

from our viewpoint...

# Landing reaffirms faith in ourselves

Its enough to make you feel like a kid again. Judging from the reactions in mission control, that's obviously how a lot of people felt as they watched the telemetry of the Curiosity Rover's touchdown on Mars. After the epic, 352-million-mile journey, the not-so-little rover had finally and safely reached its destination.

Our unmanned missions to Mars have around a 50 percent failure rate, so it's always good to see one touch down safely, especially one with such an unorthodox landing technique. The Russians lost their first five attempts, most without leaving Earth orbit. America had the first successful flyby in 1964, but only after one spacecraft failed after a bad launch.

It was the way NASA's engineers designed the landing that makes Curiosity more fascinating than the usual mission to Mars. For those of you not following along, the rover, which is as big as a small car, was actually dangled on a cable from a platform with down-facing rockets. The rockets fired to slow the descent and put the rover gently — relatively speaking — onto the surface. It was a brilliant feat of engineering, especially for something that had to be remote controlled from 352 million miles away.

Some might wonder if NASA's \$2.5 billion expenditure is worth it. After all, it's not like we haven't set down on the red planet before. What does another expensive mission really give us?

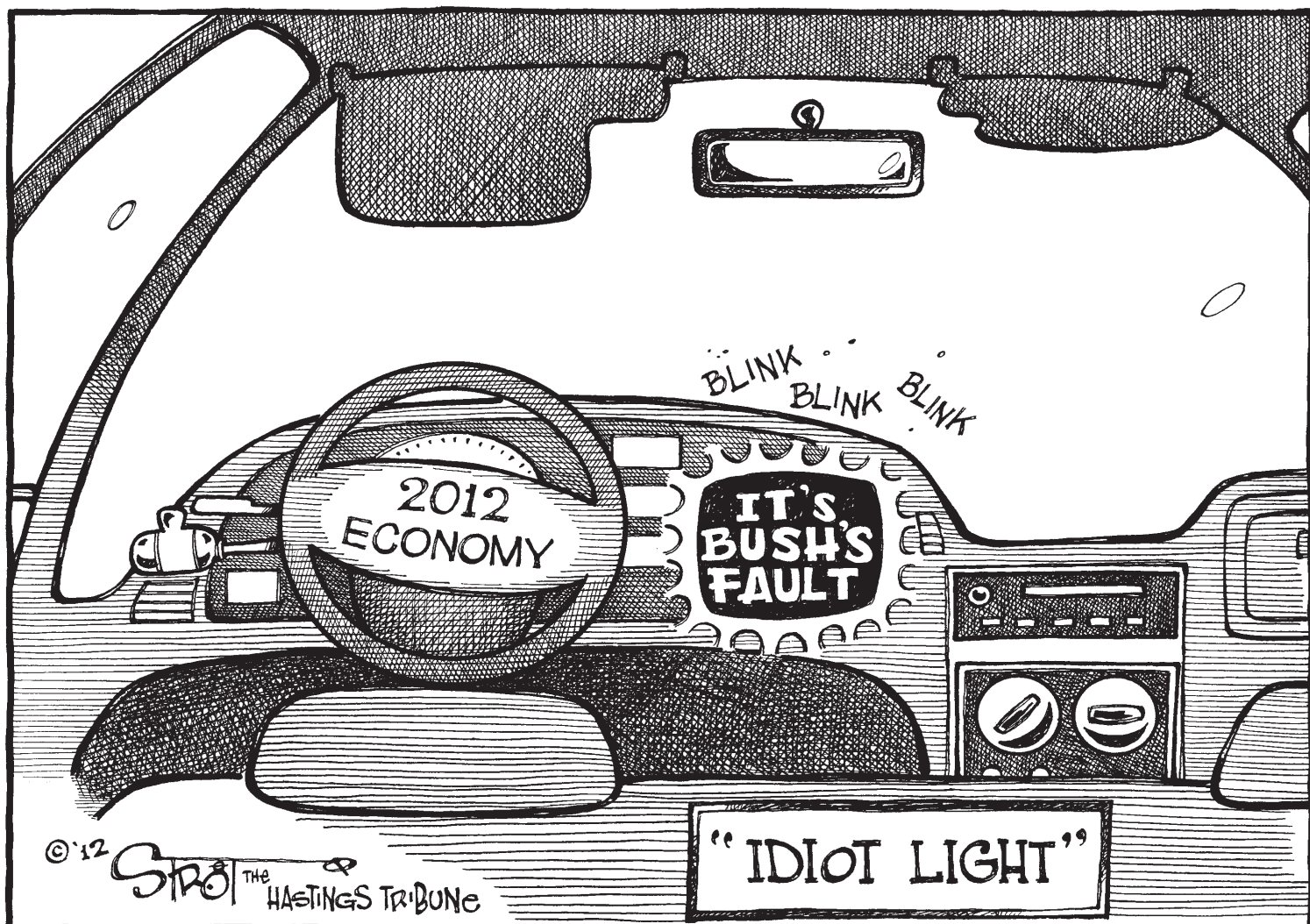
Well, from a scientific standpoint, it is far more advanced than its predecessors. It has high-resolution cameras that have already beamed back stunning images of the Martian surface. It can vaporize rocks with a laser to find out what they're made of. It can measure radiation and map X-rays from samples of the surface.

Beyond the purely scientific instruments, there are more indefinite benefits to our continued exploration of our solar system. Simply put, it's inspiring. It is inspiring to see people succeed at an endeavor that benefits people and expands our understanding of the universe around us. In this day and age when the national 24-hour news is taken up with political scandal, mounting death tolls abroad and violence at home, we need these positive stories of success to restore our faith in ourselves — that for brief, shining moments, we are more than the sum of our earthly concerns.

Those who make a big deal of American Exceptionalism, the idea that America is the greatest nation on Earth, should embrace efforts like Curiosity. America has voluntarily given up its position as the lead in manned spaceflight. With the retiring of the shuttle fleet and nothing to replace it for a long time, we need to keep up in other areas, to stay at the forefront of space exploration.

At the very least we owe it to the great pioneers of the 50's and 60's not to let America's efforts in space flight lag behind. We also owe it to ourselves, and we owe it to our children. Every child who learns about Curiosity, who sees the images from another planet, who sees video of the engineers who made it happen, is a child who may be inspired to greatness someday.

And, of course, the science fictions among us are still hoping Curiosity will run across some Martians. —Kevin Bottrell



## Northwest could have a voice in Topeka

Some people have asked about the idea of having a person who would carry the messages from northwest Kansas to those in Topeka mentioned in a recent column.

The idea of a regional person to carry the region's message to the east was something the late State Representative Jim Morrison talked to me about several times more than two years before he died. Morrison said he could see a need for the northwest region to develop a working relationship, and finding someone who could carry the region's message to officials in Topeka.

Today our region faces a reduction in the legislative voice we have had in Topeka, and Morrison's idea seems more relevant than ever. Exactly how such an idea is turned into reality is another question, but it appears the existing city, county and economic development groups would be a place to start.

Morrison said the idea of having a person — OK a lobbyist — is not only to work with the legislature, but to be a person who can help with local governments and businesses in dealing with the various state departments that have an impact on the region.

An example of such a situation arose more than a year ago when it appeared the State Board of Regents were making a funding change that would have had a major impact on Northwest Kansas Technical College.

At that time an ad hoc group of people were gathered to find effective ways to deal with the problem, and with the cooperative effort the



**tom betz**

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potential change was delayed and the technical college has been able to find ways to maintain their funding. Over the past couple of years the college has been able to call on people to help get the growth message to Topeka and the continued success helps their position.

With the court enforced redistricting the northwest region is losing an effective legislative voice with the defeat of Rick Billinger in the Republican Primary Election leaving Ward Cassidy as the lone representative for the northwest corner. On the state Senate side Ralph Ostmeyer easily won his primary race in the expanded 40th Senate District, but does face a challenge in the General Election from the east end of the new district.

Billinger was mentioned as a possible person who could carry the region's message to Topeka because he has developed many contacts both in the legislature and with many state departments in his two years serving in Topeka.

We have not made this suggestion to Billinger and do not know whether he would consider such a wide ranging type of position. We felt the experience and effort Billinger has put into his legislative service over the past two years

could be used as a starting place for developing a regional representative.

Another way to help get the region's message to Topeka is for people in the region to apply to be on state boards and commissions appointed by the governor. There are a few from the region who serve on statewide commissions, but a concerted regional effort would help carry the region's message and interests into the state on a different level than the legislature. These commissions and boards can help expand the contacts of the region and help balance the message of the rural areas.

Lobbyists get a bad rap in many ways for the corporate pressure and flow of money they can bring to the process in Topeka. However, for every questionable lobbyist many exist to help various groups and organizations keep a watchful eye on what the state is doing. These people are in position to inform their groups about state actions, and to help resolve possible issues from state action.

When Rep. Morrison talked to us about developing such a regional effort he said the need would continue to grow in the future as the power becomes more concentrated in the urban portion of the state. With the court mandated redistricting and Primary Election results Morrison's view appears to be coming true. We hope as the city and county groups hold their annual meetings such a regional effort might be an item on the agenda at least as a first step to see if this can be done.

## Kansas must stay at forefront of aviation

Kansas has a long and remarkable history of supporting the world's aviation industry. More than 90 years ago, innovators converged on an oil center called Wichita with dreams of building airplanes for a budding industry. From Kansas son Clyde Cessna, a car salesman who found his calling during a visit to a "flying circus" at age 32, to Florida's Emil "Matty" Laird, who turned his bicycle into a glider at age 15, pioneers from around the country migrated to Wichita — a city that would soon become the birthplace of the companies known today as Hawker Beechcraft, Cessna and Bombardier Learjet.

Wichitans are proud of their heritage, and are right to be proud. According to the Kansas Aviation Museum, Kansas aviation workers have supplied 75 percent of all general aviation aircraft since the Wright Brother's first flight at Kitty Hawk. This pioneering spirit continues today as workers in the "Air Capital of the World" are designing and building the next generation of general aviation and military aircraft to be flown around the globe.

Today, roughly 32,000 Kansans support more than 450 aerospace companies and contribute more than \$7 billion to our state's economy each year. General aviation is our largest industry and generates nearly \$2.9 billion annually in exports from our state. Exports are vital to Kansas' economy and Kansas jobs — our state must continue to build quality products in order to stay competitive in the global marketplace.

Kansas is not only a leader in aircraft manufacturing. Our state also supplies the workforce the aviation industry needs through education and training facilities like the National Center for Aviation Training and Wichita State University. Wichita also boasts the WSU-based National Institute for Aviation Research, which tests aircraft components for structural safety. These facilities make Wichita a hub for future generations of aviation manufacturers and engineers — and help solidify Kansas' aerospace reputation around the world.

The fact is, Kansas builds world-class airplanes and builds them well. The quality of our



**jerry moran**

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products and suppliers keeps global aviation manufacturers like Airbus — the largest export customer of the U.S. aerospace industry — coming back. A decade ago, Airbus built its first U.S.-based engineering center in Wichita because the talent pool of aviation experts is among the richest in the world. Today, their employment is growing, and Airbus' payroll exceeds \$34 million a year in Kansas.

Airbus recently delivered some good news: not only does it intend to continue its partnership with Kansas, but it will expand its purchase of American-made components and services. Since 1990, Airbus has spent \$127 billion with U.S. suppliers — \$12 billion in 2011 alone. Now the company is set to double its American investment over the next 10 years.

Airbus already contracts with many Kansas companies including Spirit Aerosystems in Wichita, Alcoa in Hutchinson, B/E Aerospace

Interiors in Lenexa and Honeywell in Olathe. We must make certain that as Airbus looks to contract with new U.S. suppliers, it looks to Kansas companies.

To meet that goal, Airbus Americas Chairman Allan McArtor and I have announced a partnership between Airbus and Kansas suppliers aimed at growing the aviation industry in Kansas through more contracts with Airbus. This week I am co-host of Kansas' first-ever Airbus Air Capital Supplier Summit at the Center for Aviation Training in Wichita. The conference will help facilitate more business between Kansas companies and Airbus, and will enable more than 200 representatives from around the state to meet one-on-one with representatives from Airbus and other suppliers.

Wichita is the only place in the world that offers 90-years of experience in aviation manufacturing, access to the world's largest supplier base, and aircraft workers and training second to none. It's no wonder global aviation manufacturers like Airbus are eager to tap into the talents of Kansans. The suppliers' summit brings together the high-skilled workers, innovations and tradition of aviation excellence that continue to define Wichita as the "Air Capital of the World."

### where to write

**U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts**, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774; E-mail address — <http://roberts.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?p=EmailPat>

**U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran**, 354 Russell Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-6521; Fax (202) 228-6966. E-mail address — <http://moran.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/e-mail-jerry>

**U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp**, 1st Congressional District, 126 Cannon House Office Building, Washington D.C., 20575-1601. (202-225-2715) E-mail address — <https://>

[huelskamp.house.gov/contact-me/email-me](http://huelskamp.house.gov/contact-me/email-me)  
**State Rep. Rick Billinger**, Docking State Office Building Rm 724, Topeka, KS 66612. Phone (785) 296-7659, cell (785) 899-4770, home (785) 899-5824. E-mail [rick.billinger@house.ks.gov](mailto:rick.billinger@house.ks.gov).

**State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer**, State Capitol Building, Rm. 225-E, 300 SW 10th, Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785-296-7399; e-mail address — [ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us](mailto:ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us)

**Kansas Attorney General**, 301 S.W. 10th, Lower Level, Topeka, KS 66612-1597 (785) 296-3751 Fax (785) 291-3699 TTY: (785) 291-3767

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e-mail: [star.news@nwkansas.com](mailto:star.news@nwkansas.com)

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Richard Westfahl, General Manager  
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**nwkansas.com**

N.T. Betz, Director of Internet Services  
([nbetz49@nwkansas.com](mailto:nbetz49@nwkansas.com))

Evan Barnum, Systems Admin. ([support@nwkansas.com](mailto:support@nwkansas.com))

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