

## Airlines setting us up for yet another bailout

News that other airlines are circling the carcass of bankrupt AMR Corp., parent of venerable the American Airlines, can't be good for the economy or the consumer.

American, once the biggest domestic carrier, undoubtedly struggled to compete with its merged megarivals, United-Continental and Delta, which itself picked clean the bones of bankrupt Northwest.

All four of the big carriers washed themselves through bankruptcy premerger, shaking out union contracts, pensions and restrictive work rules, terminal and aircraft leases, anything they thought they could get away with. Common stockholders, of course, were left holding the bag, along with retirees, airport operators and others.

In the self-centered world of business, none of that counts. It's a jungle, and survival indeed goes to the fittest, or the one with the most and best lawyers. That is not necessarily wrong, just true.

Then the big airlines set about getting bigger by gobbling up the competition. That blazed a trail that others want to follow. Today, a large airline, U.S. Airways, hopes to go mega by gobbling up American. U.S. Air itself used the name of a fallen carrier taken over by newcomer America West a few years ago. The original U.S. Air formed after regional carrier Piedmont feasted on the remains of bankrupt Eastern, and so on.

There remains virtually no holdover from the "legacy" airlines of yore, the pioneering firms like Continental and American and Trans World whose founders built empires in the days of small planes and government regulation. Just names and shattered dreams.

The men and women who run today's air-

lines see profits after bankruptcy, but they seem to prize size above all.

Unfortunately, that will make them, like the "Big Three" automakers and the megabanks before them, "too big to fail." And the next time an airline goes down, the entire economy will suffer. Taxpayers will be stuck with the bill.

Can't happen, someone will say. Of course it will. Just watch.

The solution, as with banks and other businesses, is for the government to enforce anti-trust laws and keep big businesses relatively small. You could argue over how small, but any firm that controls more than 20 percent of an industry ought to be suspect.

The purpose is not to control business or punish business people. Let them fight it out in the arena. But make it possible for startups like the highly successful, always profitable Southwest Airlines to prosper. Maintain a level, open playing field. Then stand back and watch. That's what government should do; not control, not bail out and never play favorites.

What happens if AMR does not fall to U.S. Air? Reportedly, Delta waits in the wings. And marketing partner British Airways is said to have a large stake — and say — in what happens.

But management says the firm can and will stand on its own. We believe it should have that chance, though the ones who led it into bankruptcy probably should not be rewarded with even-bigger contracts. That's a question for the board of directors, of course.

But airline customers and taxpayers — the rest of us who stand to have our pockets picked down the line — ought to favor an independent and healthy American over yet another big, big albatross just waiting to tumble.

— Steve Haynes

## Time again to set priorities

The 2012 legislative session is under way and will probably be controversial. We will begin the session by setting new boundaries for all House, Senate and congressional districts.

Chairman Tim Owens said hearings on each chambers' districts would be weekly. I remain confident that we will retain as many western Kansas seats as possible.

We should not have lost a Senate district during the last reapportionment, and I will do my best to preserve representation. This all needs to be done in a timely manner to meet the June filing deadline.

A few other important issues that will require a lot of discussion:

- Major adjustment of the state's retirement fund.
- Medicaid reform.
- Overhaul of school finance.
- Which departments get cuts restored from increased revenues.
- Tax reform.
- Water policies.

It won't be long before we will be doing town hall tours. I always enjoy the feedback on these issues.

The Kansas Restaurant and Hospitality Association had their annual food bar set up at the Ramada Inn, and I could not help noticing some interesting statistics. The association says it represented 9 percent of the total jobs in Kansas in 2011 and generated \$3.6 billion in projected



**Letter from Topeka**  
By Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer  
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sales in 2011.

Every dollar spent in Kansas restaurants generates an additional \$1.01 in sales for other industries in the state. Each \$1 million spent in Kansas eating and drinking places generates 28.8 jobs in Kansas.

The governor's State of the State address presented his outline on directives for getting our fiscal house in order. I'm concerned with his education proposal but realize this will get fair hearings in both

chambers and the final outcome will serve the needs of my districts.

The governor has made some really bold proposals, and I am not sure this will be the year he will get all of it done. I do support Gov. Brownback, and I will give him the attention he needs as long as rural Kansas isn't penalized.

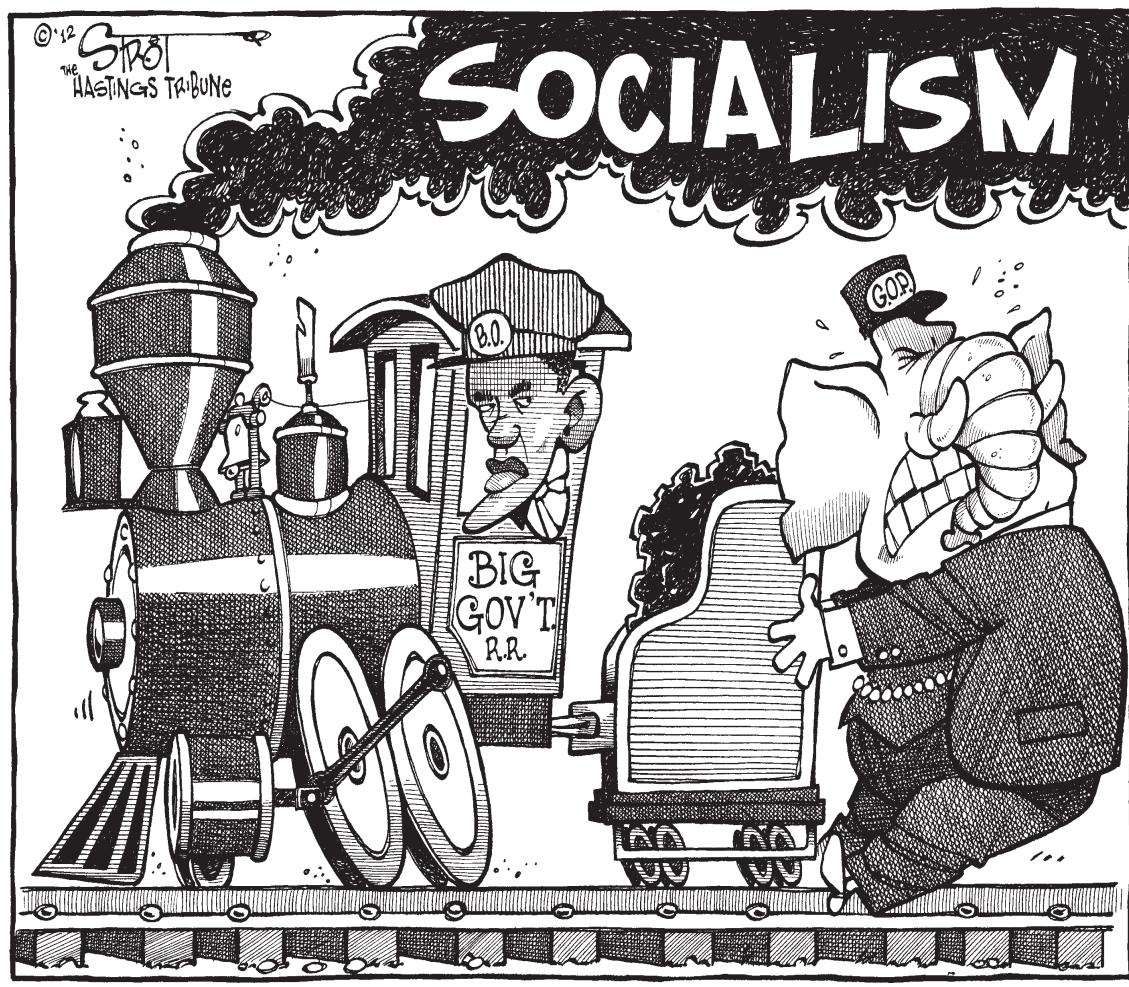
If you are a student age 12 to 17 who would like to be a page this session, call my office and schedule a Monday.

### From the Bible

And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came

by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, then he took him up in his arms and blessed God, and said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.

— Luke 2:25-30



## The times aren't a changin'

My mother used to say, "The only constant in the world is change."

Seventy-seven years ago, in January 1935 she wrote, "Times don't change much. The local paper says that 50 years ago everyone was complaining of colds. They still are. People were getting married then. They still are. Old-timers said that was the coldest winter they had experienced in years. Old-timers still say it."

No, times don't change much. In that same column she commented on how Franklin Roosevelt's son was always getting in scrapes. Politician's kids are still getting in trouble. Probably always will.

Seed catalogs have been flooding the mail box. It's making me drool to preview the new tomato plants and the "umpteenth" varieties of cucumbers. Even more than the vegetables, though, I can't get enough of the flowers. I really want to try my hand at hydrangeas this year.

Our daughter Jennifer grows them, and they are beautiful. But then, Jennifer can grow anything. When she lived here in Kansas, her lawn, landscaping and flower beds were picture perfect. Now that she lives in Texas, with practically a year-around growing season, her place is right out of House Beautiful.

She's about to run out of planting beds, though — unless she turns the entire lawn into one giant flower garden. She definitely has a green thumb.



**Out Back**  
By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts  
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The seed catalogs make me think of spring, and spring makes me think of baby chicks. I imagine this is the year we need to be bringing in a replacement crew in the hen house. The old girls have done good for about three years, but their eggs will be running out soon.

I had my first hint that their laying days are waning. Gathering the eggs one day, I found a little egg in the nest no bigger than a grape. It's the same when they start to lay, small eggs. I think the same thing happens when their productive days are about over.

Introducing new chickens into the flock is always tricky. Where do you think the phrase "pecking order" comes from? But by the time we raise chicks up big enough to be layers, we'll know for certain if the older hens are really and truly done.

My nephew, by marriage, Terry Welzen, died last week. He married my brother Bob's oldest daughter, Sherry, and was instantly welcomed

into the family. I'm not sure of Terry's ancestry, but his family was all blonde and blue-eyed. German, perhaps, or Norwegian. Terry had a great sense of humor and was a super storyteller. That endeared him to my dad right off the bat. And he had that Michigan/Wisconsin/Minnesota kind of accent which made him fun for us "flatlanders" to listen to.

Just a couple of years younger than me, Sherry was my parents' first grandchild to marry, and it was a blowout of a wedding. My oldest daughter, Halley, was the flower girl and Sherry's little brother, Patrick, was the ring bearer. They, of course, stole the show when Halley was trying to carefully drop the petals, one-by-one, and Patrick said, "Hurry up." Terry was so kind to Halley, and I think she fell in love with him, just like the rest of us.

Terry had been ill for a long time. Surgeries and treatments had not been kind to him. I imagine he was just plain sick and tired of being sick and tired. Still, he was too young, and I know he'll be missed.

## Bank the surplus for a cushion

There will be no shortage of information to share with the 120th District this year. In this article, I am going to talk about the most-asked questions I have received.

First, the governor's budget. The last time Kansas met the constitutional ending balance requirement was in 2008. The constitution requires an ending balance of 7.5 percent of the total. The current budget provides an ending balance of \$465 million, exceeding the 7.5 percent statutory requirement.

I have received some complaints that we should spend the excess for programs that have been really hurt. I believe that if we had maintained a cushion in the bank, when the crisis hit, we would have been in a position to better manage and would have not had to make the cuts we did. Kansas families must budget to have a cushion in the bank; the Legislature should be no different.

Last week, I wrote about the difference in the All Funds Budget and the General Fund Budget. In this year's budget, the All Funds Budget, covering all state spending, decreases by \$596.6 million, or 4 percent. The state General Fund Budget, state money controlled directly by the governor and Legislature, decreases by .6 of 1 percent, or \$39.1 million. I would say that we are headed in the right direction.

The governor has recommended that the Kansas Arts Commission and the Kansas Film Commission be combined into a new Creative Industries Commission in the budget of the Department of Commerce. It would get \$200,000 a year and be charged with showing how the money is used and how it can improve state financial resources.

The first rule of being stuck in a hole is to stop digging, and that is exactly the plan for the Kansas Public Employees Retirement System. While the hole of \$8.3 billion seems insurmountable, there is a



**Letter from Topeka**  
By State Rep. Ward Cassidy  
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manageable solution.

The first step is to fund the state's year-to-year obligations, and this budget does that. The next step is to reform the system to prevent future employees from being trapped in an inflexible plan. However, current members, those retired and already vested, will not see a change in the program. They will continue to receive the payments as promised.

It is undecided what to do with members who are not yet vested. The recommendations for new employees are still being considered, but I believe that we will ultimately pass a defined contribution plan for new members. This would help ensure the fund stays solvent and retirees who have been promised a pension will receive it.

The governor recommends no general pay raise for state employees for fiscal year 2013, which begins July 1. That is better than last year, when a legislator recommended a 7.5 percent cut across the board. For the sixth year, the governor recommended money for a longevity bonus payment at \$50 per year, capped at \$1,250. Employees hired after June 15, 2008, are not eligible for this bonus.

I love all of my committees, but Appropriations has proven to be very exciting. I will learn how every penny of the General Fund Budget is spent.

One of my favorite hobbies is hunting and fishing. Today in Appropriations, we heard from the new director, a friend of mine, Robin Jennison. The Department

of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism has been directed to become self-sufficient. One of its proposals to achieve this goal is to have Kansas 65 and older once again purchase hunting and fishing licenses. I have received quite a few e-mails about this.

Here is my point of view: A very high percentage of outdoorsmen are 75 and over, thanks to us Baby Boomers. I want my grandchildren to have the same outdoor experiences as I have had and am willing to buy a license as long as I can still hunt. It is a small price to pay.

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