



Other Viewpoints

Biotech future offers good news

A ranking released this week by a national-site selection publication is great news for people who envision a bright future for Kansas in bioscience research and industry.

Business Facilities magazine called Kansas’ jump into fifth place in the magazine’s rankings for biotechnology strength “one of the most significant improvements” in its annual rankings. Our state was ranked ninth last year.

“Kansas clearly has shown that it is a biotech force to be reckoned with,” said editor Jack Rogers, “and it has staked a claim to a leadership position for years to come.”

We like the way this magazine thinks.

Business Facilities focused on the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility and other animal-health efforts under way in Manhattan, which it ranked as No. 2 among its top 10 metro areas for economic growth potential. The magazine also cited the Kansas Bioscience Authority for its “impressive and expanding program ... that brings together industry, higher education and government in a coordinated, targeted effort.”

That’s all good news for Kansas. The authority, meeting in Overland Park this week, took steps to push two major bioscience efforts in the state: agricultural research and the drive to obtain National Cancer Center status for the University of Kansas Cancer Center. On the agriculture front, Kansas will become one of nine partners in a new U.S. Department of Agriculture network designed to connect research to potential commercial products.

For the KU effort, the authority approved spending \$1.6 million to hire two top researchers, who will bring large research grants with them and are expected to attract \$8.2 million in additional grants in the next decade.

Hiring top researchers not only brings millions of dollars into the state, it also is a key component in bolstering the application KU plans to submit in about a year to become a National Cancer Center.

Success breeds success, and the national attention Kansas is receiving for its efforts in biosciences certainly has the potential to open new doors for the state. The new animal facility and other animal-health research programs at Kansas State University are setting the pace. Hopefully, KU and its cancer center won’t be far behind.

— *Lawrence Journal-World, via the Associated Press*

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COLBY FREE PRESS

155 W. Fifth St. (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963
Colby, Kan. 67701 fax (785) 462-7749

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State award-winning newspaper, General Excellence, Design & Layout, Columns, Editorial Writing, Sports Columns, News, Photography. Official newspaper of Thomas County, Colby, Brewster and Rexford.

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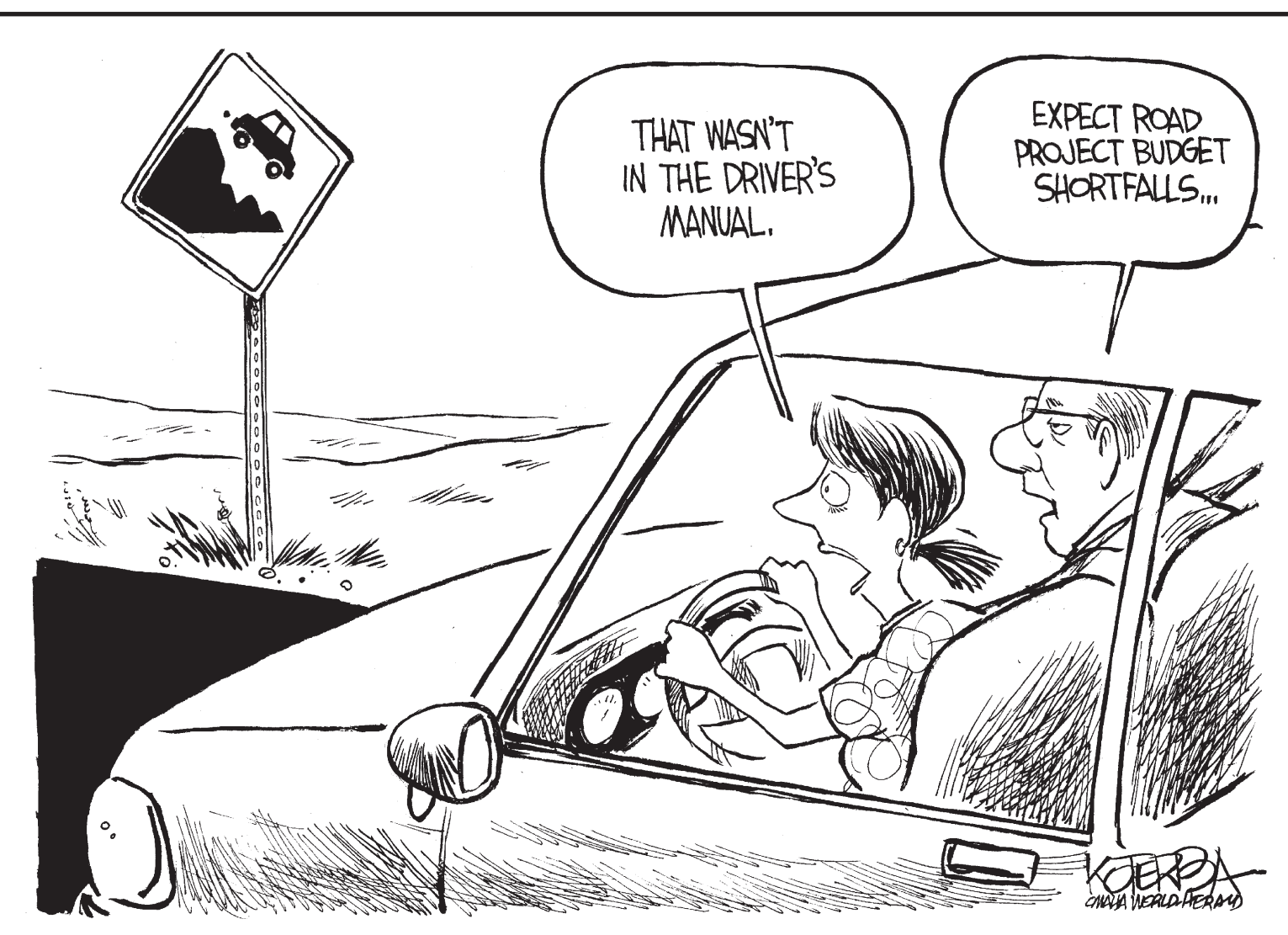
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THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the days observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Nor'West Newspaper, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

PERIODICALS POSTAGE paid at Colby, Kan. 67701, and at additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday to Friday, closed Saturday and Sunday. MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, which is exclusively entitled to the use for publication of all news herein. Member Kansas Press Association and National Newspaper Association.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: In Colby, Thomas County and Oakley: three months \$35, one year \$85. By mail to ZIP Codes beginning with 676 and 677: three months \$39, one year \$95. Elsewhere in the U.S., mailed once per week: three months \$39, one year \$95. Student rate, nine months, in Colby, Thomas County and Oakley, \$64; mailed once per week elsewhere in the U.S. \$72



Good crop brings big bucks to economy

How excited would a place like Thomas County be if it had the prospect of a new business or industry coming to town that would do \$50 million worth of business in a year?

Sometimes it isn’t a new business, but an old one under new circumstances, that can provide a needed economic stimulus.

We are well past the midpoint in an extraordinary series of events that could bring an additional \$50 million to our county this year.

Last summer’s wet conditions resulted in a good dryland corn crop, at least where the hail stayed away. That got many area farmers thinking about how good a crop dryland corn can be in a year with moisture.

Then, continued wet fall weather did two things: It left most dryland fields with a full subsoil moisture profile, and it had fields so wet that many farmers were unable to get into them when they had intended to plant to wheat last fall.

As a result of these two and other factors, this spring Thomas County farmers took a big gamble and planted 153,000 acres of dryland corn. This was almost double the 2009 acreage – which had been a record.

Other Opinions

• Kenneth Frahm Area farmer

Due to another year with lots of rain, at this point of the summer, almost all of those fields are looking very good, are past the pollination period and seem to have really great yield potential. Some fields were devastated by recent hail storms, but they probably represented far less than 10 percent of the county’s dryland corn acres.

Speculating as to what might happen: If those 153,000 acres were to average 100 bushels per acre (we are not there yet, but, lots of fields exceeded that yield last year) – that would be 15,300,000 bushels of dryland corn produced in Thomas County. At the current elevator price of around \$3.35 per bushel, that is potentially \$51,255,000 of dryland corn pro-

duction of Thomas County.

Thomas County also has 68,000 acres of irrigated corn this year. Appearance of the crop and recent year’s yields suggest 200 bushel per acre or better average yields should be achievable for irrigated corn. That figures another \$46 million of potential corn production this fall.

With almost \$100,000,000 of potential corn production at stake, perhaps everyone in Thomas County will be anxiously watching for continued good weather and the onset of corn harvest.

The impact is broader than just the direct sale of corn in two ways: The “ripple” or “multiplier” effect of money being passed down to: seed and fertilizer suppliers, combine dealers, pickup dealers, grocery stores and the like vastly increases the money flow, and the high acreage and great-looking crop covers many surrounding counties also.

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By supporting schools, we buy the future

“I don’t understand why school administrators are dismissing teachers when schools have such big reserves,” say the adherents of the no-more-taxes, pro-business lobby.

The first part of their statement is correct: they don’t understand. But schools don’t have fat reserves. The 293 Kansas school superintendents are not firing teachers just to get public sympathy for raising taxes. Most school budgets are drained, and with over 80 percent tied up in personnel, laying off school employees is the only recourse.

Critics decry that public education takes up over half the state budget. That is correct. Public education is every state’s biggest responsibility and every state’s single biggest expense. From the beginning of statehood, Kansans invested in their schools, and that quality echoes today.

Kansas schools operate on money from the state general fund and local property taxes. Along with federal Education Act funding, there can be up to two dozen additional “silos” of money, each with its own special uses and restrictions.

Capital funds for building facilities are restricted to that purpose. Some folks do not understand that when state money is provided for a building, it cannot be diverted to pay salaries. And when folks vote on a bond issue for a specified purpose, the money borrowed on those bonds cannot be diverted unless the people vote to do so in another election.

A few schools have been able to save over the years and set aside some discretionary funds for a “rainy day.” Much of that has now been spent to meet commitments this last year when state cuts were made after teacher contracts went out.



John Richard Schrock

• Education Frontlines

However, some districts have no reserve to fall back on at all. Last year, state revenues began falling short of meeting the first-of-the-month payment to schools. The state Department of Education asked schools which could not temporarily transfer other money to make payroll in mid-December and worked with the state Budget Office to pass through an earlier-than-others payout to districts that were flat broke.

Another misleading figure is the comparison of school money before and after the Kansas Supreme Court directed an increase in deciding a lawsuit filed by several districts. The court agreed Kansas was failing to support public education. Part of the increase went to teacher salaries and part to improve school programs. Today, Kansas teacher pay remains at 38th in the nation, the same as before the raises. Without the increase, Kansas would have fallen far behind.

Is Kansas top-heavy with school administrators and nonteachers? Some states have legislated caps on the percentage of noninstructional staff. It has not improved their schools. Kansas ranks in the same range as most other states.

If you want to eliminate administrative positions, you must eliminate their duties. A large district needs a competent manager of finances

and a skilled overseer of school bus transportation – assistant superintendents with critical duties. If you want to eliminate the paraprofessionals who serve special-needs students, you can’t just dismiss them – you will have to change federal laws that require those services.

I would love to shut down the external assessments, or state tests, and return testing to the teachers’ hands, eliminating assessment supervisors in larger districts. But we can’t do that without changing the state Quality Performance Accreditation and federal No Child Left Behind laws.

Critics who claim schools should divert restricted funds to cover the shortfall claim to represent the Kansas business community. However, if Kansas schools were permitted by the Legislature to raid those funds, the consequences would be disastrous. In a few years, with public schools essentially bankrupt, Kansas businessmen would be the first to point out such gross mismanagement. California did this, and their state bonds are barely above junk status. Most Kansans are glad we are not California.

Two economic estimates of the “cost” in Kansas jobs (from raising the sales tax for 3 years versus cutting school money and keeping taxes flat) show amazingly narrow differences measured by the costs in job loss.

But Kansas settlers had no difficulty making a decision between short-term private gain and long-term investment in their children.

John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.

Write us

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Letters will not be censored, but will be read and edited for form and style, clarity, length and legality. We will not publish attacks.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

