

Opinion

Letter Drop

Our Readers
Sound Off

Finding solutions to financial crisis

To the Editor:
The financial crisis gripping our nation has many Americans on edge, and it may take some time before relative stability is restored. No crisis would be complete without someone trying to take advantage of it for political gain. Unbelievable as it may seem, the country's largest insurance companies are using the AIG liquidity crisis and subsequent Federal bailout as a reason to deregulate insurance and move its regulation from the states to the federal level.

It was federal regulation of the financial services side of AIG that failed. The AIG insurance subsidiaries are solvent, profitable and paying claims thanks to careful state regulation. And it was state regulators and laws that prevented AIG's management from raiding their solvent insurance subsidiaries to prop up the risky investments in collateralized debt instruments, such as credit derivative swaps on mortgage-backed securities.

It would be a monumental mistake to transfer regulatory authority of the insurance business over to the federal government. For one thing, look at the track record of federal agencies when it comes to oversight of financial services.

The commercial banks, investment firms and international holding companies (like AIG) that are at the center of the nation's financial crisis are all regulated by the federal government. The savings and loan mess of the 1980s, which cost billions to clean up, also occurred on the watch of a similar federal bureaucracy.

In contrast, most elements of the insurance industry are regulated today by state officials, and those leaders and policymakers do an excellent job. At a time when crisis and turmoil are the norm in the banking and securities sectors, state regulators continue to quietly ensure that insurance companies are solvent, that claims are paid and that consumers are protected.

State officials have experience, outnumber their banking and securities counterparts, handle countless inquiries and questions from consumers, and understand the concerns and issues facing the citizens of their area. State oversight of insurance may not be perfect, but its record is far superior to that of the financial regulators at the federal level.

The only people calling for federal oversight of the insurance industry are the big insurance players who desire the same level of weak oversight, accountability and consumer protection that has produced this crisis. To them, I say "get real."

Larry Magill, executive vice president
Kansas Association of Insurance Agents

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, Fax (202) 225-5124

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

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Steve Haynes - Publisher
s.haynes@nwkans.com

NEWS

Andy Heintz - Sports Reporter
aheintz@nwkans.com

ADVERTISING

Jasmine Stewart - Advertising Manager
j.stewart@nwkans.com

Heather Woofert - Advertising Sales
hwoofert@nwkans.com

Steifon Matthews - Graphic Design
smatthews@nwkans.com

Jessica Estes - Classified Ad Desk
jestes@nwkans.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support@nwkans.com

NORWEST PRESS

Jim Bowker - General Manager

Richard Westfahl, Lana Westfahl, Jim Jackson, Betty Morris, James Ornelas, Barbara Ornelas, Tasha Shores, Elizabeth Brock
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I love small town football games

Andy Heintz

Colby Free Press
aheintz@nwkans.com



Andy Heintz

• Wildcat Ramblings

While I'm sitting here typing away on the keyboard after another hectic day in the wonderful world of journalism, my thoughts keep drifting back to last week's football game between Colby and Hoxie. The game was my first introduction to small town football in America, and I loved every minute of it.

To a guy who grew up in the Kansas City suburbs, last Friday's game seemed like the football version of the movie Hoosiers. The crowd at the game was not huge, but they made up for it with enthusiasm. There were no fancy cars in the parking lot. There was no bumper to bumper traffic going to or from the game. The scenery I drove past did not featuring ugly strip malls or obnoxious billboards trying to sell me something I don't need. The only thing I could see on each side of me was crops. It was a different experience. It was life without the extra noise that you hate hearing, but still cannot seem to ignore.

The actual game was a little slow in the first

half, but the Eagles were able to really turn it up a notch in the second half. Senior quarterback Heath Stephens made my jaw drop a couple times when he decided it was time to show off his lightning quick speed. His three touchdowns certainly displayed how dangerous a runner he is.

But in the end my favorite part of the game was the atmosphere. Its simplicity is what I was attracted to. Both teams played as hard as they could and in the end the better team won. The fans were supportive and enthusiastic towards their teams without denigrating the opposition. It was an example of what sports should be.

Somehow small town football is one part of America that has yet to be tainted by commer-

cialism and big money. People still play for the love of the game and nothing more. The rest of the sports world could learn something from attending these Friday night games.

The football game last Friday showed me how authentic life can be in small town America. Whether you know it or not small town America has something that many of us from the city wish we could experience. And what you have is a community that is bereft of the status seeking that seems to have permeated through much of suburban society. There seems to be more awareness of the fact that material things are nice, but they won't bring happiness.

Today it seems like everyday the media bombards us with images of the latest gizmo that's supposed to make us happy or the newest business strategy that supposedly will turn regular people into millionaires. The message seems to be the only way to be happy is to have as much stuff as humanly possible. But I don't believe a word of it. All I have to do to get in a good mood is go watch the Eagles play football.

The best of the best

By John Schlageck, Kansas Farm Bureau

Hands down, food production has been the single most important vocation in human history. Farming and ranching helped pave the way for modern civilization.

Today as in the past, feeding the world is vital to our growth as a community, region, state and nation. Our ability to produce the safest, most wholesome food in the world has allowed us to progress as a civilization.

When we think of food production, our state and the farmers and ranchers who farm our fertile soil rank with the best in production agriculture. The Sunflower State ranks at the top when it comes to crop and livestock production.

According to 2007 figures, Kansas had 63,800 farms. Land in farms totaled 47.2 million acres. The average farm size was 740 acres.

Cattle and calves totaled 6.7 million head. Hogs and pigs amounted to 1.86 million while sheep were 98,000 head. Milk cows totaled 109,000, while milk production amounted to 19,734 pounds per cow.

Last year farmers produced crops worth \$4,517,824,000 according to Kansas State Agricultural Statistics. Livestock production ac-

John Schlageck

• Guest Commentary

counted for another \$7,211,504,000 for a total of \$11,729,328,000.

The latest figures on crops and livestock produced in Kansas and shipped abroad totaled \$3,834.8 billion.

Kansas lost its wheat crown to North Dakota. Wheat production totaled 283.8 million bushels in 2007. This ranked second.

We led the nation in wheat flour milled with 34,614,000 cwt. Kansas farmers produced 212 million bushels of sorghum grain in '07. This ranked first in the country. We ranked second in sorghum silage production with 1,120,000 tons.

Kansas ranked first in the number of cattle processed with a total of 7,725,900 head. Kansas ranked second in number of cattle and calves on farms with 6,700,000. Kansas ranked third in red meat processed with 6,224,700,000 pounds. Hog inventories ranked ninth with

1,870,000 head.

The Sunflower State ranked third in sunflower production with 234,250,000 pounds. We placed sixth in all hay produced with 6,370,000 tons and 11th with all alfalfa hay produced with 2,800,000 tons.

In soybean production, Kansas now ranks 11th with 84,150,000 bushels. Kansas corn ranked eighth with 518 million bushels.

Our state remains one of the most diversified in the nation in terms of crop and livestock production. Our Kansas farmers and ranchers also produce dry edible beans, oats, corn silage, rye and barley. Specialty crops like pecans, fruits, vegetables and popcorn are produced in our rich Kansas soil. Kansas farmers and ranchers also raise chickens, sheep, buffalo, ostriches, turkeys and a few other exotic creatures.

Yes, Kansas is blessed with some of the finest farmland and farmers and ranchers in the world. By using this land wisely, with the help of the latest technology and research, we will continue to feed the hungry mouths of the world.

John Schlageck is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. Born and raised on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

