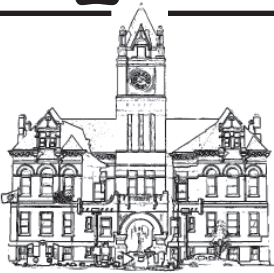


Opinion



A Kansas Viewpoint

Too little, too late too much at risk

The Lawrence Journal-World

To those who carefully guard their Social Security numbers and other information that could allow someone to steal their financial identity, the news this week out of Topeka was stunning.

An investigation conducted by the Kansas Legislature’s Division of Post Audit found that many, perhaps hundreds of, surplus state computers had been sold to the general public while they still contained confidential information stored by the original users.

That information included thousands of names and Social Security numbers as well as personal information on state employees and password accounts that would come in handy for anyone wanting to hack into the state’s computers.

Out of 15 surplus computers tested by the auditors, 10 still contained some data; seven of those 10 held confidential information that the auditors said could be easily accessed using software that is readily available for about \$60.

State officials are considering whether to try to track down the computers that were purchased, but that would be next to impossible. It seems that all state residents can do is watch their bank and credit card accounts and keep their fingers crossed.

State agencies said they would immediately tighten up their procedures for disposing of computers. That’s good, but it could be coming too late. Considering how little money the state probably makes from selling outdated computers as surplus, it might make more sense, both financially and for security reasons, to simply destroy the computers when they are taken out of service.

The news about the computers is another example of the Legislative Division of Post Audit more than earning its keep for state taxpayers. It’s good that legislators decided to ask the questions that led to the computer audit; it’s just too bad they didn’t start asking a little sooner.

About those letters . . .

The *Free Press* encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, if at all possible, and should include a telephone number and an address.

Where to write, call

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 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, 2202 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. 202/225-2715 or Fax 202/225-5124

State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St. Rm. 143-N, Topeka, Kan. 66612. 785/296-7676 e mail: jmorriso@ink.org web: www.morrisonfamily.com

State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol, 300 SW 10th St., Rm. 128-S., Topeka, Kan. 66612, 785/296-7399 ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

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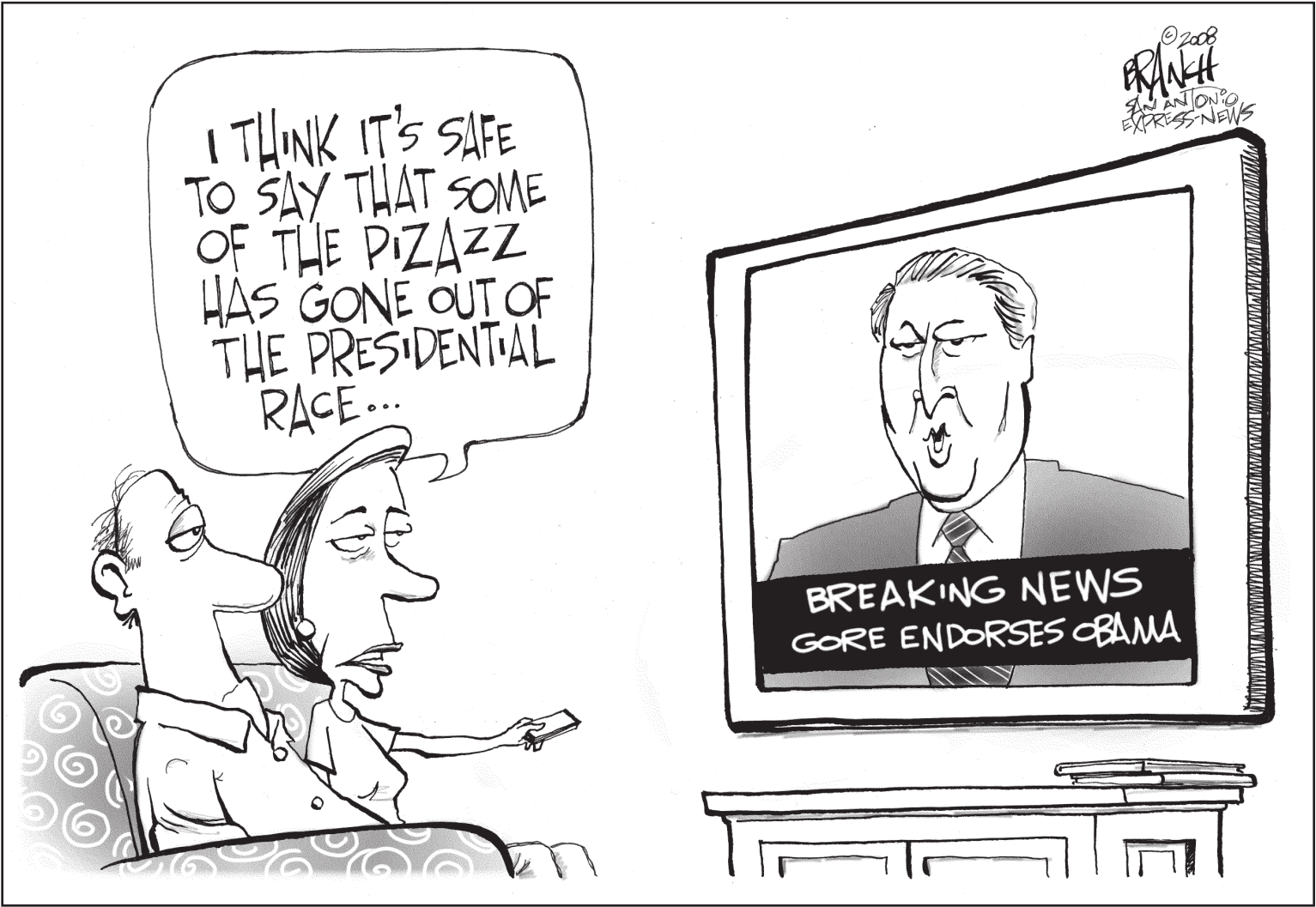
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I want action and I want it now

I liked what Chief Court Clerk Vergie Wentz said about Sheridan County Commissioners needing to do the right thing and install an elevator in the courthouse.

As a taxpayer myself, I’m the first one who does not want to cough up more money for taxes. But come on folks, in the past three years, two people have been injured in falls down marble stairs in the Sheridan County Courthouse.

In January, County Treasurer Esther Bainter took a spill and fractured one of her vertebra. Fortunately, she was able to go to Salina and have her back surgically repaired. Fortunately she did not sue the county.

In 2005, a 77-year-old Colorado man fell down the marble stairs and hurt ribs. He didn’t sue the county, us taxpayers, either. But our luck is going to run out one of these days.

Because of hip and feet surgeries, Wentz is forced to descend the stairs backward to make it more equalized in bearing her weight on them. That’s despicable to make a person traverse a flight of stairs backward.

Sure, Monday at a meeting with M.J. Willoughby, general council for the Kansas Office of Judicial Administration, and with Anthony Fadale, the state’s Americans with Disabilities Coordinator, Commissioners Doyle Kauk, Ron Schamberger and Keith Kennedy said they would make sure all taxpayers had access to the courthouse. (see page 3)

Well, guys, that’s yet to be seen. Maybe the



Jan Katz Ackerman

• From Where I stand

commissioners need to move their meeting room to the third floor and see just what it’s like to get up there. Or better yet, maybe they should take turns running a video camera and document just how many people have trouble doing business at the courthouse because of the lack of an elevator.

In the past 10 years, three separate knee injuries have prompted me to ask board of commissioners for equal access to the third floor of the courthouse where court records are kept. I’ve been denied equal access, being told to ask the court clerk to bring records I need down to the ground floor. How silly.

It’s not the court clerk’s job to haul court records from floor to floor. It’s the commissioners’ job to make sure, according to the 1992 legislated law, that all people have access to all three floors. All people, even reporters.

The Sheridan County Commissioners don’t think twice about spending \$100,000 plus for a road grader. But they put all taxpayers at risk of a lawsuit by not installing an elevator in the courthouse.

These three commissioners are looking at installing a lift apparatus that a wheelchair can be rolled on and electrically moved from one floor to another. In my opinion, that’s a stop-gap solution that won’t work in the long run. I for one wouldn’t want to be sitting in a 300 plus pound chair on a metal plate hovering some several feet in the air. That’s not the best solution. The best, in my opinion, and I admit I’m not an engineer, is an elevator.

If I’ve said it once I’ve said it more than once, that taxpayers should think about a recall for the commissioners’ lack of action on this topic. Since 1999, boards of commissioners have studied putting an elevator in the 1917 built courthouse. But studying the topic is not the same as taking steps to do something about making sure all three floors of the courthouse are accessible to the public. I asked Willoughby and Fadale if their trip to Hoxie from Topeka was going to be the straw that breaks the camel’s back on the issue. It was when I told them I’ve been denied access to the third floor to do my job that Fadale said, “Ma’am, it’s going to get done.”

Will it get done before someone falls down the stairs and dies? Will it get done before more employees or members of the public fall and hurt themselves?

Well, folks, I’m waiting!
—Jan Katz Ackerman is a reporter for the Colby Free Press

Congress should think of solutions

By Rep. Jerry Moran

Welcome to “This Week in Congress.” On Thursday, the House passed additional funding legislation to provide for the ongoing military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The same bill also placed a moratorium on six Medicaid regulations that would reduce services to seniors and people with disabilities. It also included money to help rebuild from the floods and tornadoes that hit the Midwest. I hope you find this newsletter useful.

High Energy and Gas Prices

Kansans are frustrated by the cost of energy, including the high cost of gasoline. I support many proposals in Congress to address escalating prices, but these solutions are going nowhere until there is a collective will to do something about the energy crisis. The will does not currently exist because Republicans and Democrats are trying to posture themselves to deflect blame and capture political gains. I disagree with my colleagues and believe members of Congress should be solution-minded, not partisan.

The energy challenge requires a diverse solution of developing all available energy resources. While the demand for energy has continued to increase over the years, there has been no significant change in our domestic supply. We must lift federal bans on oil and natural gas exploration in Alaska and off our coasts to increase our domestic supply.

Expanded production of domestic oil and natural gas resources alone cannot solve this problem. The solution must also include initiatives to support renewable energy such as solar, wind, geothermal, hydro-electric and nuclear power, as well as biofuels made in states like Kansas. Energy development must also be accompanied by energy conservation. We must encourage the development and construction of more efficient vehicles and buildings.

companied by energy conservation. We must encourage the development and construction of more efficient vehicles and buildings.

If we are to solve this nation’s energy problem, Democrats and Republicans must work together to promote conservation, aggressively pursue forms of renewable energy, and develop domestic exploration and production of oil and natural gas.

21st Century GI Bill

More than 60 years ago, Congress passed the first GI Bill to take care of our men and women who served in World War II. This week, I voted for passage of historic changes to modernize the GI Bill. The bill delivers enhanced education benefits to military veterans who have served since Sept. 11, 2001.

The current Montgomery GI Bill is outdated and not meeting many of the needs of service members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, particularly members of the Guard and Reserve. The new GI Bill will fully fund the cost of a four-year education by providing tuition and fees for enrollment in colleges, monthly housing payments and money for books and supplies. Veterans have up to 15 years after they leave active duty to use the education benefits and those who stay in the military also have the option to transfer their benefits to their spouse and children.

Our soldiers are investing in our country through their service. It is our duty to invest in them by providing these overdue educational benefits. By providing an education, we in turn further invest in our families and communities. It was past time to increase the value of the educational benefit for those putting their lives on the line every day for our freedoms.

Tanker Decision

On Wednesday, an independent review by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) confirmed what many Kansans believed to be true since the Air Force announced its decision to award Northrop Grumman and Europe’s EADS the contract to build the new fleet of refueling tankers. The GAO concluded that the Air Force’s selection process was badly flawed and the competition should be redone to give Boeing a fair chance.

Since the tanker contract was awarded several months ago, every conversation I have had with Air Force officials raised more questions than were answered. I agree with this independent finding. The Air Force should follow the GAO’s recommendation and reopen bidding.

Awarding this contract to Boeing would create thousands of American jobs, especially in Kansas. But the bigger question is whether we should even allow a foreign-subsidized company to bid for U.S. military work. While the GAO rejected the Air Force’s process, Congress needs to address the broader issue of keeping manufacturing jobs in the United States.

Honor Flight for Service to World War II Veterans

I introduced legislation this week that recognizes the Honor Flight volunteers and donors that make it possible for World War II veterans to visit the World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C. Many World War II veterans are now in their 80s and 90s and unable physically or financially to visit our nation’s capital to see the memorial built in their honor. Honor Flight thanks these patriots for their service by organizing one-day, all-expenses paid trips to the capital.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

