

Neither party wants to tackle antitrust issue

One glaring fault in our economy neither party seems willing to take on. Maybe there's too much corporate money out there.

Big business, as in too big to fail.

First the less-shaky banks were allowed to gobble up their less-fortunate brethren when the economy went south. Outfits like Bank of America then became "too big to fail," did they not?

There's more, though. With only three American automakers, they've long been considered "too big to fail."

Where was the antitrust division when that happened?

And airlines? We already have Delta, which was allowed to scoop up competing Northwest. Did we need an airline that big.

Now United has swallowed Continental whole, "so it can compete," and American wants to soak up U.S. Airways, itself a conglomeration of the America West (the dominant partner) under the name of a better-known corporate weakling.

Won't they all be "too big to fail"? Where was the Justice Department when all this was going on.

Yet you almost have to go back to the Nixon Administration in 1974, when a federal suit was filed to break up the AT&T telephone monopoly, and the Reagan Administration in 1984, when the breakup actually came down, to find a real antitrust policy.

Since then, it's been open season for big-time mergers. In the years since, Southwestern Bell, at first just one of a flock of Baby Bells produced by the breakup, has gobbled up three

of its siblings and its former parent to become the new AT&T. Airlines, banks, other businesses have merged with little opposition.

Take railroads: today there are just seven "Class 1" long-haul carriers, where once there were more than 200. They are big, mostly efficient and mostly profitable, but what will happen when one threatens to go down?

The next time Delta goes into bankruptcy? It's not like it hasn't happened before, after all.

There's just no evidence that bigger is better. A strong economy can't depend on just a few big outfits, because the odds are, one or more of them eventually will fail.

Antitrust policy used to be based on the idea that bigger businesses could control markets and manipulate prices. That's still a valid concern, but history suggests we've moved way beyond that issue.

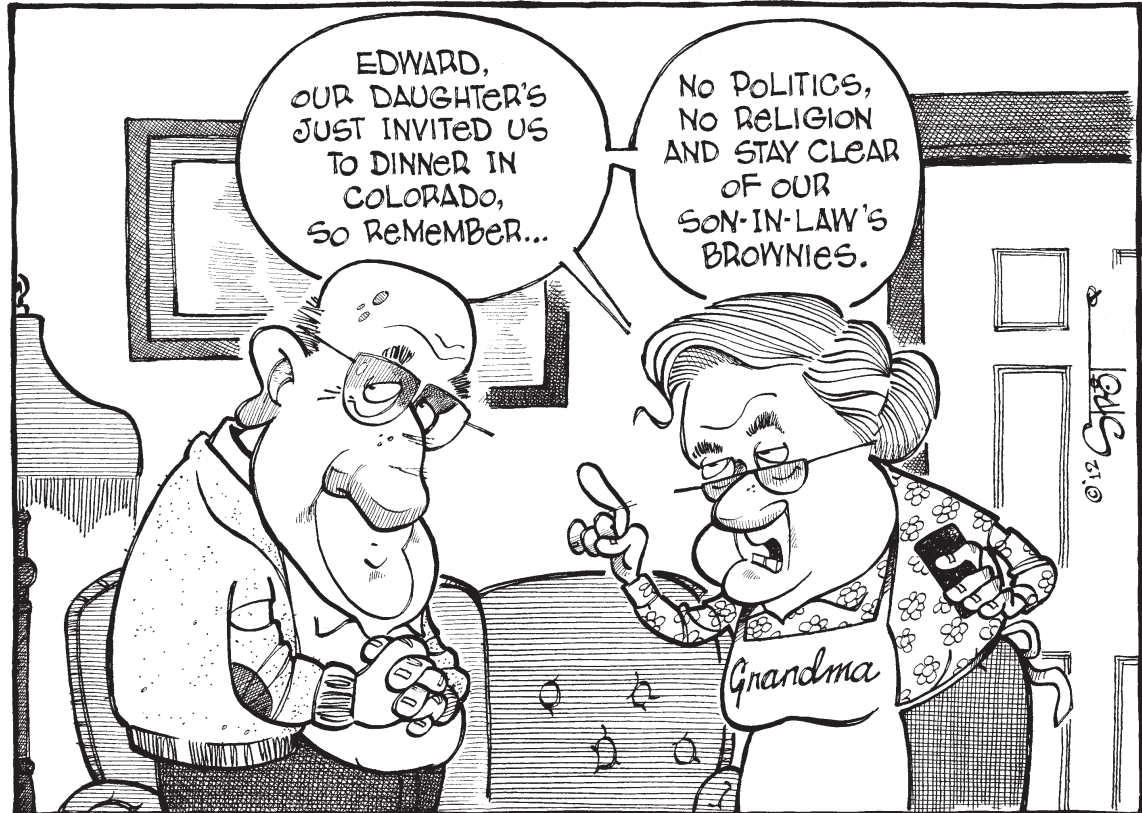
Today, bigness threatens the entire economy. You'd think we would have learned that lesson, but there's just no evidence anyone cares about anything except a continued flow of big-business money to their campaigns.

We will rue the day we let this happen. Markets dominated by a few big firms lose their natural ability to regulate themselves.

It's time to start breaking up the "too-big" businesses and letting the forces of nature and economics operate as intended. Let firms compete, let those that make mistakes fail, let new competitors spring up.

But don't let our prosperity depend on a few far-from-stable corporations.

— Steve Haynes



Postal Service on delete list?

What's disappearing from our lives.

A story in the *AARP Bulletin* a few months ago (yep, I'm that old) gave a list of items that it believes will be gone before long.

The story starts out with snail mail — the good ol' U.S. Postal Service. The story contends that electronic media will kill that oldest of U.S. institutions as fewer and fewer people mail letters, bills, checks, cards, books, magazines and newspapers.

Well, I disagree, but the U.S. government itself seems to be trying its best to kill off the post office. While the senators argue ways to help the service, the Social Security Administration took all the millions of checks it sends out every month out of the system and went to electronic banking. That, my friends, is the government at work for you.

Home phones are also on the list, and I hate that. None of my three children has a "land line." They all rely on their cell phones, even the ones who work from home.

When I visit my daughters in Georgia, I have to go to the office supply store to get a fax because you can't send or receive a fax on a cell phone. One daughter says just have them scan it and e-mail it, but that isn't always as simple as it sounds.

Still, it isn't just the kids. Lots of my friends and co-workers have



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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dropped their home phones, and now I can't find out how to spell people's names by looking them up in the phone book. To make things even worse, people have started spelling their children's names in odd ways. Take the name Alice, for example. It used to be spelled Alice. Now it could be Alyce, Allise, Allys or a half dozen other variations. It's enough to drive a copy editor to drink.

Glove-box maps are next on the delete list. I thought that maps were in trouble when the Tom Tom and Garmin became popular, but these two fancy little devices didn't prove a threat. Now it seems that these global positioning machines will soon be right up there with the highway map, as every smart phone in the country can tell you not only where you are, but where you're going and when you should get there.

Of course, when you're on the road, they usually tell you you're out

of cell-phone range, and therefore, out of luck.

Personally, I still like our Garmin. It sits on the dash and is easier to use than the cell phone. I can get the Garmin to talk to me when she tells me where to go, but that gets really annoying, especially when I disagree with her. She doesn't like to give up.

One item that has almost disappeared from the landscape is the pay telephone. Again, cell phones have made this once wonderfully useful device obsolete. You can't even find pay phones in airports, train stations or bus depots anymore, although we did see one recently.

And phone booths? Poor Superman would have a hard time in today's world.

The problem of changing his clothes would just be the start. Wait until he had to file a flight plan with the government every time he took off.

Black olives a 'white' thing?

There's no denying northwest Kansas is in the heart of "Whitebread America." There is not a lot of racial diversity out here. When a friend of mine, a woman of color, said she had an ethnic question, I braced myself.

A mutual friend had just died and my friend called to ask, "Do people out here take food to the family when someone dies?"

"Yes, of course," I answered her.

"Good," she said, "I didn't know if it was just a black thing."

I had to laugh. "No. It's not just a 'black thing,'" I said. "You don't have a corner on that market."

The next week the same friend called with another question.

"Do you serve black olives on your Thanksgiving table?"

"Well, yes I do. Why?"

She said a nonprofit she works with had just received two boxes of food to help with Thanksgiving dinner.

"Both boxes had black olives," she said, "and I just wondered if that was a white thing."

Again, I had to laugh. But, you know, she may be right. Maybe it is a "white thing."

—ob—

Why didn't I think of that? How many times have you seen a simple device being sold to help with everyday chores and you kick yourself for not marketing it first?

When I was a kid, my mother had me slide, in my sock-covered feet,



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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all over her freshly waxed floor. I thought it was fun and she got a nicely buffed floor.

I did the same thing with my kids. Run and slide. Run and slide. Presto, chango — a shiny floor.

Last week, hanging on a rack at the department store were slippers with a detachable sole of micro-fiber dusters. I bought a pair and tried them out at home.

They worked great. The only drawback was Jim threatening to take my picture as I "waxed on — waxed off."

—ob—
Little Tomas has been claimed. Sort of.

We discovered that he had been the kitten of our little neighbor girl, Aubrey. Tomas, whose original name, we learned, was Barney, wandered away from home and was thought to be lost forever. Aubrey was thrilled when Barney came back.

Barney/Tomas, however, may be having an identity crisis. He doesn't know where "home" is. I know he loves Aubrey, but he also knows he was fed at our house. Since he lives

just across the street, he still makes a bee line for our house when he sees us outside. We try not to give him any attention, but he's pretty demanding. And did I mention, pretty cute. I've even taken food over to his front porch and fed him there, trying to persuade him to stay home. So far, it's not working, and I find him at my front door as often as not.

—ob—
The youth minister of our church spoke Sunday on the subject of encouragement. He shared an idea that I like: Keeping a file of encouraging notes people have given him over the years. He said on bad days, it helps him to look at an encouraging letter to remind him of good days.

I think I might do the same. People have been kind to me my entire life, and somewhere, in a box, I have the notes, cards and letters they have sent to me. My goal, now, is to put them in a permanent folder, in my file drawer, where I can get my hands on them.

One thing I need to remember, though. If I want to be encouraged, I need to be an encourager. That street runs both ways.

Pigs line roadway with litter

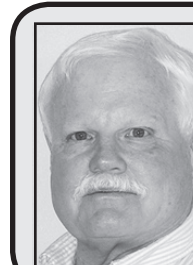
Pigs. That's the only thing I can think of to call 'em, people who throw trash out of their cars.

A lot of them out there, too, judging from the amount of trash you find along a typical American road.

If people would only stop and think what they're doing. But that'll probably never happen, except maybe for some of the younger ones. The adults, chances are they're never going to change.

What do they throw? Packaging from anything they eat, drink or smoke, it seems.

Judging from the roadsides at Sappa Park, there are a lot of Bud-



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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weiser, Bud Light, Michelob Ultra, Coke and root beer drinkers out there. Fast food. Snack food. Junk food. Cigarette packages — mostly Marlboro. Cigarette butts. Pheasant wings and entrails. Once, a deer carcass.

Oh, yeah. A bucket of excrement. Souvenir of someone's camping trip, I guess. We didn't bother to move that one.

You name it; if someone had it in a car, it'll wind up beside the road.

And all this is in a park. A park, people. A park with a dumpster.

But, of course, it's always easier to just toss something out the window than to take care of it.

One thing I can't figure out, though, is how so many of them manage to hit the space below the bridge with beer cans and bottles. If you're driving, it's a pretty small target. Do they stop and aim? Or are we the only ones who go down there?

Now I have a confession to make.

Once, I was one of the pigs. A long time ago. I didn't like having trash in my car, so I threw it out. All

of it. Cups, bottles, wrappers, you name it.

Oh, I was a teenager then. And there was some method to my madness. We'd learned that empty beer bottles in your car were just evidence. But if you were throwing evidence out, it was just as easy to throw everything else out.

One day, I woke up to what I was doing to the world. I vowed never to toss litter again, and it's one promise I've kept. Today, I'll scramble after a tissue if I drop one. I try never to let the smallest piece of paper or plastic fly away.

Of course, I don't have any empty beer bottles in the car today. That was long ago.

But if the subject of littering comes up at the Judgement, I'll have to hope I've done enough penance in the days since.

So when you see me on my high horse, railing about the things the pigs dump out at the park or along the highway, you know I haven't led a perfect life. It's just that I've come to believe there's a better way.

You know what they say about converts.

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From the Bible

Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: so that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

—1 Corinthians 1:3-8

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In the U.S.A.

Off with your hat, as the flag goes by!

And let the heart have its say;

You're man enough for a tear in your eye

that you will not wipe away.

Henry Cuyler Bunner
1855-1896 American novelist and poet

