

Other Viewpoints

Technical training doesn't offset school

The governor came to town last week to talk about education. During a visit to Garden City, Gov. Sam Brownback touted the new Career Technical Education initiative, a program designed to help train students for high-demand jobs such as nursing, information technology and welding. The state program offers to pay college tuition for high school students who earn college credit in technical courses and certifications in a technical industry. It also rewards school districts with \$1,000 for every student who earns a technical certificate in high-need industries. The governor's interest in technical education and its ability to fuel economic growth makes sense. Brownback has, however, failed to show true support for public schools in general. His pursuit of massive income tax cuts and resulting revenue declines undoubtedly will lead state lawmakers to seek more funding cuts for school districts already hurt by previous reductions in state funding. Ideally, a Kansas Supreme Court ruling would help minimize such fallout. With the state mired in another lawsuit over school finance, the court may rule as it did in 2005 that the Kansas Legislature failed to meet its constitutional mandate to provide "suitable" funding for education, and order the state to provide more dollars for schools. But one Brownback ally, state Rep. Steve Brunk of Wichita, said his fellow conservative GOP lawmakers who dominate the Legislature would "give the courts the finger" and set their own course for future school funding – a sure path to additional losses for school districts that already have seen jobs and programs disappear, as well as higher property taxes as more of the funding burden shifts to local communities. While dollars from the new technical education program were welcome – Garden City USD 457 received \$26,000 – it's minuscule compared to the millions of dollars districts could lose. School districts have a responsibility to educate students in a cost-efficient way. But undermining the institutions responsible for academic and technical education – both of which deliver workforce development – makes no sense. The governor and his circle should acknowledge as much if they have a sincere interest in economic growth and prosperity in Kansas.

– The Garden City Telegram, via the Associated Press

Write us

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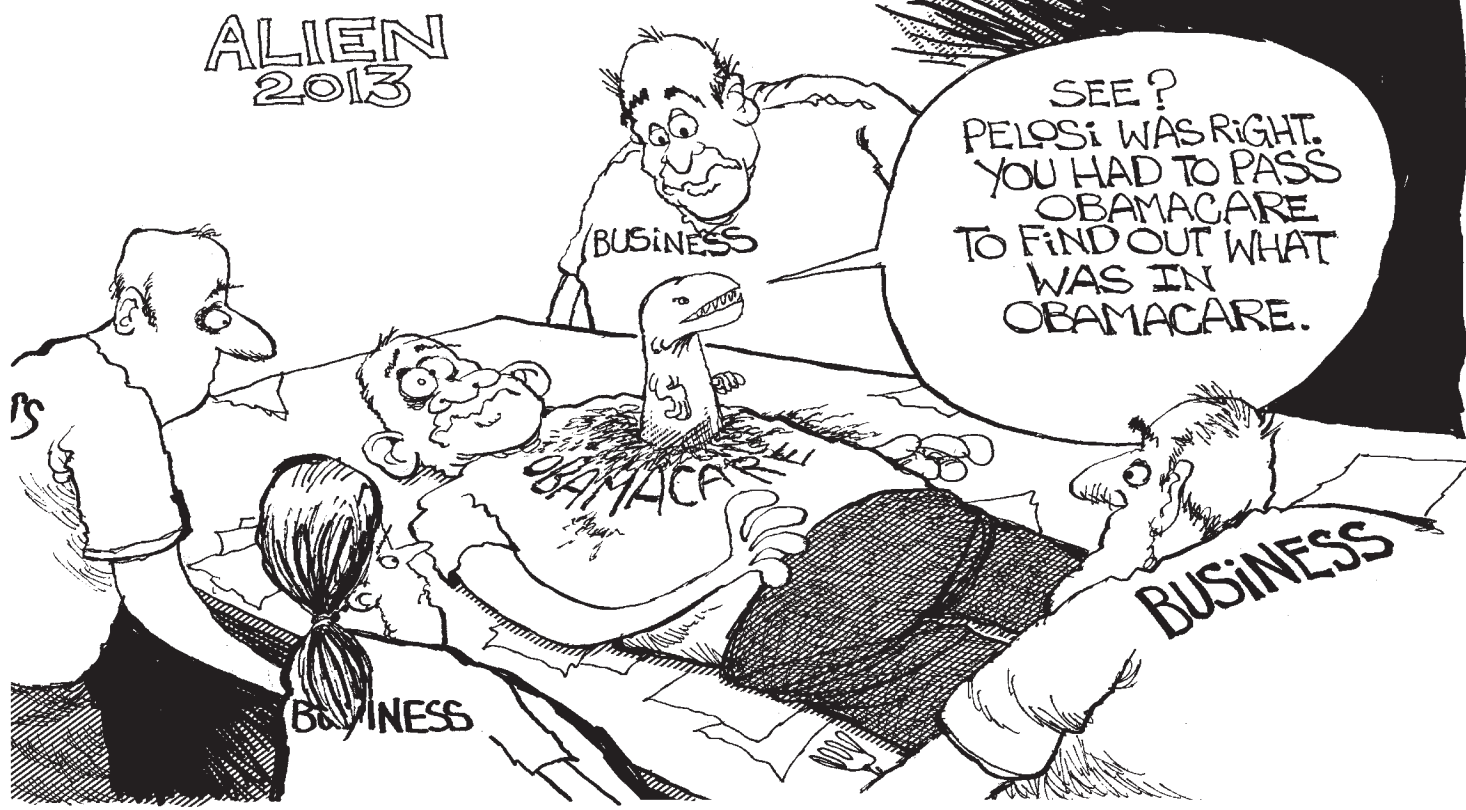
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Turkiye junket starts with long flight

Where to start?

For 5,000 miles over first the Atlantic, then Europe, you don't know what's ahead. Only one of us has been to Turkey, or Turkiye, as the natives spell it. We know what we've read, seen on television, learned in school. This is for real.

We are on what's commonly known as a "junket," a trip for journalists organized and partly paid for by the something called the Niagara Foundation, which is interested in bringing people from other nations together with those of Turkey.

And while we know what we know, there's more to it than that.

Eastbound, the flight is about 10 1/2 hours with a tailwind. You fly not east, but a "Great Circle" route toward Greenland, Iceland, over Britain and Germany and down across Romania to the Black Sea. Mostly, it's night, but the pilot announces sunset and sunrise. Most of us wonder why.

We arrive in Istanbul the next morning, having lost seven hours since New York. We get the afternoon off to rest and refresh, then go out for dinner, the first of many feasts.

From the hotel, Istanbul spreads out to the west, north, east and – across the Sea of Marmara – to the south. The skyline is punctuated by the towers of modern office and apartment buildings and by the minarets of hundreds of mosques. The weather is 80s, clear and beautiful.

We spend the next couple of days touring



Steve Haynes

• Along the Sappa

this ancient city, occupied by humans for as much as 8,000 years. Makes our sesquicentennials seem silly. A modern city of some 15 million, Istanbul has light rail, a subway, a busway, freeways – and traffic, lots of traffic.

The city was the capital of the eastern, or Holy Roman, or Byzantine, empire until the conquest by Turkish muslims eight centuries ago. Today, they say the population is 99 percent Muslim, with a smattering of other "people of the book," Christians and Jews.

Istanbul's climate is moderated by the sea, but when we fly south, we find ourselves hiking around ancient Ephesus on a cloudless day with the temperature well into three digits (or in metric Turkiye, 35 to 37C). The coast of the Aegean Sea has mountains and pine trees, and lots of fire breaks bulldozed into the forest.

Farther east, we find country more like Colorado or New Mexico, with a touch of Kansas. Golden fields of wheat and barley stubble cover the valleys, and here and there, combines (red and green) clean up the last of the grain. Around Kayseri, there's little water and the streams lead north into a huge, shallow salt

lake.

Snow-capped peaks dominate the horizon, and the weather is cool, 70s to 80s by our standards. We go no farther than the center of the country, which could hold Kansas, Nebraska and Iowa with, it appears, room to spare. We drive to Cappadocia, where early Christians hid from Roman soldiers in quarters carved out of soft volcanic rock. We find that the government is trying to encourage people to stay here, rather than leaving for overcrowded Istanbul. It sounds familiar.

We ride a fast (150 mph) train to the capital, Ankara, and see the parliament building, tour the city, then it is back to Istanbul for a couple more days.

On Saturday night, we watched the now-weekly demonstration downtown on television. The Polis are shooting people with water cannon mounted on strange-looking tanks. Demonstrators throw things. No one dies. Where we are, hardly anyone notices.

All too soon, and yet, soon enough, we are on the way home. Wherever we have gone, people have welcomed us and gone out of their way to help visitors, whether they knew who we were or just saw us standing on a street corner. Such a place; so much to tell.

This is just the beginning. Oh, and it's 11 1/2 hours home, against the wind.

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.

Education makes great difference

I will call her Wei (pronounced 'way'; it is not her real name). She had just earned her doctorate with distinction.

As the youngest professor with a good command of English, Wei was my assigned "handler." A Western guest lecturer in China is always assigned a handler, not to spy on you, but to make sure you get to your meetings and don't get hit by a car. After several days of lecturing, they insist you do some sightseeing. That is how we ended up strolling through a bamboo garden.

By now she knew I understood Chinese customs. This allowed me to ask a personal question. Wei came from a region of the countryside that was desperately poor. So how did she succeed in becoming a doctoral entomologist? Since so many in China have lived in hardship, they rarely speak of it among themselves. But I was a person from outside who would soon leave.

Wei described the very poor village where she grew up. Her parents were farmers. She had two older brothers. During sowing and harvest times, her brothers stayed home to work the fields. She was always sent to school. Even when all three attended school, when they returned home, she was sent into the house to study while there was still daylight to read. Her brothers would work in the fields until dark.

Without the study time, they never had a chance to succeed in school. Her brothers failed the junior high test that determines if you can go to high school. Her brothers eventually got married and had children, but they had very poor jobs. They got up at 3 a.m. and peddled bicycle carts a long distance to a wholesale market to buy fruit and peddled



John Richard Schrock

• Education Frontlines

back to sell it and make just enough money to keep food on the table.

But because of her hard study and determination, she passed the middle school and the all-important high school leaving exam with very high scores, and continued up the ranks through the university to become a scholar. And while Chinese professors are paid the poorest of all developing country professors, it is dramatically more than anyone could ever make in the countryside.

"Are your parents still farming?" I asked. "Yes," she said, "but their health is not good from their life of hard work. I can support them in retirement now."

"And your brothers' children; will they be needing tuition to go to high school eventually?"

"Yes, but I will be able to take care of that too now."

"That must be difficult?" I asked.

"Very," she said, looking away.

In Chinese society, it is the older brother's duty to take care of parents when they grow old. But here, it was she – the younger sister or "mei-mei" – who had risen by education to become the one who would not only care for the parents, but also support her nieces' and nephews' education. The loss of face that her older brothers would have to endure made this

all the more difficult.

Wei recognized that there were hundreds of thousands of other students in the countryside who had studied just as hard as she had, but never had a chance to leave the countryside. Opportunities to succeed were limited. She was not where she was merely because she worked hard.

With tears welling up, she said, "I am so ... lucky."

Her English was superb. Her wet eyes were looking around for another word.

"Fortunate?" I offered.

"Yes, I am so ... fortunate," but that still did not express the meaning she was looking for.

I knew the word she was looking for, but probably did not have the background to understand.

She felt "blessed."

That was over a decade ago. I recently revisited that university and asked a colleague about her.

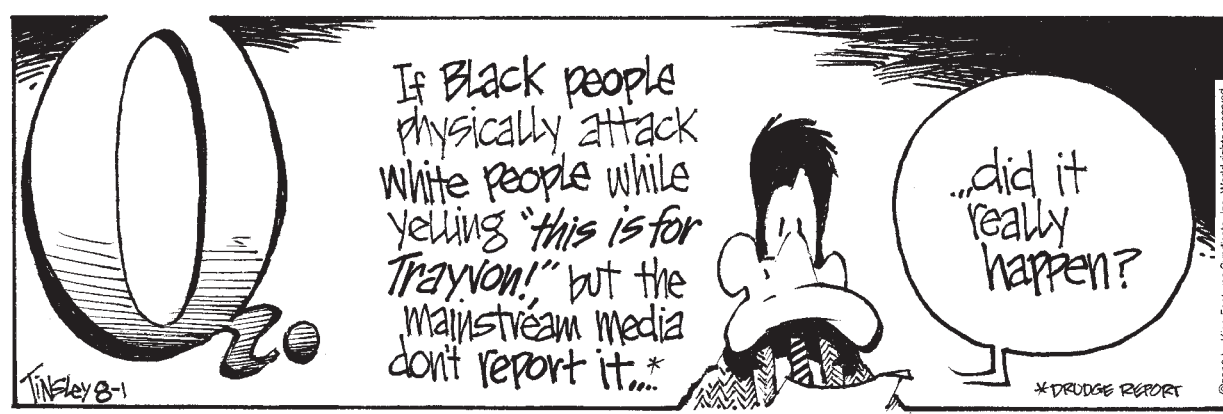
Wei had an opportunity to take a university position in New Zealand, then married another professor and has several children. She now has abundant resources to care for her retired parents, and her nieces' and nephews' education too.

She is living the Chinese students' dream: your chance to get ahead – study!

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



*DUDGE REPORT