

from our viewpoint...

Anti-trust issues are still important

One glaring fault in our economy neither party seems willing to take on. Maybe there's too much corporate money out there. Big business, as in too big to fail.

First the less-shaky banks were allowed to gobble up their less-fortunate brethren when the economy went south. Outfits like Bank of America then became "too big to fail," did they not?

There's more, though. With only three American automakers, they've long been considered "too big to fail."

Where was the antitrust division when that happened?

And airlines? We already have Delta, which was allowed to scoop up competing Northwest. Did we need an airline that big. Now United has swallowed Continental whole, "so it can compete," and American wants to soak up U.S. Airways, itself a conglomeration of the America West (the dominant partner) under the name of a better-known corporate weakling.

Won't they all be "too big to fail"? Where was the Justice Department when all this was going on.

Yet you almost have to go back to the Nixon Administration in 1974, when a federal suit was filed to break up the AT&T telephone monopoly, and the Reagan Administration in 1984, when the breakup actually came down, to find a real antitrust policy.

Since then, it's been open season for big-time mergers. In the years since, Southwestern Bell, at first just one of a flock of Baby Bells produced by the breakup, has gobbled up three of its siblings and its former parent to become the new AT&T. Airlines, banks, other businesses have merged with little opposition.

Take railroads: today there are just seven "Class 1" long-haul carriers, where once there were more than 200. They are big, mostly efficient and mostly profitable, but what will happen when one threatens to go down?

The next time Delta goes into bankruptcy? It's not like it hasn't happened before, after all.

There's just no evidence that bigger is better. A strong economy can't depend on just a few big outfits, because the odds are, one or more of them eventually will fail.

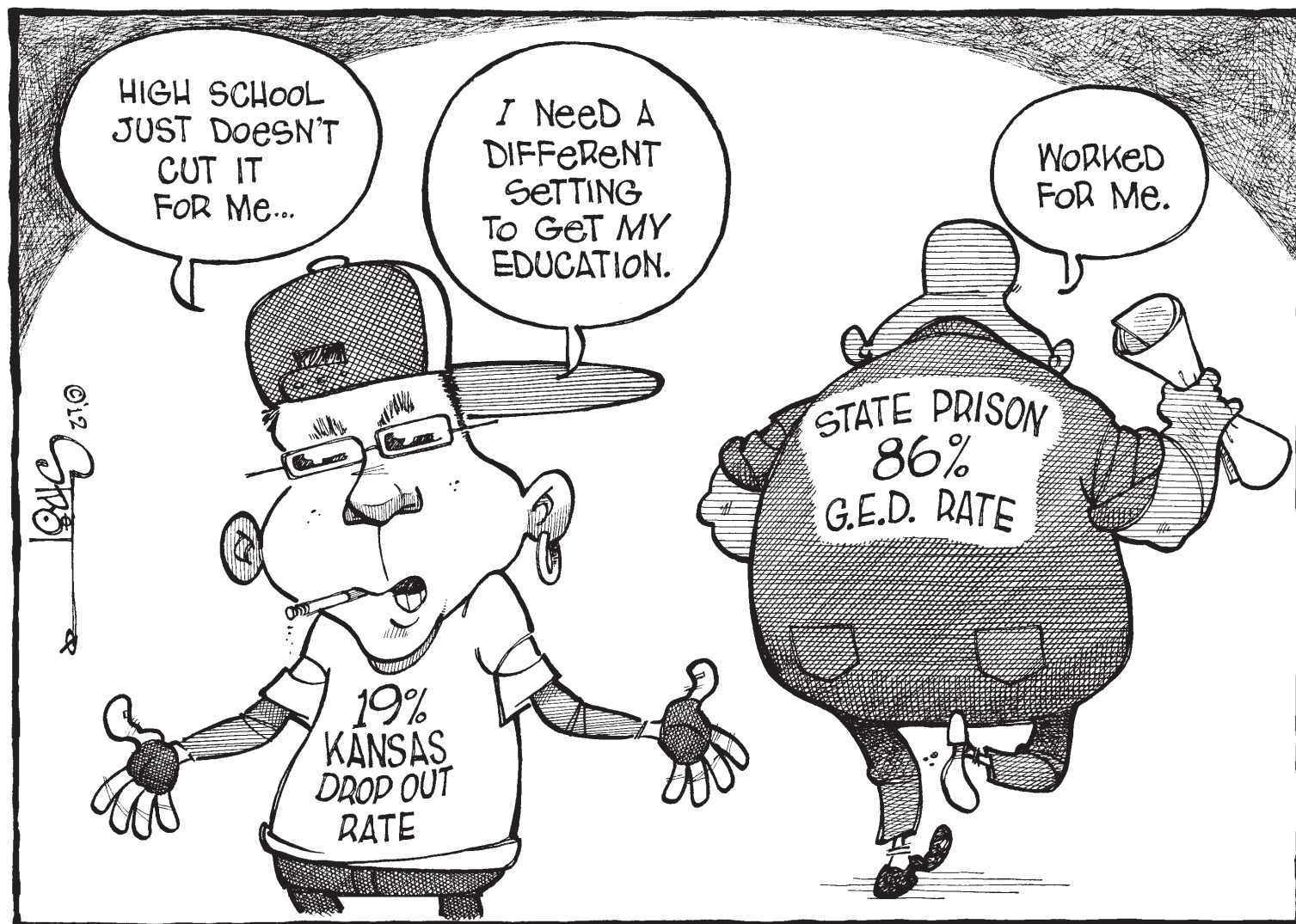
Antitrust policy used to be based on the idea that bigger businesses could control markets and manipulate prices. That's still a valid concern, but history suggests we've moved way beyond that issue.

Today, bigness threatens the entire economy. You'd think we would have learned that lesson, but there's just no evidence anyone cares about anything except a continued flow of big-business contributions to their campaigns.

We will rue the day we let this happen. Markets dominated by a few big firms lose their natural ability to regulate themselves.

It's time to start breaking up the "too-big" businesses and letting the forces of nature and economics operate as intended. Let firms compete, let those that make mistakes fail, let new competitors spring up.

But don't let our prosperity depend on a few far-from-stable corporations. — Steve Haynes



Consider a real tree

Now that we've celebrated Thanksgiving, and Christmas is just around the corner, many folks will be selecting a tree to adorn their apartment or home.

It's been said many times before and will be repeated again and again, "A traditional Christmas begins with a real tree."

Most of us buy a particular kind of tree based on family tradition. If we grew up with a spruce, we buy a spruce tree. If our family had firs, we buy firs. If we cut a cedar out of the pasture, chances are we still cut a cedar out of the pasture and bring it into our house for Christmas.

When I was a youngster, my family only considered one option when buying a Christmas tree — a real pine or fir tree. That all changed when a U.S.-based toilet bowl brush manufacturer, the Addis Brush Co., created an artificial tree from brush bristles. Hence, the prototype for modern artificial trees.

Today, some people feel guilty about cutting down a new tree each year. They feel better buying an artificial tree they can use over and over. Cost, convenience and environmental impact are reasons consumers opt for an artificial tree.

Given the current economic climate, artificial trees may be especially appealing for their investment value when compared with the recurrent annual expense of a real tree. Their



Insight this week

• John Schlageck

convenience is also appealing to consumers as they don't need watering, don't leave pine needles all over the floor and transportation from tree farm to home isn't an issue.

That said, real trees are a renewable, recyclable resource. While artificial trees contain nonbiodegradable plastic and metal, real Christmas trees provide the oxygen for millions of people while growing.

A single farmed tree absorbs more than a ton of CO2 throughout its lifetime. With more than 350 million real Christmas trees growing in U.S. tree farms alone, you can imagine the yearly amount of carbon sequestered. Additionally, each acre of trees produces enough oxygen for the daily needs of 18 people.

This year, approximately 33 million American families will celebrate the holidays with the fragrance and beauty of a real Christmas tree. There are approximately 1 million acres in production for Christmas trees.

The top Christmas tree producing states are Oregon, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Washington and Wisconsin. The

top selling Christmas trees are the balsam fir, Douglas fir, Fraser fir, Noble fir, Scotch pine, Virginian pine and white pine.

More than 100,000 people are employed full or part time in this industry, which pumps \$1 billion a year into the U.S. economy.

While it can take as many as 15 years to grow a tree of average height (six feet), the average growing time is seven to 10 years.

The secret to keeping a Christmas tree alive and healthy when you bring it into your home is to make a fresh cut on the bottom of your tree. When you place the tree in your stand, make sure it has plenty of water.

While you can spend money on additives that claim to keep the tree fresh, forego the expense and just add fresh water every day. Nothing works better.

As far as choosing a particular tree, pick a tree you like.

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Everyone has an opinion on what tree is the best. I like them all — firs, spruce, pine — the important thing is that the trees are watered after you cut them. That will keep the color looking rich and the tree looking beautiful.

So whatever tree you choose, real or artificial, have fun finding the perfect one for your family.

Thanking teachers who change lives

"Let me tell you about the teacher who changed my life!"

A year ago, I had spoken about the importance of teachers in students' lives. After the program and before I could leave the arena, I was stopped by parent after parent who wanted to tell me about a special teacher who had "been there" for them at a critical time in their school life.

I listened intently as one described how his teacher worked to help him read when he fell behind. Another was grateful to a teacher who convinced her to not drop out of school.

One parent remembered a teacher who restored her confidence and made her feel worthwhile at a time when she had no friends.

Outside the arena and on my way to my car, another parent recognized me and had to stop to tell me about his teacher who had worked outside of class to help him catch up in math. He learned that if he could stick with tasks that were hard, even if he didn't like it, he could work through them. And that was a skill he carried throughout life.

I visited a student teacher a few weeks ago. She was changing lives, too.

I don't sit at the back of the class where I can only see the back of students' heads. I sit at the side, so I can look back and see student's eyes. My student teacher was enthusiastic. As she taught the lesson, I could see student faces "light up." You could see the "Ah, ha!" in many eyes.

And that is exactly the phrase she used when we met with her principal during her planning period: "I like to see the 'Ah, ha!' in their eyes," she said. "I think I make a difference with some of them."

"She has made a difference in some student's lives," the principal confirmed.

He was eager to get her on payroll as soon as her student teaching was over. With her solid command of biology and chemistry, he needed her in the advanced classes.

"But I still want her to teach one introductory class," he said, "because with her enthusiasm, she can change the lives of some of them."

That was a very wise principal. He knew that no single teacher can change the lives of all of their students. Some students are self-



education frontlines

• John Schrock

motivated and grow under any teacher. And not all students have crisis points in their life where a teacher can rescue them.

Besides, student personalities vary. They don't all respond to the same teacher.

For the parents who related the special teacher that helped them out at a critical point in life, I know that they had classmates who had different "special teachers." An athlete may relate to a coach. Other students may accept guidance from a shop or home economics teacher. Teachers vary widely in personality. And so do students.

Take the "best" teacher at a school — by whatever measure you want to use — and clone them. Make every teacher in the whole school exactly like this "best" teacher, and you will have a monotonous school.

The real world is full of a wide range of personalities. School is a place where students learn to relate to and interact with this variation. Some teachers let you enter class a few seconds after the bell; others are demanding. Some are gentle. Some are strict.

where to write

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All teachers should know their subject and be able to communicate it. All should care that their students learn. But a diversity in teachers is critical for a good school.

Our children come into school different. They should graduate as unique individuals.

Much schoolwork is slow work. We learn to write our ABC's over years of tedious practice. We build our math skills from addition and subtraction to multiplication tables without much excitement. If the journey goes well, we may not remember those teachers that helped us stay on task. We may not remember them, but we would not be reading newspapers and budgeting our subscription rate without them.

I tell my student teachers not to expect their students to know how much the teacher changed their lives. We can all look inside ourselves, see all we have come to be, know and do — and then realize we never thanked our teachers for it. And all of those folks who eagerly explained to me how a teacher changed their life long ago, it's likely they never thanked that teacher either.

Our parents were the first teachers of us all. Most knew not to expect verbal thanks. Just watching us grow up had to suffice.

And for my student teachers, just seeing the "Ah, ha!" on some students faces will have to be reward enough.

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