



Other Viewpoints

Move forward on bio-defense labs

Kansas worked hard to become the new home of the National Bio- and Agro-Defense Facility. Now, Kansas must fight hard to keep the facility. The state’s congressional delegation, the governor and other state leaders led the effort to convince federal officials in Washington, D.C., that Kansas State University in Manhattan was the best location for the new bio-defense laboratory to replace the aging facility on Plum Island, N.Y.

While other states competing for the project – Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina and Texas – might have had more political clout, Kansas was chosen as the site. The lab, initially expected to open by 2018, would create several hundred high-paying jobs, boost economic growth in the region and help anchor the state’s bioscience industry.

The \$1.1 billion facility would research dangerous animal diseases that could threaten the nation’s food supply. Backers of the project say it is vital to national security, but critics are raising concerns about security and the possibility of an accidental release of diseases.

Last week, an independent report mandated by Congress and prepared by the National Research Council contended that a favorable Homeland Security assessment in March was flawed and that the U.S. Department of Homeland Security still doesn’t have a good assessment of how it could operate the facility safely. The report said that Homeland Security had overestimated the danger posed by tornadoes and earthquakes but underestimated the risks of disease being released by human error. A spokeswoman for the department noted, however, that the report called the new lab “a critical asset” and said its designs are sound.

Congress had set aside \$90 million to build a new utility plant for the lab and continue site work in Manhattan but told Homeland Security it couldn’t spend the money until the National Research Council had finished its report. Although the report indicates that additional security work remains to be done, Kansas officials, with the support of some Missouri leaders, are pressing Homeland Security to release the \$90 million and get the project started. Ron Trewyn, vice president of research at K-State, points out that the new lab will face rigorous, ongoing reviews by other federal agencies and further pre-construction safety assessments don’t serve much purpose. “It’s time to build the building,” he said. “It’s time to move forward.”

Safety and security are critical issues, but initial work on the project should be allowed to proceed. There is still time to finalize the necessary security plans for the project, but Kansas officials are right to press federal authorities to keep this project moving forward.

– The Lawrence Journal World, via the Associated Press

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

Send news to: colby.editor @ nwkansas.com

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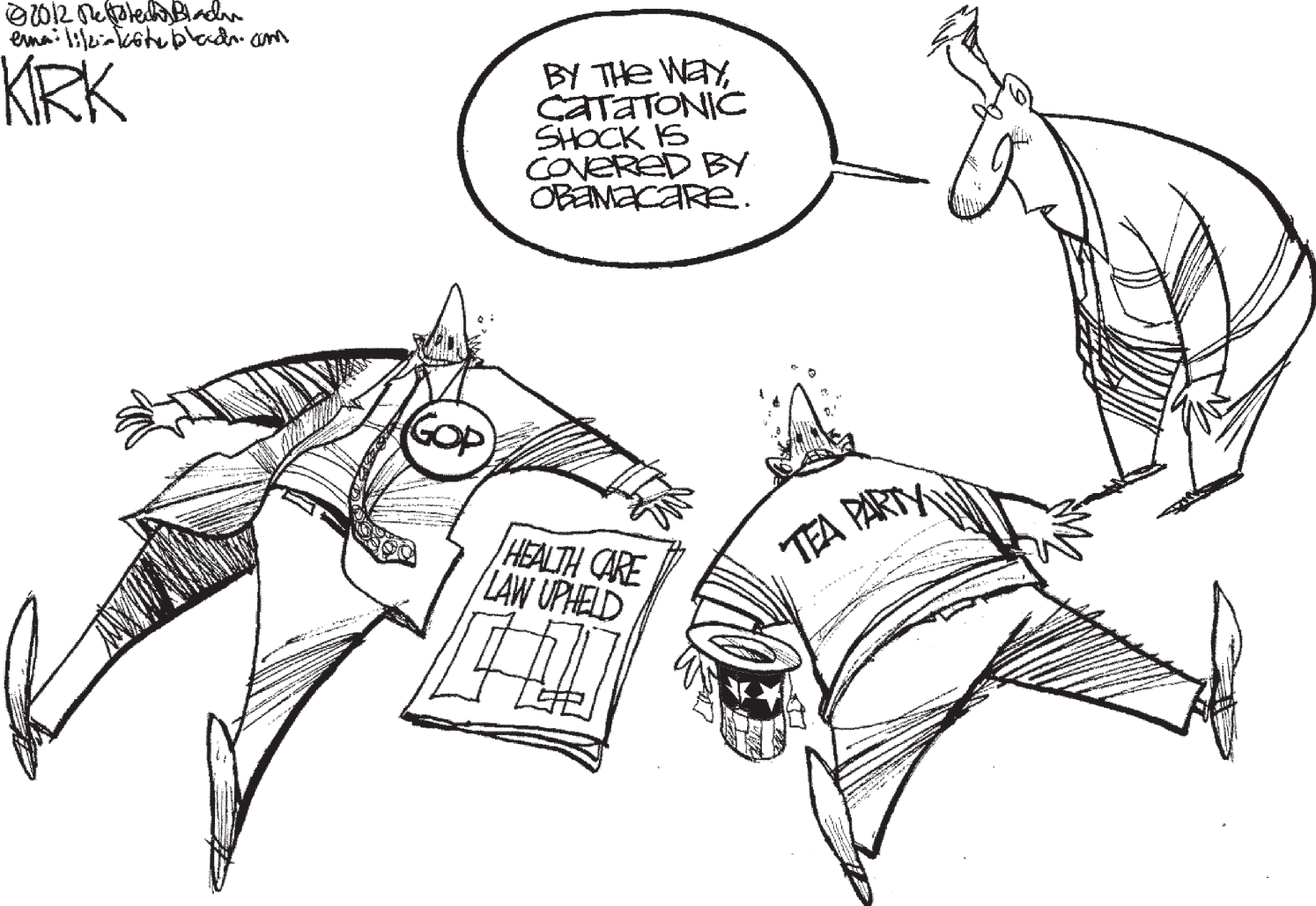
THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the days observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year’s Day, by Nor’West Newspaper, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

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

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KIRK



College seeks to renew American dream

Contrary to popular opinion about educators, I really do not enjoy change. That is probably why I appreciate summer so much, despite my dislike of the heat.

I cannot stress that last statement on heat strongly enough. Growing up, the summer months always brought me comfort in their consistency. I could always count on a football or basketball game with my friends, trips by the bookmobile and ice cream trucks through and overgrown yards which needed to be mowed. (In the south, you simply turn your head and the grass grows three inches.)

That reliability has also been attached to higher education in the U.S. There was an underlying belief following World War II and the G.I. Bill that subsequent generations were guaranteed to do better than their predecessors. Go to college, get a job, be a success – seemed pretty simple. The formula, however, has changed. And the American Dream has certainly been threatened in recent years.

According to information provided by the American Association of Community Colleges, median family income in the U.S. since 2000 has fallen by seven percent after remaining stagnant since the late 1970s.

Though blame for national woes can be shared, higher education certainly must accept a share due to its reluctance to change. By the same token, higher education has the potential to play a great role in future prosperity.

Beginning in the summer of 2011, the association, of which Colby Community College is a member, set a goal of producing an additional 5 million students with degrees, certificates and/or credentials by 2020. Much of the rationale and the blueprint is found in their report, “Reclaiming the American Dream.”

It details that the American dream is at risk,



Steve Vacik

• From the president

that a “highly educated population is fundamental to ... a vibrant economy,” and that to mend the educational system “requires dramatic redesign....” More specifically, what does this blueprint look like and how is it relevant for local community colleges?

First, community colleges must redesign students’ experiences. This includes increasing completion and transfer rates, college readiness skills and career-technical educational opportunities for jobs that do not exist yet.

At the college, we are working on increased completion and transfer rates. A staff member is serving as a retention specialist to work with students. We have also created an enrollment management plan in recruiting, retaining and redirecting students. And Kansas has adopted a plan and approved courses to make transfer between a community and four-year college seamless for students.

Your community college is continuing to develop and roll out programs to address the changing job market – alternative energy, virtual office assistant and medical coding.

With regard to college readiness skills, this is where the college needs to partner with local school districts to ensure that every student has the intellectual and social skills to succeed. None of these three are neglected by the college, however, and redesigning students’ educational experiences fits within our concept of

being different, better and purposeful.

Also, community colleges must reinvent institutional roles. Reclaiming the Dream maintains that we must refocus our mission to determine who we serve, how we serve and how we measure success.

The college recently revised its mission statement and is forming a strategic plan for the next five years. As an open-enrollment institution, the college is never going to turn away students; nonetheless, in an era of limited resources, we must work to keep our best programs on the cutting edge.

We have program outcomes in place now to help us with assessment of all areas on campus. Through a refocused mission – and by collaborating with other colleges in our state and region – we are reinventing our role.

Finally, to reclaim the dream, the association believes community colleges must reset the system. We must seek greater private and public investment while improving rigor, transparency and accountability. This fits well with our fund raising campaign for the college and the informational sessions that share the state of the college with the community. We need your support but you deserve a reasonable accounting of the college’s impact and value.

The college has begun to make progress. Just like all colleges in our nation, we must change to address the needs demanded by the economy of the coming decades.

We must change and adapt our educational system to prepare the next generation to thrive, not just survive.

(The full report on Reclaiming the Dream can be found at www.aacc.nche.edu.)

Dr. Stephen Vacik is president of Colby Community College.

Remember to value freedoms on Fourth

Other Opinions

• Daris Howard Life’s Outtakes

wife asked me about their excitement and what was going on and I said I wasn’t sure. After the girls had spent some time with it, I was finally able to get them to explain their enthusiasm.

They said that since Novosibirsk was a scientific city, the citizens had received a lot of privileges. However, they were also the first to be expected to live the Communistic ideas. That included abolishing anything religious. Though they weren’t born when it happened, their older relatives talked of the “purging day” when all religious things, especially Bibles and other such books, were burned.

Since the fall of the Berlin wall, religious freedom was beginning to flourish, but getting hold of anything was really hard. Most people wanted to read a Bible. Some of the older generation had read from one in their youth, and hungered to do so again, while the younger generation had an insatiable curiosity about it.

“But,” the one girl continued on in Russian, “we only know of two Bibles left in the whole city.”

I thought I misunderstood. In a city of almost

1.5 million there surely had to be more than two Bibles, but the girls insisted that if there were more they were hidden. One girl said the Bible’s owners rented them out, but only if a person deposited 100,000 rubles (\$3,000), and then paid 1000 rubles (\$30) per week in rent.

The girls spent a long time looking through the Bible, and when they finished, we did our nightly reading. As everyone went to bed, I considered the freedoms I take so much for granted, including the fact that a person can read whatever they like, the Bible, the Qur’an, the Torah, the Book of Mormon or anything else.

As I considered what a privilege that is, I decided to do something about it. I called my Russian teacher and asked if he knew where I could purchase a Russian Bible. He had one I could buy. I went to his house and bought it.

The next day my family presented it to the girls, making them promise not to use it to gain money, but only to share. They said they would, and carefully packed it into their luggage. The girl that knew a little English then turned to me and smiled as she spoke.

“Now, Novosibirsk have three Bibles.”

And, as for me, each Fourth of July I think about their visit, and it makes me more grateful for freedoms that I take for granted each day.

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

