



Other Viewpoints

Studying history grants perspective

Tales from Topeka's past are earning the city some new fans, and perhaps greater exposure of its historical sites and their significance.

Granted, the stories are from some of the darker days in the history of Topeka and Kansas, even in its territorial days, but that does nothing to detract from their importance. In fact, it only adds more drama to those events, especially if there is more to learn.

Historians, professors and authors who gathered in Topeka for the 2010 National Underground Railroad to Freedom Program Conference have been pleased with what they've learned about the role of Topeka and northeast Kansas in the widespread but loose-knit conspiracy to move slaves from the south to Canada and free states in the north before the Civil War.

The visitors also explored the Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site and the story behind its significance, and delved into the prewar fighting between the free-state and slave-state forces that spawned the term "Bloody Kansas."

None of those events is recent news, but walking through the sites and poking into the history has meaning to those who attended the conference, which ends today. Some of the visitors are well-versed in Topeka and Kansas history, but many are more familiar with events that occurred in their own states or communities and seek a greater understanding of what was happening elsewhere during those periods.

Carol Mull had spent 10 years researching the history of the Underground Railroad in Michigan but knew little about Kansas' involvement in the route to freedom for escaping slaves.

"In order to understand the Underground Railroad," she said, "you need to have the experience from every location."

"All these places in the Midwest have been neglected for a very long time and now they're a part of this whole story that is coming out, and that's wonderful."

Actually, the Topeka stories haven't been neglected by our historians or others who have heard them and taken the time to research them. But the story of the Underground Railroad obviously has captivated many people who began their research closer to their own backyards – such as Mull, who has published a book, "The Underground Railroad in Michigan."

We're glad that Mull and others who attended the conference found so much to interest them, and hope they're inspired to mention Topeka and northeast Kansas in their next book, article or lecture.

Publicity about Topeka's history and many historical sites can only be a good thing for the community. Mull, her colleagues and their readers are welcome any time.

– The Topeka Capital-Journal, via the Associated Press

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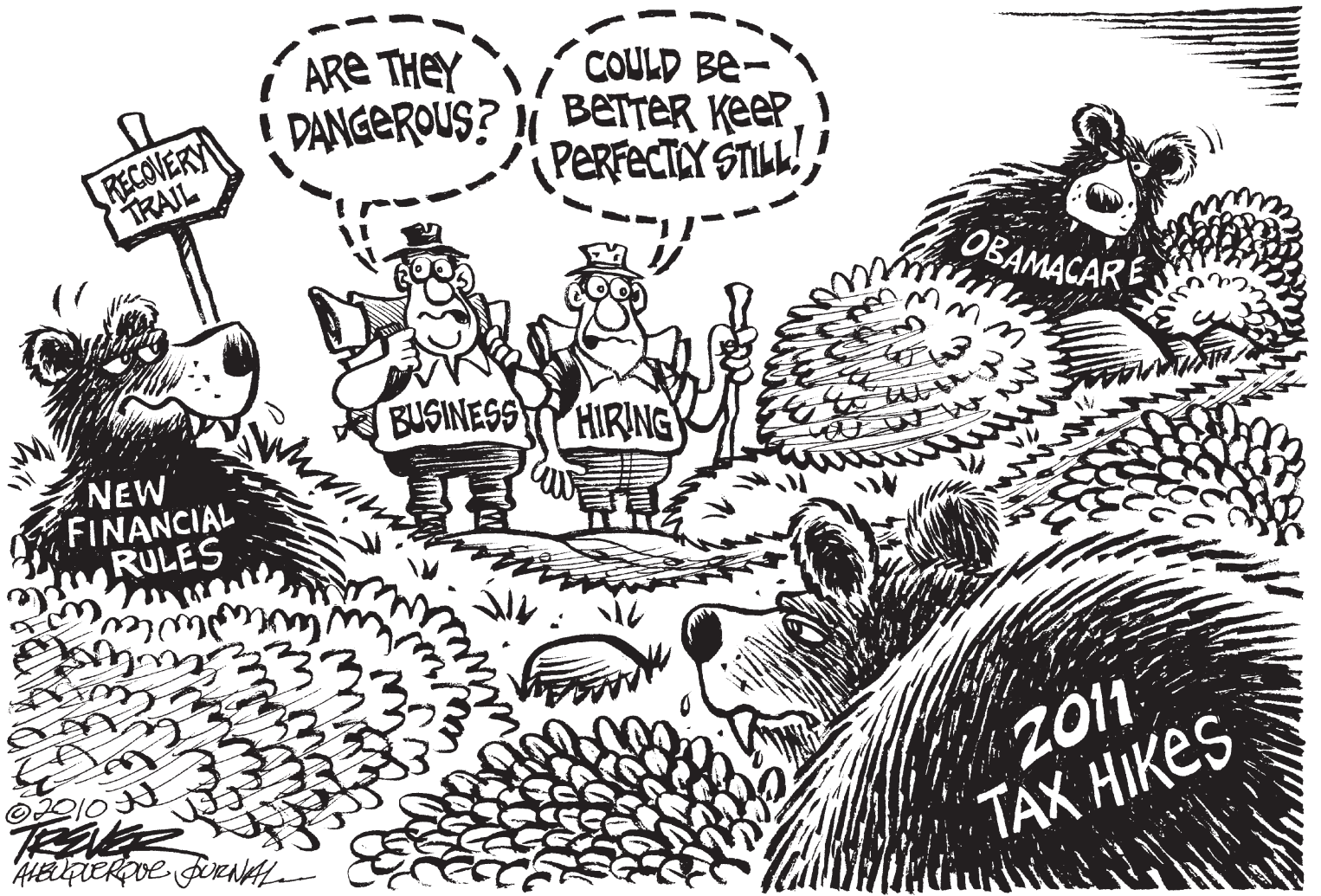
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Cures for financial woes unclear

It's hard to figure out what the average American voter wants these days.

Most folks are worried about the economy, unemployment and the mounting federal deficit. These are reasons for concern, but it's unclear what voters want the government to do about them.

Many people are complaining the government is risking their children's future by spending too much money. The "tea party" movement has been one of the most vocal opponents of what they perceive as "big government." They seem convinced that the government has been getting bigger and more intrusive with each passing year.

But does that anti-tax, anti-government stance hold water when it's tested against genuine facts? The answer is no.

Fareed Zakaria, editor of *Newsweek International*, correctly points out that America has one of the smallest governments among all the rich nations. Despite all the talk about America being severely overtaxed in the age of President Barack Obama, federal taxes as a percentage of the economy are at their lowest level since the presidency of Harry Truman, Zakaria notes.

While anger at Washington is in vogue right now, voters should be cautious to believe that many of today's conservatives will take any serious steps to solving the budget crisis if returned to power. Zakaria points out that the



Andy Heintz

• Wildcat Ramblings

three things that turned the budget surplus we had during President Clinton's administration into the federal recession we have today were tax cuts supported by President George W. Bush, the Bush-backed new prescription drug bill (Medicare Prescription Drug Modernization Act signed in 2003) and post-9/11 security spending (including the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan).

"Of these, the tax cuts were by far the largest, adding up to \$2.3 trillion over 10 years," he writes. "According to the Congressional Budget Office, nearly half the cost of all legislation enacted from 2001 to 2007 can be attributed to the tax cuts."

The tax cuts are set to expire this year, but conservatives want to keep them all, even for those making more than \$250,000 a year (less than three percent of all Americans). Unfortunately, I think the Republicans will have no trouble ratcheting up support for keeping the tax cuts because many libertarian-minded voters don't see the correlation between the Bush

tax cuts and the deficit. They have been taught to believe that the budget can be balanced simply by eliminating pork-barrel projects and other real and perceived examples of government waste.

Eugene Goodheart, writing for *Dissent Magazine*, perfectly captured our country's often contradictory political views while discussing the Obama administration's attempt to regulate some sectors of the economy.

"Note that populist outrage against the huge bonuses the banking chief executives give themselves is coupled with, or should I say contradicted by, outrage against government efforts to regulate the economy, which entails regulating corporations," he said. "Either way (tolerating the bonuses or regulating them) inflames populist outrage."

Americans need to make a choice. Everyone certainly has right to vote for candidates who support deregulation and tax cuts for the wealthy, but we shouldn't kid ourselves into thinking this will lead to a new era of fiscal responsibility.

The economic legacy of the Bush presidency should have taught us otherwise.

Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate, is sports reporter for the Colby Free Press. He says he loves K-State athletics and fishing, sports and opinion writing.

Small towns instill big values

Reflection is a good thing. It allows you to see where you've been and hopefully chart a better course on where you're going. While on vacation recently I had a chance to think about the small town where I grew up.

Located in northwestern Kansas, Seguin was a small farm/ranch community of about 50 hearty souls in Sheridan County, three miles south of U.S. 24. The Union Pacific railroad used to run through town.

Seguin was a place where families were raised and values – good and sometimes bad – were instilled. Looking back, those fortunate enough to grow up there as I did in the '50s and '60s were surrounded by people with core values that helped guide us through our lives.

At the top of this list of virtues my town provided was spirituality: "Seek ye first this kingdom of God, and his righteousness and all things shall be given unto you."

We all grew up with Monsignor Mulvihill and the Sisters of St. Joseph, went to mass six days a week and learned to abide by the Golden Rule.

Next came courtesy. This was measured by the ordinary civilities a total stranger could expect. Residents always welcomed family and friends back for special events – many centered around our church and its congregation.

Transient laborers, especially during harvest, were treated well because of their valuable contributions during these critical periods.

Rootedness or a sense of commitment was another cornerstone in our little community. Depending on the fertile, sandy loam soil of the High Plains, Seguin's families lived by the unspoken agreement that this was a place to stay, put down roots and build a family, a farm, a business and a future.

This quality is closely related to a sense of place, which grows more rare with each passing day.



John Schlageck

• Insights
Kansas Farm Bureau

Diversity – not necessarily in the form of many nationalities – but rather in the form of creative disagreement – was another building block of our community. This meant our little town enjoyed a certain confidence that all of its inhabitants didn't have to echo one another in order to make progress.

To the contrary, a community, like a country, can profit by its differences. Believe me, nearly everyone I ever knew in Seguin spoke up, voiced opinions and let their ideas be heard.

Loyalty was the fifth attribute our town was blessed with. This is often confused with conformity, though the two are really opposites.

It is precisely loyalty to the community, to posterity and to principle that moves a citizen not to conform. A dissenter may never be so loyal as when refusing to go along quietly.

Loyalty is a virtue, but not a simple one. Certainly it is not as simple as those who use it as a club to enforce their will on an individual or a community.

Generosity was the sixth attribute, and not just with material support, but a generosity of spirit akin to humility. This broader, deeper attribute sets aside not only personal interests for the sake of community, but personal grudges, slights and obsessions.

One might call this trait charity, but charity in our society has acquired an unfortunate connotation of being optional. Some believe charity is what you do with what you have left over. Those who believe they owe a debt to

their community and embrace the opportunity to repay it practice charity, the real thing.

Pride in our little burg was readily apparent. Self respect may be a better word for this civic virtue. It has to do with much more than clean streets, green lawns and painted buildings. It also explains good schools, honest law enforcement and other amenities that make for a proud, self-respecting community.

Openness was the final attribute in our small northwestern Kansas town. Without openness, these other virtues would only be a facade.

Our community was an open book. Everyone knew everyone else and everything that was going on. Candor, candidness, frankness, sincerity and plain dealing were the only way of conducting each day of your life.

Everyone who lived in Seguin was a member of the community and part of our town. Didn't matter who you were, where you lived, or how old you were. Our community was a place of human and humane values.

Sometimes in the rush of everyday life we forget to live by such values. Know your neighbors, coworkers and the members of your community. And, yes it's all right to argue with them and disagree with them about what is best for the community.

What is important is to care about the place you live. Think of its best interests and don't let your mind be diverted by lesser concerns or scattered holdings.

Just like the town I grew up in and the family and neighbors who helped shape who I am today, each of us live in a community with values and traditions to uphold. Be part of yours.

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm near Seguin, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

