



Biolab safer than alleged terrorists?

Let’s review: Members of the Kansas congressional delegation promise they can contain hazardous biological materials — the kind terrorists like — at a proposed \$500 million research lab on the K-State campus, but they can’t promise that American soldiers can contain and detain Gitmo suspects at Fort Leavenworth’s military prison.

Something doesn’t smell quite right.

Kansas’ junior senator, Pat Roberts, is so revved up about Fort Leavenworth being considered a site for Guantanamo Bay prisoners that he uttered a ridiculous statement (recently): “I will shut down the Senate before I let that happen.”

Seriously?

Roberts wields little power in the Democratic-controlled Congress and certainly doesn’t carry the clout to shut down the Senate.

The bravado and outrage demonstrated in recent days by Roberts and other members of the Kansas congressional delegation — including Rep. Jerry Moran and Sen. Sam Brownback — border on hysteria. They’ve fueled the frenzy with unnecessary fears and unfounded concerns that imprisoning Gitmo suspects in Kansas will make the state a target for terrorists.

Seems like a biolab, where research will be done that hasn’t been conducted on the mainland since 1929, might be more of a draw for visiting terrorists rather than confronting rifle-toting U.S. military personnel at Fort Leavenworth.

Additionally, some think the Gitmo detainees are the worst of the worst when it comes to criminals — or more specifically, alleged criminals.

Seriously?

American Jeffrey Dahmer ate his murder victims.

Kansan Dennis Rader bound, tortured and killed his numerous victims.

Kansans Reginald and Jonathan Carr carried out vicious sexual attacks before they shot their victims and left all but one of them dead in a snow-covered field in Wichita.

Three of these homegrown “terrorists” are housed in a Kansas prison — El Dorado Correctional Facility — yet Roberts, Brownback and Moran aren’t lobbying to move them out of state.

If Kansas congressional members and Gov. Mark Parkinson could put the hysteria on hold, they might see that placing Gitmo suspects at Fort Leavenworth makes a lot of sense – and would create some jobs....

Kansas ought to position itself as a lead player in the Gitmo deal. Instead, we have a junior senator ridiculously threaten to shut down the Senate, a statement that stands in stark contract to the reaction of another U.S. senator, Carl Levin of Michigan, whose state remains open to accepting detainees....

The Gitmo detainees are no more dangerous — and arguably less dangerous — than the biolab Roberts and company so eagerly want to place in the heart of Kansas. They have failed to make the case for rejecting one while endorsing the other.

— The Hutchinson News, via The Associated Press

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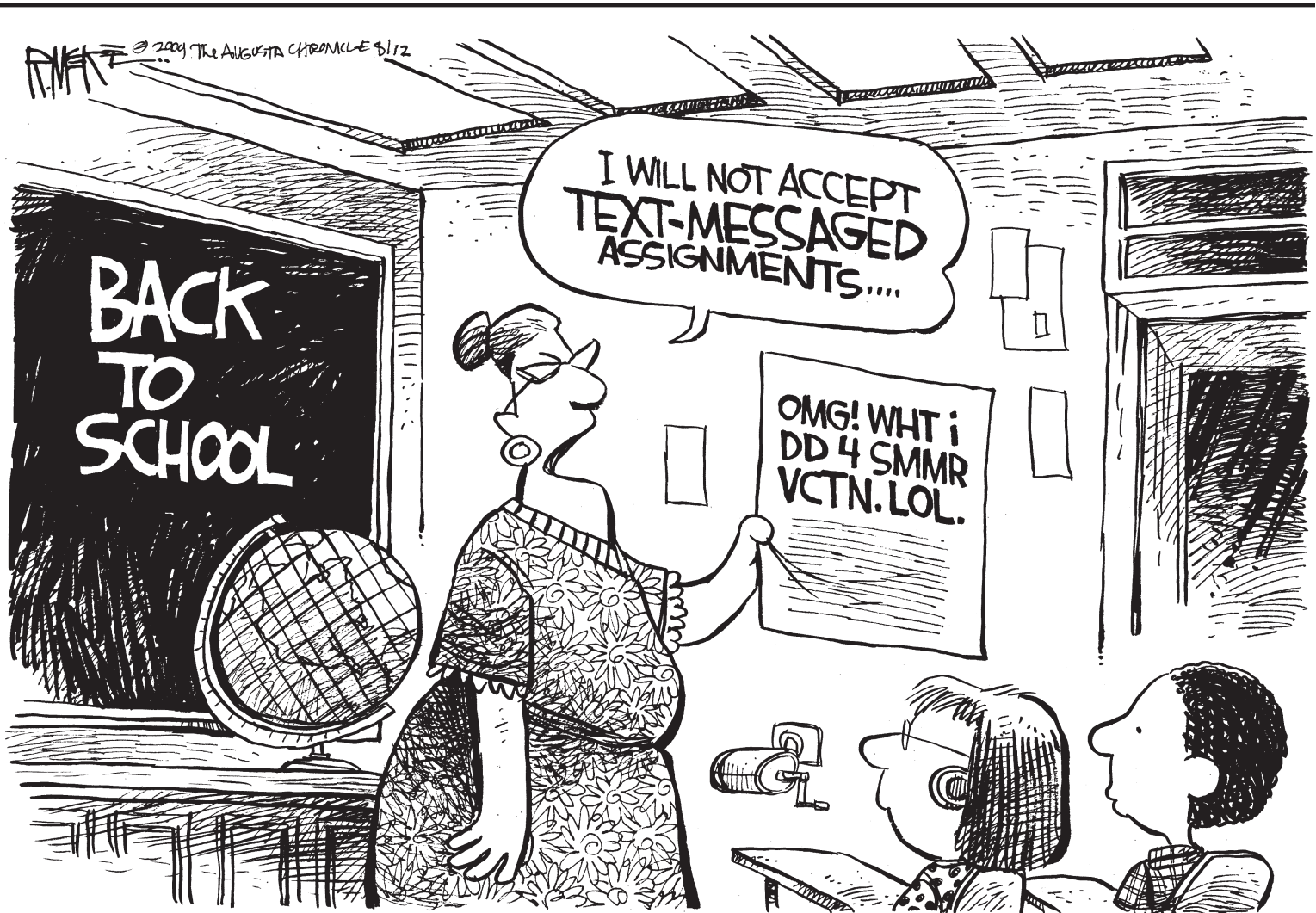
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There’s shade in the nosebleed section

As we climbed the upper deck, looking for our seats, I figured I was in for trouble.

We were panting already, and we hadn’t found row 23 yet.

“Go up that way,” the usher waved.

It made my neck sore to look “that way.”

When we did find our row, it was a couple of steps past the purple line; you know, the row of seats around the top of Coors Field meant to show visiting teams just where 5,280 feet in elevation is.

We turned and looked down, straight to the field. Big mistake.

“It’s a good view,” Cynthia said, gamely. “I’m not sure I can watch the game, though.”

She has trouble with heights; anything over, say, five feet makes her nervous.

Heck, one glance back to the field, and I was nervous, too.

We’d decided to go to the Rockies-Cubs game on the spur of the moment. We had been trying to find time for a game all summer, but if the Rocks were in town, we weren’t. Or we were busy.

We would have gone Saturday night, but she was working at the drug store until 3, leaving not enough time to make a 6:10 game. So Sunday it was, and that, at least, turned out to be a good thing.

Cynthia called and found us a place to stay. We decided to see what kind of tickets the scalpers had on the street. After she got off Saturday, we took off, stopping in Colby to do some work.

We listened to the second game of the series — we lost — and went to dinner when we got to town. Along the way, we realized what we had forgotten — the “game bag” with our little radio to listen to the broadcast and some caps. And the sunscreen.

We got checked into the hotel all right, but I thought we might not get to the room. You have to swipe your key card to go to a guest floor, and Cynthia could not get the hang of it. Our elevator was going nowhere.

The door opened again, another woman got on and, swipe, she was in. She pushed our button, too. At the room, though, the story was the same. I offered to use my card. That got me a dirty look, but it was not to be the last.

At dinner, we were too early for the late-night “happy hour” menu, and the bar was way too crowded to eat in anyway. We went to the dining room, Cynthia unhappy about the big hamburger she’d been dreaming of. She got it, but not for the happy-hour price.

Next morning, on the way to church, we discovered that we’d left our sunglasses in the car. No problem, I said; we’ll just have the valet bring it up. Hah. When we got there, there was an hour delay on getting cars. Dozens of people were sitting around looking dejected. One woman was yelling at the valets.

“One hour I wait,” she shouted. “They came after me. They got their car. I want the MANAGER.”

We bought cheap sunglasses on the way



Steve Haynes

- Along the Sappa

to the game, plus expensive sunscreen. Then there was the matter of tickets. The first scalper had nothing but nosebleeders and the Rock Pile bleachers beyond center field. No good, she said.

The next two were the same. The fourth guy seemed pretty nice.

“Where are they?” I asked. He pointed to the upper-level boxes, good view from there.

How much? “\$25 each.”

Sounded better than anything else we’d seen. Of course, the next two scalpers had season tickets down below. I figured I was in real trouble.

As the game wore on, though, I saw a glimmer of hope. We were winning, for one thing. That always helps.

Cynthia admitted that she could watch the game without getting ill. And, truthfully, it helped when all the latecomers filled in the seats below us.

At least there was something to fall on.

And the shade. Did I mention the shade?

Those seats were tucked way up under the overhang. We were out of the sun all day, had that view of the mountains and a nice breeze.

Down in the expensive seats, people were passing out from the sun.

So ours turned out to be pretty good seats after all, and the Rockies whipped the Cubs 11-5, which saved me from abject embarrassment at the hands of my son-in-law, Brad. But that’s another story.

Steve Haynes is editor and publisher of The Colby Free Press and president of Nor'West Newspapers. In his spare time, whenever that is, he like to ride and watch trains.

Public effort should benefit all taxpayers

A recent Wichita Eagle commentary by Doug Stanley, vice chairman of the Greater Wichita Economic Development Coalition, made the case for government to invest taxpayer money in developing ‘shovel-ready’ sites to attract new employers, especially large industrial and manufacturing companies.

He says consultants who work with large employers on site selection give preference to communities that have made the up-front investment to save them time and obviously, a lot of money.

The logic is that communities want jobs, so some companies and their site consultants use that carrot to entice local and state governments to absorb part of their up-front risk.

It’s easy to understand what’s in it for the company receiving a taxpayer-funded inducement to build, and these deals certainly give elected officials a chance to show taxpayers that they’re working to create jobs. Some jobs are created if one of these deals gets done and that’s a good thing, but ‘buying’ those jobs is not the best use of taxpayer money.

First of all, it’s a roll of the dice as to whether spending money on shovel-ready sites will actually create any jobs, and even when it does, it’s not unheard of for recipients of taxpayer money to close or leave town later. Sometimes they even threaten to leave if they don’t get more money for new projects.

It’s not unlike betting money in Las Vegas; you might win once in a while, but the house is the only winner in the long run. Come to think of it, though, the public official always wins

Other Opinions

- Dave Trabert
Flint Hills Center

in this case. If they place a bet on a site and eventually land some jobs, they get the credit; if they lose, well, it wasn’t their money ... it belonged to taxpayers.

The real conundrum, though, is why government and economic development agencies place risky bets that only really pay off for a select few instead of going after a sure thing where everyone wins.

A new employer coming to town with a few hundred or even a thousand jobs gets a lot of headlines, and large employers are important, but they pale in comparison to the jobs provided by small business. Dun & Bradstreet data analyzed at YourEconomy.org shows that 73.5 percent of Kansans employed in 2007 worked for businesses with fewer than 100 people.

Instead of picking winners and losers, government should be doing things that benefit all taxpayers and employers of all sizes: Find ways to operate more efficiently and reduce property, sales and income taxes. Eliminate a lot of the bureaucratic red tape in the licensing and permitting process.

Creating a stable, pro-taxpayer environment

is the best kind of economic development; instead of costing taxpayers money, it puts money in their pockets.

There’s no doubt that governments and economic development agencies feel pressure to compete with towns that offer inducements to employers, but they should be creating strategies that benefit all taxpayers instead.

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