





Other Viewpoints

University audits support honesty

University leaders — especially the accomplished ones — enjoy enviable independence. And access to money. Alumni and other supporters are willing to pay for their college’s success and prestige. Donors tend not to follow closely how their money is used, as long as the results are to their liking. Retired president Jon Wefald transformed Kansas State University from a sleepy land-grant school into an athletic, economic and academic powerhouse. But Wefald’s legacy is tarnished by a new audit that reveals a stunning amount of nest-feathering among a tight circle of his closest advisers. They created a satellite structure of entities that were associated with but not controlled by the university, funded by donors and business transactions. The auditors uncovered conflicts of interest, accounting problems and improper payments within those groups....

The Kansas Board of Regents last year commissioned audits at K-State, the University of Kansas and Pittsburg State University. The leaders of those three campuses have retired, and the regents wanted to examine financial practices before new leaders took over. The reports were intended to be confidential, but the board properly released the findings of the K-State audit. With the problems in the open, new President Kirk Schulz can be more up front about how he intends to resolve them. More review of some of the unusual financial arrangements is needed. Schulz is setting up controls for donor funds and other money connected with the university. The startling findings of the K-State audit are a sign that the regents shouldn’t wait for a leader’s retirement to investigate accounts. Regent Gary Sherrer, the former Kansas lieutenant governor, said he will propose a regular schedule of reviews for all six regents universities. That’s the right idea. Independent eyes are needed to protect donors’ money as well as the integrity of universities and their leaders.

— The Kansas City Star, via The Associated Press

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The future still holds paper and ink




Steve Haynes

- Along the Sappa

We got to tour a brand-new printing plant in Colorado last Thursday, \$20 million worth of presses, equipment, paper-handling and plate-making equipment, rail spur and building. Some said it may be the last of its kind build in this region, but maybe not. The real question is what might take its place. The plant serves the Longmont and Loveland papers owned by Lehman Communication, which also owns smaller papers east of Boulder and the daily Cañon City Record. We went because I am a past president of the Colorado Press Association and to represent the National Newspaper Association, since I am still on the board for a few more months, but mostly because the Lehman family have been good friends for more than 25 years. The sparkling new plant is the capstone of a long and distinguished career for Ed Lehman, who bought the Longmont paper with his wife Ruth in 1957. Neat and new as it is – and a clean plant is a rarity in the newspaper business, where ink and paper usually mix into a permanent stain – a new newspaper plant is a rarity today. It’s no secret these are trying times for the industry, especially for daily papers in large markets, where declines of as much as 30 percent in income have been common. Some say it’s a waste to spend money on presses when the Internet is taking over, but that belies the fact that smaller, local papers still make money. Instead, daily publishers are returning to their roots – local news – and trying to figure out where the money will be in the business five to 10 years out. Everyone thinks there will be a market for local news, and no one has identified a way to replace the newspaper as the essential gatherer. But will we still be printing that news on paper with black ink? The betting here is that we will. It’s possible that someone, some day, will invent an way to deliver a newspaper by all-electronic means without losing any of the convenience that makes real newspapers so well-loved. It hasn’t happened yet. Most attempts have met with abject failure, but the researchers keep trying. Publishers are hedging their bets while they wait for electronic newsprint. In the last 30 years, we have replaced every part of the process – from the reporter’s notebook right down to the making of individual printing plates – with computerized equipment. The new ways are, for the most part, vastly superior to the old. Today, we can write, make and assemble news pages, send them to a printing plant in the next county or the next state, and never touch the product until it comes off the press. An electronic paper would be a logical extension of that, but so far, it’s just not there.

Health care, tune-ups not economical



Ken Poland

- Ken’s World

Health care and engine tune-ups have something in common. It is rarely proven that either one, in itself, will pay for itself. Many years ago, I tried a brief stint of selling for a local auto parts store. We sold tune-up kits and all kinds of oil and gas additives. My job was to convince my customers, the mechanics and shop owners, to push the economics of these services and additives. The tune-up kits and additives worked. The engines ran better, the cooling systems cooled better, and the engine lubricants lubricated better. But, the economics just don’t always work! When you included the cost, you actually spent more per mile of travel than before. What then was the payoff? Better performance was an easily proven benefit. It cost more, but the engine started easier, it ran cooler, and in the long run, would last longer. In the case of my 1956 high-compression Chevrolet engine, the car ran faster. I suspect the air pollution was considerably less, with a well-tuned engine. But, in spite of the benefits, I had to spend more money to get to where I wanted to go. What does health care have in common with all this? Our health care system is coughing and sputtering. There is a great disparity in its availability. The lower income folks simply cannot finance preventive care and simple tune-ups. They just have to sputter along until they completely break down and then go to President Bush’s national health care system, the emergency room. They still can’t pay for the services, but our Christian conscience chips in and the hospital or clinic absorbs the cost. Or do they? No, they don’t absorb it all. If you have the means to pay for your services, either out of pocket or with insurance benefits, you absorb most if not all of the cost. The United States spends more on health care than any other nation, whether those nations have national health care or not. Our system works for those who have the means to purchase their services. It doesn’t work for those who don’t have the means or the discipline to prioritize their choice of what to spend their money on. So, let ‘em die or suffer! Whoa, the majority of us won’t allow that to happen. Soft hearted, socialist or just plain stupid? No, we claim to be a Christian nation, and Christians have compassion for the orphans, widows, sick, even the indigents who won’t accept responsibility. We have a national system of roads and we all pay taxes to finance them. Why don’t we just cut that system out and you pay for whatever equipment you need to get to where you want to go? That would save me some taxes and I don’t have to go anywhere. I have a four-wheel-drive pickup and tractor that will get me to Colby, whether the roads are open or not. Our health care system needs a tune-up. That tune-up is going to cost money. A national sys-

tem of some kind is the most efficient way to go, but it will take tax dollars to get there. Ken Poland describes himself as a semiretired farmer living north of Gem, a Christian, affiliated with American Baptist Churches, and a radical believer in separation of church and state. Contact him at rcwinc@cheerful.com.

Write us

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Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

