddy clothes.

Never worked after that, she admitted.

A man across the counter offered that he had also had bad luck with electronics. His last cell phone had gotten stepped on by a horse, he said. And the one before that was eaten by the dog.

Boy, the way kids use their cell phones to do everything from text to tests, that puts a whole new twist on the old “the dog ate my homework” excuse.

Visiting eldest daughter in Augusta, Ga., I noted a couple of old computers being used as plant stands. Well, she explained, what good is a Mac Classic or SE. They’re just little boxes without much memory and can’t even be used to get on the Internet.

And this is the woman who will be picking out my nursing home some day?

I think the best story, though, is not about what had happened but what could happen.

My son-in-law smokes and keeps one those small butane lighters in his pockets. Daughter dutifully

fishes them out when she washing his clothes — most of the time. The occasional lighter that goes through the wash is discarded.

However, one day while preparing the clothes to be washed, she fished out a lighter and put it on top of her front-loading washer. As she put the soap in the holder, the lighter fell in with the soap. When she tried to retrieve it, she found there was no back on the soap dispenser and the lighter fell into the area between the washer drum and the outer shell.

It’s still there, and she figures she’ll have to get someone to come out and disassemble the washer to get it out. In the meantime, she is washing all her clothes on cold. She thinks the washer has a heating unit and she doesn’t want to void her warranty, destroy her washer or burn her house down by igniting the butane.

Myself, I think she should stick to emptying pockets in the kitchen near the sink — where she has only the garbage disposer to worry about.

Winter dampens humor

An acquaintance recently commented, “Your column hasn’t been very funny lately.”

I guess even at the Plotts’ house it isn’t always a laugh a minute. Jim must be slipping, because he is the “fodder” for my grist mill.

The other explanation is “cold” kinda kills Jim’s sense of humor. He really suffers when temps drop. The rest of us will be perfectly comfortable, and he will be shivering. Standard issue at our house is a cuddly, warm blanket on his chair.

That’s why I’m glad he got up as many Christmas lights as he did before it turned really cold. I know he was torn between putting up lights and working on his restoration shop while the weather was still mild.

Sometimes the lights won, and sometimes the shop won. At any rate, there are enough lights up to suit me, and enough is done on the shop to keep him happy until he gets the siding.

— ob —

If you happen to live in northwest Kansas, you are experiencing the same snow I am. I think this is what Coloradoians would call “powder.” It’s so light and fluffy. This morning when I went out to check the chickens’ water and feed, I noticed how the flakes were piled high on the barrel where we keep their mash. It was mounded at least a foot high



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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and sparkled like diamonds. If my overshoe hadn’t had a hole in it that was letting my foot get wet and cold, I might have appreciated its’ beauty a little more.

Speaking of the hens, I had to have a little talk with the ol’ girls. Their output has certainly dropped off with the cold. I actually had to buy eggs the other day.

Now, that kills me, to have 17 beautiful laying hens and they can’t keep up with the demands of three people! That’s just wrong. Especially, when I’m feeding them as much, if not more, than I do in nicer weather. I’m not ready to threaten them with the “noodle bath” just yet. But I’m close.

— ob —

I’ve been to the grocery three times in the last four days, and each time I have forgotten to buy white corn syrup. Every candy maker knows you can’t make peanut brittle, caramel corn, penuche or pecan pralines without the stuff.

So, I’m going to the store one more time and this time SYRUP is at the top of the list. I’m itchin’ to get started on my Christmas candy.

It’s dawning on me that Christmas is less than two weeks away, and I have four boxes to get mailed.

We don’t do much in the way of presents, but all the kids would be disappointed if they didn’t get some candy. It’s my gift to them.

From the Bible

And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.

And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

Mark 12:30-31

Replacement hard to find

The departure of Rep. Dennis Moore from Congress will be as much of a loss for Kansas as it might be for the Democratic party, which will have a tough time finding a replacement.

Mr. Moore is the kind of representative we should have at the Capitol, regardless of party. He’s intelligent, thoughtful and a heck of a good guy. He takes time to meet with people who come to Washington, and shows a genuine interest in what they have to say.

He may not always agree, but if he doesn’t, he’ll tell you why — with a smile — and go on to other issues.

Going into his 12th year, the six-term congressman told reporters last week that he had only planned to stay about a decade. At 64, he agreed, the every-weekend flights back to Kansas have gotten old.

But as much as anything, he said, the partisan atmosphere which has marked Washington for most of our history — “ungodly partisanship,” he called it — finally got to him.

“Eighty-five percent of what we do in Congress should not be about party,” he declared.

And that’s true. Most of it should be about what’s good for America and the American people. What increases our freedom rather than diminishing it. What helps rather than hurts. What’s right, not wrong.

The truth is, it’s seldom been that



Along the Sappa

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way. Partisan feeling ran deep in the early years, the administrations of both Adamases, Monroe, Jefferson and certainly Andrew Jackson. Partisan feeling, overlain by the slavery issue, preceded the Civil War. It resumed its’ march at war’s end.

And while it ebbs and flows, partisanship has peaked in the Clinton, Bush II and Obama administrations. Whichever party controls the Congress has worked to block the opposition president’s programs and appointments. Today, it’s no different, and House members have less freedom to buck their leadership.

It’ll be interesting to see where Dennis Moore lands. Will he return to Johnson County to practice law? Retire? Become a highly paid capital lobbyist?

We’d like to see him back in Kansas, frankly.

The race to replace him will be interesting. Can voters back east do as well this time?

Doubtful.

We’ll remember Mr. Moore as

the guy who always took time to hear us out when we visited on press association business, as the congressman who, when he had to rush off to a vote, said “Come on,” and waved us to follow him to the chamber, then came back and talked to us some more after the vote.

He was the guy who followed his father’s example in more ways than one, and kept his Dad’s “Mr. Moore goes to Washington” poster from the 1960s (He never made it to D.C. himself,) on the wall as a reminder. It was a point of pride that, after service as district attorney in heavily Republican Johnson County, he’d fulfilled that dream years later.

Of course, Mr. Moore has had to play the partisan game some days. Still, he sticks out as a guy who tried his best to do what he thought was right. You can’t ask for much more than that from anyone.



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Published each Wednesday by Haynes Publishing Co., 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749. Periodicals postage paid at Oberlin, Kan. 67749.

Steve and Cynthia Haynes, publishers
Official newspaper of Oberlin, Jennings, Norcat, Dresden and Decatur County. Member of the Kansas Press Association, National Newspaper Association, Colorado Press Association, Nebraska Press Association and Inland Press Association.

Subscriptions: One year, \$38 (tax included) in Decatur, Norton, Rawlins, Sheridan, Thomas and Red Willow counties; \$42 (tax included) elsewhere in Kansas; \$48 elsewhere in the U.S. Foreign subscriptions, \$50-\$250 (in U.S. dollars only) extra per year (except APO/FPO). POSTMASTER: Send change of address to 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749-2243.

Office hours: 8:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. Mon.-Fri.

Nor’West Newspapers

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