

Other Viewpoints

Air Force decision good for Kansas

Kansas won one and lost one when the Air Force decided which bases would be the first to receive the new KC-46A air refueling tanker.

McConnell Air Force Base in Wichita was selected as the main, active-duty operating facility for the KC-46As. Forbes Field was among the finalists vying to be the first Air National Guard base to fly the new tankers, but that honor went to Pease Air Force Base in New Hampshire.

Congratulations go to McConnell AFB and Wichita. McConnell already is the largest air tanker base in the world, and its performance over the years certainly showed it was worthy of new equipment that will allow it to continue providing excellent service for decades to come.

The KC-46As, being built by Boeing, are scheduled to begin rolling out of the factory in 2016, and McConnell will receive the first 36 planes.

Pease is expected to begin receiving its new tankers in 2018. Although our hearts, obviously, were with McConnell and Forbes in this competition, Pease, too, deserves congratulations for its selection. It would not have received the honor without an outstanding record of service.

As a finalist among Air National Guard bases, Forbes and the 190th Air Refueling Wing remain a likely candidate for some of the KC-46As sometime down the line.

The 190th has been an important part of the Air Force's refueling operations for a long time and has served with distinction when its personnel and fleet of tankers have been called upon. The Air Force would be wise to maintain 190th's effectiveness with the new tankers when that becomes possible.

Topeka has been proud to serve as the unit's home throughout its time here and that will not change now. The community and the 190th can take some pride in the fact the Air Force hierarchy thought enough of the unit to consider it among the elite of Air National Guard operations.

McConnell, Forbes and other in-flight refueling units in the Air Force have been using KC-135 Stratotankers for more than 50 years. After a long and contentious bidding process — it once appeared the contract for new tankers would go to a European firm — Boeing was selected to build the next generation of flying gas stations.

In addition to the first KC-46As off the line, McConnell also will receive a \$200 million upgrade to its facilities in preparation of the new tankers.

Kansans can take pride in the role McConnell has played and will continue to play in defense of our country.

— *The Topeka Capital-Journal, via the Associated Press*

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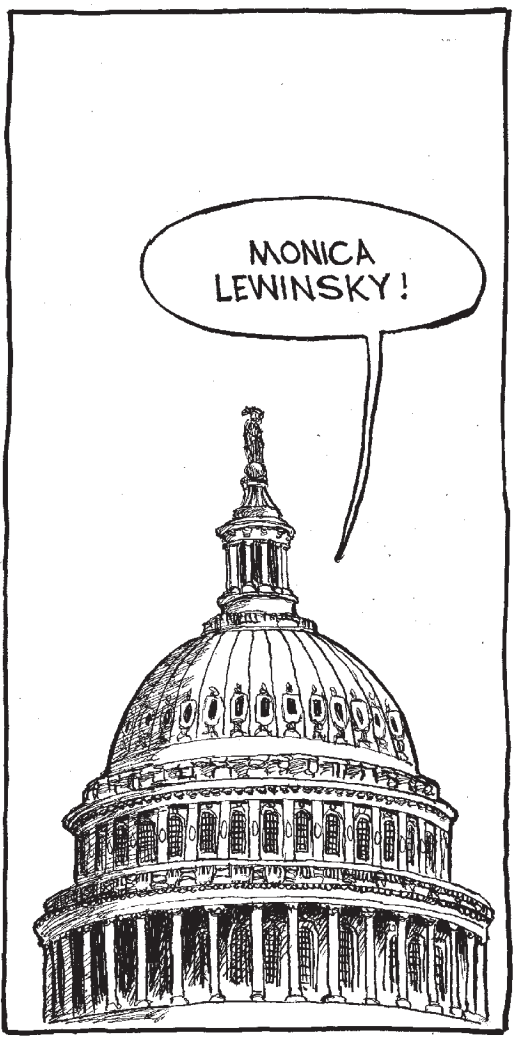
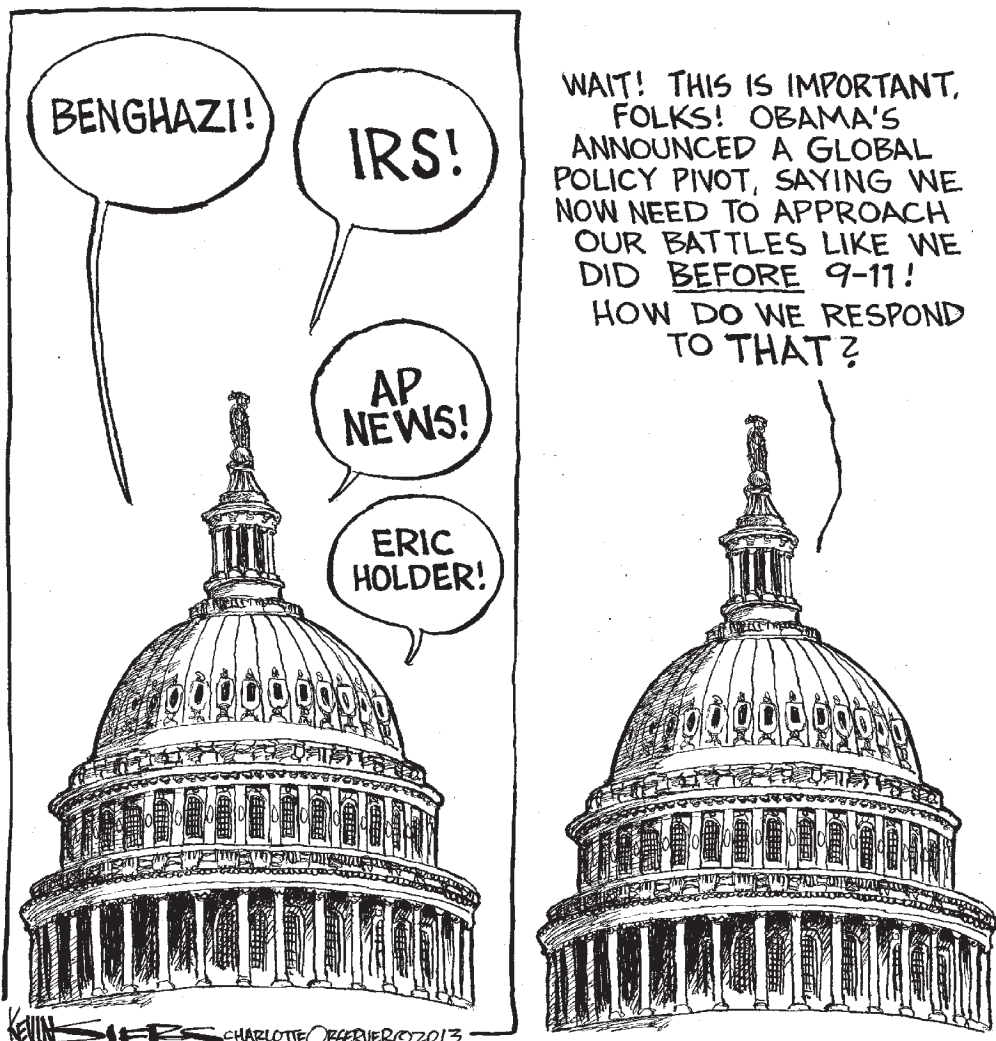
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Alexander the gecko takes a trip

Alexander joined us in Augusta, I guess. I first noticed him on my leg when I'd just gotten on the Interstate. He had such a light touch, it felt like maybe a moth had landed on my leg. I brushed, and it went away. Later, he was back. I caught a glimpse of something brown. I brushed again at the moth, and it flitted away. The next time he jumped on my leg, though, I got a better look. I felt him and looked down. He looked back. This was no moth, but a lizard, small, brown and green, wide-set eyes. A gecko. We knew that Lindsay had plenty of lizards in her big suburban yard. We'd see them hopping from the back deck to the wall of the house, scurrying up the bricks. Mostly, she had skinks, slick and shiny looking, and big, some close to a foot long. We used to catch them when I was a kid, but you had to be quick. Grab the tail and it just pops off. Then there were the little geckos, smaller, green and brown, with spots and a matte finish. Nothing shiny about them. Anyway, Alexander was just a-sittin' there on my leg, looking up at me. All this while I was getting the truck up to 70 mph for the first leg to Atlanta. We'd had to stop at a bookstore on the way out of town, and I wanted to be



Steve Haynes

- Along the Sappa

through Atlanta before rush hour started. No time to fool with a lizard. No problem. Alexander jumped over to the door, clinging to the lefthand speaker. I called our friend John, who lives in Roanoke, Ala., southwest of Atlanta, to see if we could buy him dinner. It's about an hour out of the way, but we don't get to see John too often. I tried to explain what was going on to Cynthia, since she likes reptiles so much, but from the passenger's seat, she couldn't see him. Alexander just kept his place. Every once and a while, he'd move, and I'd feel his tail. Once he got back on my leg, but mostly he stayed on the speaker. When we stopped at Newnan, Ga., to change drivers, he scurried up into the dash. Cynthia took over, and we saw nothing more of him until we got to Roanoke and parked at John's house. John had to introduce us to his new puppy and let us play with his wife's cat, Brady. Brady loves to play, but you don't

want to find out what he'd do to your hand if he catches it. When we went back to the truck to go to dinner, there was Alexander on the floor mat. I tried to catch him, but he scurried up into the dash again. On the way west to Birmingham, I saw — and felt — nothing of him. We finally made it through the Steel City of the South and scooted off northwest to Jasper, where we found there was no room in the inn. Not the Hampton. Not the Holiday. Not the Best Western. The Super 8 had a room, and we took it. Next morning, while she was packing the car, Cynthia said she opened the driver's door and told Alexander he should get out. She told him it was a nice building, lots of greenery and surely plenty of bugs in the grass. Maybe even a good place to start an insurance business. With that, we took off for Tupelo, Miss., birthplace of Elvis. I can't be sure he's gone, but I haven't seen Alexander since. I hope he got out, because I don't think Kansas winters would be too good for him. But we're two-thirds of the way across Missouri as I write this, and I haven't felt a thing on my leg all day.

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.

Keep politics out of science classrooms

From the mid-1930s to 1964, the Soviet Union suffered from the intrusion of politics into science research and teaching. The ideas of Trofim Lysenko (1898-1976) were enforced in research labs and school classrooms throughout the Soviet Union. The rest of the world was making advances in animal and plant breeding based on the new genetics — and reaping the benefits of increased crop production. But Lysenko was allowed to dismiss and imprison biologists who did not follow his view that wheat could be trained to be cold-hardy. Soviet politicians saw genetics as supporting the hereditary monarchy — the czar who had been overthrown. An ability to pass to your offspring new traits you had acquired through hard work just fit better with communism. Thirty years of bad science took a huge toll on the Soviet Union. The episode served as a lesson on how politicians should stay out of science laboratories and classrooms. Certainly the United States would never make such a mistake. Unfortunately, across the country this spring, we have seen a flurry of legislation attempting to distort our scientific understanding of natural phenomena to fit political ideas. House Bill 2306 introduced in the Kansas House of Representatives on Feb. 12 would have directed the Kansas State Board of Education to provide "a course of instruction in



John Richard Schrock

- Education Frontlines

science" that provides students with scientific evidence to both support and counter scientific theories or hypotheses. "The legislature recognizes that the teaching of certain scientific topics, such as climate science, may be controversial. The legislature encourages the teaching of such scientific controversies to be made in an objective manner in which both the strengths and weaknesses of such scientific theory or hypothesis are covered." Of course, Kansans are familiar with the "strengths and weakness" argument from our 1999 and 2005 evolution-creation debates. Climate change has now replaced evolution as the new battleground and some politicians are not hesitant to meddle in the science lab and classroom. But just as hospital administrators should not tell surgeons how to operate, legislators should not tell science teachers what or how to teach. There are folks who believe the earth is flat and there are citizens who do not believe in blood transfusions. Just because there

is controversy among some of the public at large does not mandate that science and science teachers should give equal time to unequal ideas. While the bill in Topeka did not get out of committee, there is a much bigger assault on science in Washington. Representative Lamar Smith (R-Texas) chairs the Science, Space, and Technology Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives and is pushing his "High Quality Research Act" that would curtail any pure research without immediate applications. He would also bring politicians into the peer review process that evaluates research funding, under the rubric of "adding a layer of accountability." And he would de-fund any political science research. No one has yet explained to him that the "peer" in peer review refers to other experts in the science field, not just any legislator with a heartbeat. If Trofim Lysenko was alive today, he would pack his bags and move to the United States. The opportunity to inject politics into research labs and science classrooms has never been greater.

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.

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Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

