

## Other Viewpoints

### Legislature step boosts biodefense

Assessing the performance of the 2013 Legislature will take longer than the scant 12 hours that have passed – as this is being written – since the Kansas House and Senate dropped their respective gavels on the legislative session and sent their members home.

It isn't too soon, however, to say legislators made the right decision in including in their budget for the fiscal year that begins July 1 the authority for the state to issue \$200 million in bonds to support construction of a National Bio- and Agro-Defense Facility at Kansas State University in Manhattan.

Granted, a ground-breaking ceremony was conducted last week at the site for construction of the utility plant that will power the operation. Earlier appropriation by the federal government of \$40 million for the utility plant, coupled with appropriation of more than \$100 million by the state for the facility's infrastructure, certainly gave the appearance construction of the full facility was a done deal.

When politicians are in charge, though, and they are in charge of the national facility at the federal and state levels, nothing is a done deal until it's done.

The Legislature's decision to contribute another \$200 million in state funding moves the National Bio- and Agro-Defense Facility closer to a done deal.

President Barack Obama earlier this year included \$740 million in construction funding – and the caveat Kansas would have to come up with an additional \$200 million – in the federal budget he sent to Congress.

Kansas now has come through, but Congress hasn't yet approved the \$740 million federal appropriation.

There doesn't appear any reason now for Congress not to supply the federal dollars to complete the deal, but strange things happen.

Some Kansas legislators grumbled at the thought of increasing the state's ante but, to their credit, no serious challenge arose to Gov. Sam Brownback's recommendation the state issue bonds to raise the necessary funding.

As an economic engine, the new laboratory, which will conduct research on dangerous animal diseases, is too important to the state to deny. It has been estimated that the facility's economic impact on Kansas could be as much as \$3.5 billion over a 20-year period. It a state looking for economic development, that's huge.

Now that Kansas has complied with every requirement the Department of Homeland Security and the Obama administration have sent down the pike, it's time for Congress to appropriate its share of funding.

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



### Knowing grandkids takes lots of visits

Maybe it's possible to get tired of playing with your grandchildren. I haven't reached that point yet.

But then I'm still new to this whole thing. My grandkids are 1,300 miles too far away, and I don't get to see them nearly enough.

But I'm willing to try to spoil them more. I really am.

After our eldest moved to Georgia, we'd go see her once or twice a year, usually on her birthday in May. After her sister moved there, too, we ramped up to twice a year. It was efficient that way, since they lived in the same place halfway across the country.

Then when the baby came, well we had to go three times that year. And with two grandchildren, we might soon be looking at four.

And I doubt it would be enough. I think we're lucky to have grandchildren at all. Some people don't. To me, that would be sad.

And there's only the two. Some people have them by the dozen.

I could deal with a dozen, but not all at once. There'd be way too much confusion and noise. But, come to think of it, if they offered, I might try.

My mom had 10 grandchildren, and I don't know that they were ever all in one place at one time, but the times we had a bunch of them



**Steve Haynes**

• Along the Sappa

together were pretty special. She thought so, anyway. The walls of her home were covered with grandkid pictures.

I doubt I'll ever have 10 anyway. I'll just have to focus on spoiling the ones we do have. They're so cute, and so different from each other, that you could spend hours with either one and never get bored.

Taylor is 3 now, and quite precocious. Her vocabulary is exploding, along with her awareness of the world around her. She's wild and full of energy and it's a lot of fun to take her places, to talk with her and just to watch her play.

She likes to have books read to her and loves even more to "read" them to herself after she's been put to bed. Which her parents countenance as long as she keeps quiet and stays in her room. (Like her mother never did that.)

She wants Grandpa to take her to see choo-choo trains, which is fine with him, but they

are rare where she lives. Just going on the hunt is a big deal to her, though.

Little Grayson, born in May, is another story, a novel unread and largely unwritten. He's already proved he's a big eater compared to his picky sister. He eats all the time, left, right, supplement, whatever he can get.

He likes to be held if you walk around, but his mother says she thinks he wants to be able to move. I think her life is about to get a LOT more interesting. So is Taylor's, come to think of it.

But it's taken us three years to get to know Taylor, and now it seems like we're starting all over. Parents don't have the luxury of thinking of it that way, I know. When you have kids, you just deal with them. The more you have, the more you deal.

Grandparents have time to spoil 'em one at a time. With Grayson, at this stage, it's hard to tell what he wants and what it will take to spoil him, but we've got time to find out.

I personally am willing to do whatever it takes to get him going, but his sister will demand some time, too. I feel that fourth trip coming on.

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.

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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.

### Internet incivility hurts free speech

Vulgar and insulting comments fill many internet discussion boards and comment threads.

Trolls seem to have nothing else to do except lurk online to make crude and insulting remarks. Logic is missing. Their language is designed to offend.

They can do this for one simple reason: they can post comments anonymously using monikers such as dweezle34 or billybob707. "Netizens" defend this as part of their right to "free speech." And if anyone suggests it is wrong, much of the Internet rises up to defend them, screaming "censorship."

But speech has limitations. Most of us realize we cannot yell "Fire!" in a crowded theater. And we accept restrictions and provide court remedy for speech that is slanderous (heard) or libelous (seen).

And most of us would agree that, "I may not agree with what you say, but I will defend your right to say it." But in earlier times, we knew the speaker. You could see who was shouting from the podium. Hiding your identity is not part of "freedom of speech." Newspapers and radio generally insist on knowing sources.

Today, the Internet allows speakers to hide their identity, and this has led to irresponsible excesses.

Whole industries have grown up to serve targeted professionals; for a fee, they will drive negative web entries low in search engine results.

The literary theorist and legal scholar Stanley Fish wrote a book titled: "There's No Such Thing as Free Speech ... and It's a Good Thing, Too." His discussion is fairly intellectual but he does help clarify this free speech fantasy-land we live in. We do not really go about our lives saying anything that comes to our minds. We all choose to limit what we say, and as he states, "it is a good thing, too."

It is not the laws that keep us civil, but the consequences of our speech. Consider a college student who returns home and uses some



**John Richard Schrock**

• Education Frontlines

of that offensive online language with a parent. That student may in turn find his packed suitcase out on the doorstep and the door closing behind them.

We can have freedom of speech, but we are not free from its consequences.

That is what keeps society civil. We learn not to blurt out every momentary thought without considering whether it is accurate and reasonable. But because the Internet separates a speaker's identity from what is said, online language commonly plunges to levels of incivility.

Oddly, I see more constructive but still critical Internet commentary when I am in China. China's government maintains a comment board on each high ranking official. Any online citizen can enter comments and read what others have said. The one requirement is that the senders' identities are registered with the network Weibo.

You might expect that this would prevent criticism, but it does not. When Premier Wen Jiabao spoke on television in spring of 2012, he regretted that he had not been able to accomplish all that he attempted and that so many were dissatisfied with his performance. It was obvious that he had read the public comments.

Kansas senators and representatives ask for opinions, but the responses are hidden from us. We have absolutely no idea whether everyone is in agreement or in opposition with our politicians.

A press colleague of mine, whom I greatly

respect, pointed to the many flaming comments to be found strewn online about any politician. But that is just my point – we have become so inured to the uncivil websites that we ignore them. We consider their existence to be a sign of "free speech." A brawl among unknown strangers in the dark alleys of the Internet substitutes for the reasoned argument of individuals willing to stand behind their words in a public forum.

The Chronicle of Higher Education recently asked online readers whether this university newspaper of record should require online discussants to give their real name. The only reasoned argument for those advocating anonymity was by those stating that they would not have provided identified comments because they might lose their job. Our vaunted right to free speech is less practiced in the workplace.

Speech has consequences. But when a speaker can hide, there is no consequence for the speaker, and he or she escapes any responsibility for their words.

I greatly respect those who always sign their name in online comments. If Internet cowards could not hide under their white sheets of anonymity, then perhaps there would be less online cross-burning.

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

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