

Other Viewpoints

Post-audit agency needs a fresh start

Now that the forensic audit of the Kansas Bioscience Authority and its former president and chief executive officer has been completed, it is time for a fresh start for the Authority.

The audit exposed the phoniness and deceit of former Bioscience Authority President Tom Thornton and the unwillingness of authority directors to blow the whistle on him. Some were negligent for not speaking up while others were wrong in covering up for the leader and his actions and policies.

The audit reported Thornton engaged in document destruction and numerous other ethical violations, as well as other highly questionable actions. All of this time, his directors were singing his praises, defending his actions and ridiculing those who questioned his work.

The results vindicate Gov. Sam Brownback's call for the audit, as well as the effort of Sen. Susan Wagle, R-Wichita, to expose Thornton's wrongdoing. Without the audit, chances are, Thornton still would be the authority's president and his supportive board members would be riding high, engaged in questionable, if not illegal or unethical actions.

Unfortunately, the audit only tells half the story of Thornton's role in the authority, leaving out how partisan politics entered the picture and brought about substantial changes in the way the Bioscience Authority operated and used millions of dollars intended to improve the Kansas economy.

The authority was created by the Kansas Legislature in 2004. During its first several years, new businesses and industries were attracted to the state, and existing businesses expanded. It is estimated that, in the first several years, those businesses encouraged to come to the state or expand with Bioscience assistance now employ about 3,500 people.

The operation was a success in every respect. In fact, it was so successful that then-Gov. Kathleen Sebelius and her insiders realized they wanted to be part of the operation, hook their star to it and take control. That's when Thornton and several directors started to play hardball politics.

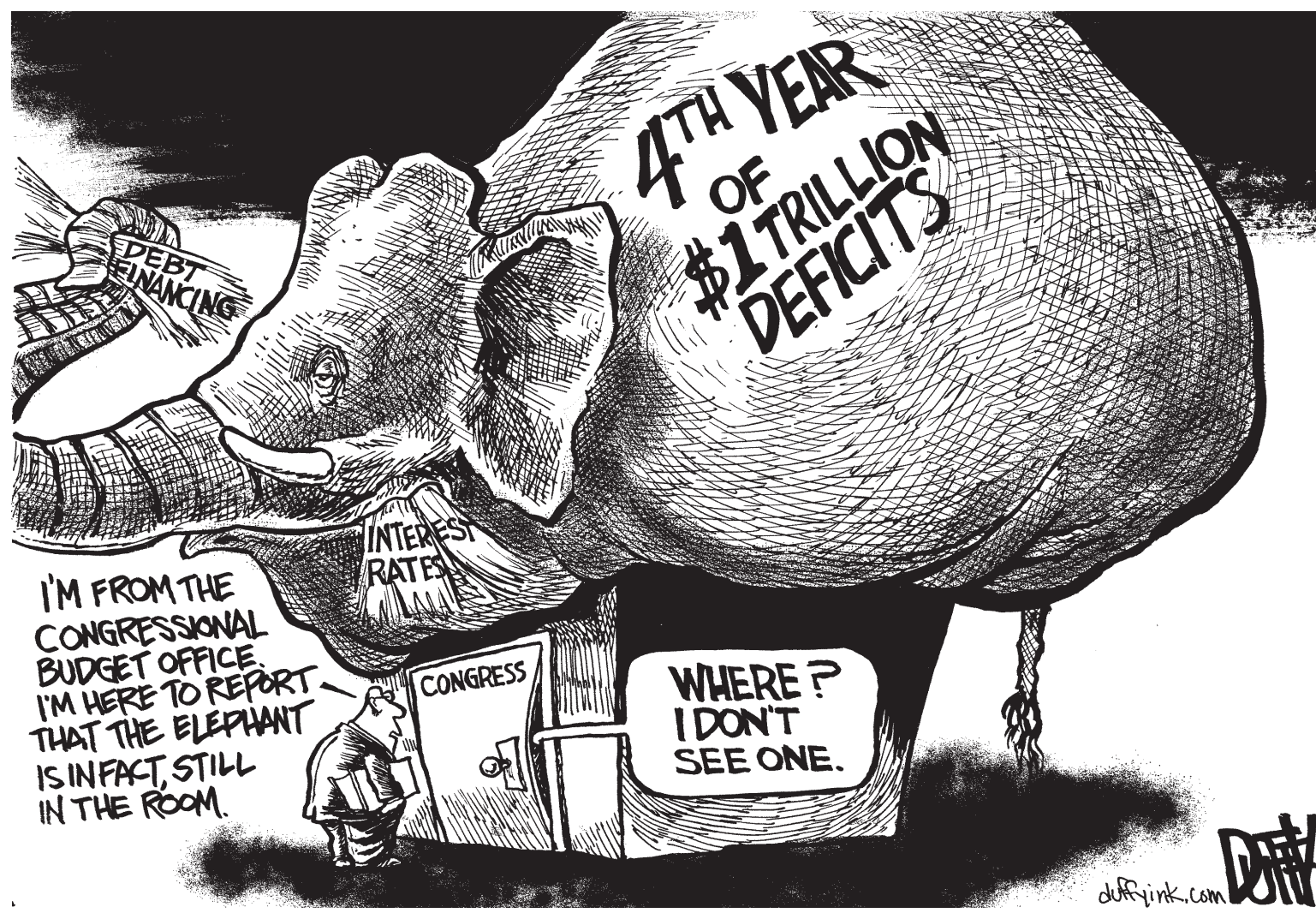
They and Sebelius finessed the removal of then-Chairman Clay Blair, who had been so successful in guiding the Authority in its startup and in recruiting business and industry to the state. Thornton, Sebelius and others have tried to claim credit for attracting the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility to Manhattan and Kansas State University, but it was under Blair's leadership the effort was organized and launched. U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts also played an important role.

The Bioscience Authority is a unique creation of former state Rep. Kenny Wilk and former state Sen. Nick Jordan. It has great potential, but it has been severely damaged by the efforts of Thornton and Sebelius to inject their own egos, self interests and political aspirations into the operation.

The state and its taxpayers deserve better. It's good Brownback has called for more oversight, holding back funds until there is evidence the Authority has gotten its house in order. Changes must be made so it can resume its position as a respected, nonpartisan body that can help Kansas grow through bioscience research, innovation and commercialization.

There is every reason to be optimistic about the future if the Authority can regain the respect and performance record it enjoyed before it became a political football. Merely handing out gifts or grants of millions of dollars may win friends, but far more effort needs to be devoted to the hard work of attracting new businesses to Kansas from the country and abroad.

— The Lawrence Journal-World, via The Associated Press



Editor's holiday means reading, naturally

Yeah, I am on vacation for a week. Not doing anything special; just hanging around, reading books and even newspapers, which when I'm working, I seldom have time for.

OK, today, I'm working, or you wouldn't have this column. But the rest of the week, I'll be scarce.

What am I reading?

A book on submarines. A John Grisham legal thriller. *The Denver Post*. *The Wall Street Journal*. Stuff I never have time for in the workaday world, where I read two newspapers before they are printed and try to scan four more. And in the morning over coffee, before rushing out the door, the *Salina Journal* and a couple of news websites.

I always forget how much fun the *Wall Street Journal* can be.

A business newspaper, fun? you ask.

Sure. Business is part of the drama of life, business people out there playing the game for high stakes. Personalities abound. Crooks and sinners crop up with regularity. Occasionally, even murder and mayhem.

But the *Journal* is so well written and deftly edited that it makes even a corporate board report interesting, sometimes delightful. In that way, it's like the *Washington Post*, bright and always readable. An account of a suburban city council meeting in Maryland will be as engrossing as anything about Congress, sometimes better.

For pleasure, stay away from *The New York*



Steve Haynes

• Along the Sappa

Times, whose reporters are full of self and sure that the fate of the civilized world hangs on their shoulders. It's a widely respected, family-run outfit, but mostly, unless you want to feel aligned with Important Thought, it's good for a snooze.

One secret is that the *Wall Street Journal* seeks out, helps train and hires the best aspiring copy editors from American journalism schools. Where other papers focus on writers, the *Journal* always has sought editing talent first. It attracts fine writers, but it has people who can sharpen and hone their copy.

So just reading the headlines can be fun: One "Heard on the Street" page the other day contained a story about Apple Computer profits exceeding expectations by an astounding \$7 billion in the fourth quarter: Apple Message to Wall Street: iWin.

That's a lot of iPhones, folks.

Next to it was a story about China's economy growing so fast that municipal bond debt which last year seemed a burden this year fades compared to income and cash: China's

Debt: You'll Grow Out of It.

And chortled another headline, "Europe's Pain Is U.S. Gain," about how the debt crises overseas is helping U.S. firms by holding input prices down.

Even the reporters get into the act. On the story about Apple, Rolfe Winkler writes about prospects for more growth at Apple, especially in Asia. He sets up his close with a clever pun:

"Three quarters of the China market, and more of India's, is comprised of prepaid subscribers. To appeal to these customers, Apple will have to sell a scaled-down iPhone that would surely sport lower margins than existing models. Still, that would offer an additional opportunity to expand its potential market.

"With that still to look forward to, no wonder Apple is the Exxon of mobile. And, following its 8 percent after-market gain, it again passes the oil major as American's most valuable company."

(Yes, a grammatical error. It should say "composed of"; these people are not perfect.)

But time's a wasting, and I must get back to work, er, reading. Work will come around soon enough.

Steve Haynes is president of Nor'West Newspapers. When he has the time, he'd rather be reading a good book or casting a fly.

House looks at carnivals, auditor's report

Local Carnivals

Last Tuesday, Kansas Department of Labor introduced a bill that will require more inspections for locally-owned carnivals. Presently the carnivals, which include those in Hoxie, Colby, Goodland, St. Francis, Sharon Springs and Oakley, are not required to have yearly Level II inspections. The state is looking at changing these. When the bill is introduced we will find out what will be required of the locally-owned carnivals.

I have contacted Sen. Ostmeyer, Rep. Cassidy and Rep. Hineman and informed them of the upcoming bill. We will work together for the best outcome possible for our local carnivals. We all want to make sure these rides are safe for our communities.

Bio Science Authority

Early last week an external audit revealed concerning details regarding the leadership of the state-funded Kansas Bioscience Authority. Based in Olathe, the authority's primary goal has been to attract high-tech biological science companies and jobs to Kansas through its partnership with the state. Since its inception in 2004, Kansas Bioscience has received \$175 million in state funding to carry out this mission.

Over the past year, the legislature and the executive branch had become increasingly concerned with reports of spending abuse and inappropriate business dealings with the authority. A full forensic audit was ordered.

Results of the audit, performed by national firm BKD, focused on both the board of directors and former Chief Executive Tom Thornton, who resigned soon after the audit was ordered. The 300-page summary confirmed numerous issues under Thornton's leadership including computer mainframe files. Evidence indicates Thornton may have tampered with



Rick Billinger

• This week in Topeka

files on the authority's mainframe computer, which contained sensitive records only accessible to top level management. However, auditors were unable to completely prove that tampering occurred because backup copies of the drive are automatically deleted after 30 days.

Environmental Protection Agency

The Environmental Protection Agency is out of control. This week the State of Kansas was notified by the agency about proposed regulations on Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations. They would require all such operations to report regardless of their size or permit status. Kansas already maintains a comprehensive permit process and database for animal feeding operations. Gov. Brownback and Attorney General Schmidt contend that changing the rules would bring an additional, unnecessary layer of paperwork.

Presently the agency is proposing stricter emission control on power plants throughout Kansas, including three power plants in my district. If we are not successful in getting the agency to back down on the Reciprocating Internal Combustion Engines rule the power plants in Hill City, Colby and Goodland will be required to install more emission controls.

Colby City Manager Carolyn Armstrong told me the Colby power plant operates approximately 60 hours a year. The cost to bring this power plant in compliance will surpass \$600,000. Goodland City Manager Doug

Gerber reported the Goodland plant operates about 100 hours per year and the cost to bring it to compliance will exceed \$750,000. These are just two stories. The City of Norton, along with other small cities, will probably decommission their power plant if these rules are enforced.

I have visited with other representatives and senators about the possible legislation resolutions to try to keep from over-regulating Kansas.

Bills

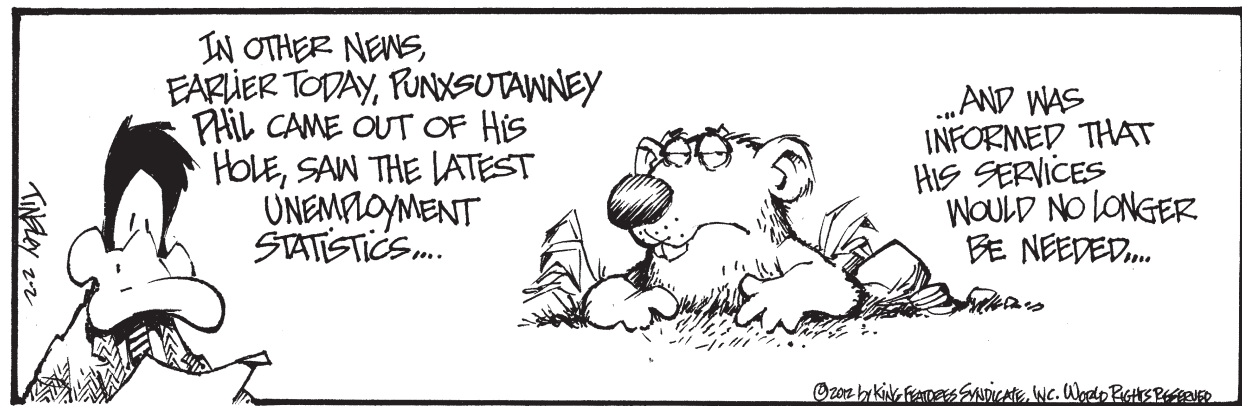
HB 2412, Dissolution of Treece. The bill dissolves any city in Kansas that was bought out or relocated by the Environmental Protection Agency during the 2010 and 2011 calendar years. The City of Treece had long been a victim of under mining and contamination by lead and zinc. As a result, residents were offered a buyout to relocate. All the residents took advantage of the buyout except for one family. The bill passed 122 to 0.

HB2436, Time Limit For Certificates of Public Convenience. This bill amends current law to impose a 180-day time limit for the Kansas Corporation Commission to act on applications for certificates of public convenience. All common carriers or public utilities who want to operate in Kansas must obtain a certificate of public convenience from the commission. The current law does not impose a deadline for action and unless the utility and the commission agree to waive the deadline, action must be taken on the certificates within 180 days. This bill passed by a vote of 121 to 1.

Rick Billinger is the state representative from the 121st District. He currently serves on the Commerce and Economic Development, Education Funding, Insurance and Local Government committees.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



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