



Other Viewpoints

Capitol costs just keep growing

So what’s another \$21 million added to a Kansas Statehouse renovation project that now is projected to cost \$319 million? Kansas taxpayers can afford it, right? In what has become an annual routine, members of the state’s Capitol Preservation Committee agreed last week to move forward with a project to spend \$10.3 million to replace the capitol’s copper dome and \$11.3 million to replace copper sections of the roof. It makes sense to do the work now, the committee decided, because a giant construction crane already is in place for other work. On some level, that may indeed “make sense,” but only if people accept the premise that the entire \$319 million renovation project makes sense for the state, especially in the current economy.

The renovation, which began in 2001, originally was estimated to cost \$90 million to \$120 million, but that was before legislative leaders approved a new underground parking garage and expanded basement offices in the capitol. Of course, as in any renovation project, there also were unforeseen expenses such as needed repairs to exterior stone on the building and, now, the need to replace, rather than simply repair, the capitol dome.

The project has produced impressive results, restoring the elegant interior of the building and hopefully solidifying the exterior for generations to come. It’s also true that it makes no sense to allow a leaking roof to damage the new interior work. Nonetheless, the growing price tag is troubling, as is the committee’s continued willingness to simply accept all recommendations for additional spending apparently without seriously considering alternatives.

Could some other material be used to renovate the capitol dome, while preserving its historic beauty? According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, Kansas is one of nine states with copper domes atop their capitol buildings. What have other states done to preserve their domes?

If replacement is the only option, could the state pursue alternative funding sources? One committee member suggested last week that some of the copper salvaged from the dome might be made into souvenirs and sold to offset the cost. It’s not such a silly idea. Faced with a \$12 million project to repair the gold dome on their state capitol earlier this year, Colorado legislators set aside \$4 million from state gaming funds and charged the private Colorado Preservation Inc. with raising \$8 million in private funds for the work. It’s a lot of money, but the organization launched the Share in the Care campaign, which has planned fundraising events, set up a system that allows people to donate money from their cell phones, and, yes, sold items like a commemorative dome ornament to help defray the costs. The owners of a Colorado gold mine also stepped up with an in-kind donation of 72 ounces of Colorado gold worth more than \$1 million to be used in the renovation.

If the state can depend on private money to fund the arts, why not do the same for the capitol dome?

It’s easier to simply approve the issuance of bonds and expect taxpayers to foot the bill, as Kansas officials have done, but the ballooning price tag for the capitol has many taxpayers shaking their heads. Generations of Kansans to come had better appreciate the beauty of the restored capitol because they certainly will still be paying the bill.

– The Lawrence Journal-World, via the Associated Press

We encourage comments on opinions expressed on this page. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

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Judge @bizknowwhatstar /ljudge@kstar.com



"WHO KNEW THE PEOPLE I PLANNED TO USE COULD BE SO CYNICAL?"

Movie inspired young actors

The Saturday afternoon movie was a treat we children looked forward to when I was in grade school.

In our family, each child received 25 cents as a weekly allowance. With that, we could pay our way to the movie and buy a sack of popcorn and a drink.

When I was seven and my older sister, Shirley was nine and a half, my mom and dad allowed the two of us to go to the Saturday afternoon movie with some neighborhood children while they took the two younger children, Ann, age four and Dick, age one, into town to go shopping with them. The theater was only a few blocks away from where we lived.

The movie that day was “Tarzan, King of the Apes,” starring Johnny Weissmuller. In my estimation Weissmuller was the best actor to ever play the part of Tarzan. In those Tarzan movies, he couldn’t speak English, he pretty much talked with sign language, but he had the most magnificent yell. With that yell he could call all the animals in the jungle to come to where ever he happened to be. When they heard his call, the animals would come storming through the jungle like a tornado to help Tarzan out of a jam.

In the movie, a group of explorers came to the jungle, and among that group was a woman named Jane. It so happened that Jane and Tarzan fell in love. That’s when Tarzan learned to say, “Me Tarzan, you Jane.” Of course, before the movie was over he had to call the animals of the jungle to come to her rescue.

We children were so impressed by Tarzan and Jane that we were screaming like Tarzan all the way home from the theater.



Marj Brown

• Marj’s Snippets

When Shirley and I arrived home, the rest of the family was still shopping down town. That’s when we decided we would act out what we had just seen in the movie. Well – it so happened that Tarzan wore very few clothes, so Shirley and I dressed in a similar fashion. We stripped down to our underpants and tied a belt or a tie of some kind around our waists.

We looped a hand towel in the belt and let it hang down in front of us covering the front of our panties and another hand towel in the back that hung down behind and covered the back of our panties, and that was all. Then we finished our look by putting on a thick coating of Mom’s bright-red lipstick.

After we were satisfied with our appearance, we began running all over the living room jumping on the furniture and doing our best impressions of Tarzan’s yell. That was when the front door opened and there was Mom, Dad and the other two kids staring at us with jaw dropping gasps.

When she could finally speak, Mom said, “Go to the bedroom and get your clothes on.”

We raced to the bedroom and got dressed, but we were in no hurry to go back in the living room. Mom finally yelled in at us, “Come in here. Your dad wants to talk to you.” We

didn’t know what to think. Up to this point Dad had never taken it upon himself to do any of the correcting of us children. He always left that up to Mom.

When we arrived in the living room, Mom and the other two children were no where to be seen, and Dad was sitting in his easy chair. Shirley and I walked in slowly and cautiously and sat down on the couch.

I don’t remember exactly what Dad said that day, but what it boiled down to is that only a certain type of woman would dress the way we had been dressed that day and she was not a very highly respected lady. He said he wanted us to grow up to be respectable women who dress in a respectable way.

I was actually glad my dad gave us that talk that day, because it let me know that he actually did care what type of women we would turn out to be. What he didn’t know though, was that we weren’t imitating any type of women. In fact, we weren’t even Tarzan or even Jane. We were just jungle girls, flying through the jungle from limb-to-limb, vine-to-vine, couch-to-chair, and calling all the animals to come and do our bidding.

Aren’t children’s imaginations wonderful things?

Note: The chimpanzee known as Cheeta, Tarzan’s sidekick in the Tarzan movies, died on Dec. 28, at the age of 80. His antics made the movies even more enjoyable for children.

Marj Brown has lived in Colby for 62 years and has spent a good deal of that time writing about people and places here. She says it’s one of her favorite things to do.

Online teacher programs not for Kansas

Become a Kansas Teacher Through an All Online Program! That is what the pop-up on my computer said. So I clicked on the ad and entered my phone number.

My phone soon rang. “Are you a veteran?” was the first question. I told her I wasn’t. She continued: “Are you interested in our online teacher program?” I could honestly answer “You bet I am!” – although with a different meaning than she heard. With my incessant questioning on whether I could be “certified” – their term – to be a Kansas teacher, she put me through to the next level. (In Kansas, teachers are “licensed,” not certified.)

That next person was a career counselor who is there to close the deal and get me enrolled. His first question was again to check if I might be a veteran or in any way eligible for federal funding. Even though I repeated “no,” he figured that if I taught in a high need area, there could be federal funds to underwrite my tuition.

Twice I asked if this online program would qualify me to be a Kansas teacher. Twice he asserted yes. I could even suggest schools where I wanted to student teach in Kansas. Their operation is several states away and they purport to train teachers in 48 states including Kansas. I would be joining 40,000 of their online students, half of whom are pursuing education training.

But this “school” is not accredited to offer any teacher programs in Kansas. And an unsuspecting student will not know that. I notified the appropriate folks at the Kansas Department of Education. In addition, I filed an online complaint with the Inspector General’s



John Richard Schrock

• Education Frontlines

Office of the U.S. Department of Education. And I e-mailed the details to U.S. Sen. Harkin’s office; he heads a Senate committee that is investigating for-profits.

The for-profit’s focus on whether I was a veteran centers on provisions in the 2008 update to the GI Bill. In its first year, these mostly online for-profits received 36 percent of the \$1.75-billion in veteran’s benefits paid by the Veterans Affairs Department. But they enroll fewer than 10 percent of U.S. students. Their lobbyists contend for-profits are more dedicated to educating service members and veterans. However, false advertising is hardly “dedication.”

The Senate committee found some for-profits exceed the 90/10 rule of the Higher Education Act that limits a school to not more than 90 percent federal student aid. If a college offers programs that are worthwhile, at least 10 percent of its funding should come from students willing to pay for it. According to a March 2011 Chronicle of Higher Education report, “twenty for-profit companies received a combined \$521.1-million in veterans and Defense Department benefits in 2010.”

Unfortunately, the Washington gridlock and extreme partisan atmosphere has polarized

our politicians. Many Republicans seem to be saying that since the investigation is being led by a Democrat senator, they will defend the online for-profits. We cannot afford to waste a half-billion dollars that should go to bonafide programs. This investigation should have the support of both parties.

In “For-profit Schools Devour GI Bill Dollars” in the December 2011 American Legion Magazine, the Legion is behind cracking down on predatory for-profit schools “that, in effect, rob veterans of their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits.” They cite that “the average cost to the government per veteran is \$4,874 a year at a public school vs. \$10,875 at a for-profit school.” And “by the time student vets realize they’ve been victimized, much of their GI Bill benefit can be exhausted.”

Meanwhile, if you see an ad promoting out-of-state online programs for preparing Kansas teachers, don’t become a victim. No out-of-state program is approved for Kansas teacher licensure.

Report them to state and federal officials. It is your tax dollars being wasted.

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.



Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

