

OPINION

THE HUTCHINSON NEWS

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EDITORIAL

Sebelius' legacy

The departing HHS secretary showed her mettle under fire

Kathleen Sebelius' legacy as Health and Human Services secretary should not be remembered for its failed rollout of the nation's first health care system.

Instead, the former governor of Kansas should be remembered as the HHS secretary who wouldn't give up, her stick-to-it-ness, if you will. Sebelius easily could have resigned rather than face the incredible fire from Republicans, including Sen. Pat Roberts, a fellow Kansan who supported Sebelius' confirmation and then turned tail and ran when the heat got too hot over the initial health care failure.

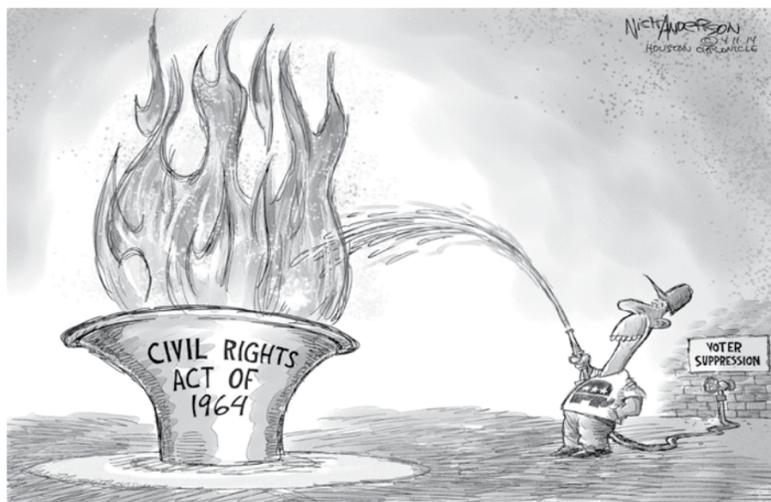
No one of sound mind thinks Sebelius actually constructed the website that couldn't get out of the starting blocks. But like most jobs in the corporate world, the leader at the top of the ladder takes the fall. It is pointless to debate whether Sebelius resigned of her own accord or if she was nudged by her boss, President Obama. It would seem that the time that has passed between the failed rollout and the successful

health care enrollment period would tell most that Sebelius left on her own terms. But conspiracy theorists will persist.

What truly matters is that the HHS secretary "got it fixed," as Obama noted Friday in bidding goodbye to Sebelius. That, she did. The latest count shows that 7.5 million Americans have signed up for Obamacare. That is remarkable considering the fits and starts that initially halted or caused sporadic disruptions during the initial enrollment. But the president and Sebelius vowed the website would be fixed. And it was, due in large part to the HHS secretary's refusal to give up.

So forget those initial woes involving signing up for the nation's first health care system. Disappointing? Without question. But also very much overshadowed by Sebelius' unwillingness to cry uncle.

And remember that a transplanted Kansan, who as a Democrat was elected in a red state, played a huge part in solving the myriad of problems involving the website. That is HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius' legacy.



COLUMNIST

Goodbye Democracy, hello Wealthocracy

On the surface, it seems that Kansas government is working precisely as it should – with voters largely supporting policies promoted by the state's lawmakers.

But what really happens under that shiny new dome in Topeka is a method of governance that operates in reverse order, where the approval of a few key lobbyists comes first, the approval of voters second.

What we have is a Wealthocracy, run by and for special interest groups that hand-pick their lawmakers, support them financially and control them with threat of defeat. This system doesn't begin with the interests of Kansans, but with the interests of those groups. Key issues – energy, taxes, regulation, tort reform, infrastructure, education, and social programs – are debated in a world where lobbyists dominate the conversation. And few lobbyists dominate like the Kansas Chamber of Commerce, Americans for Prosperity and the Kansas Policy Institute.

Take last week's battle over school funding. The House passed a clean bill, while the Senate loaded its version with policies straight from those groups' legislative agendas.

When it came time to reconcile the House and Senate bills, moderate House Republicans forced changes in the legislation. Before the final House vote, however, the aforementioned groups alerted lawmakers it was a "key vote" – a warning in the language of politics.

We urge your support of the Conference Committee Report on H Sub SB 218, "Kansas Chamber President and former Speaker of the House Mike O'Neal wrote in an email. "... More money alone is not the answer. More important is how educational resources are delivered, and by whom, and several of the policy provisions in the CCR are reasonably calculated to achieve a better educational outcome for our children and their families."

Likewise, Jeff Glendening with Americans for Prosperity, attempted to sway lawmakers.

"Although the education CCR spends more than necessary, the policy benefits outweigh the cost," Glendening wrote. "We appreciate your thoughtful support of this CCR."

Kansans for Liberty was a little more direct.

"Yesterday's action (vote against the original CCR) and today's revised bill are an insult to conservatives all across the state. The loss of the property tax credits in the current bill is an insult to the voting 17 percent of Kansas families that chose to homeschool and private school their children," the group's Craig Gabel wrote. "Kansans for Liberty, the Grassroots Coalition, home schoolers, private schoolers, Common Core activists and many other groups will be very active this year to support



Jason Probst

you. You can be assured that."

Those pointed messages secured the votes for passage.

Days later, in a newsletter to constituents, Rep. Virgil Peck proudly highlighted his pressure on House members and echoed the Kansas Chamber's message.

When working for the best educational opportunities in Kansas, more money alone is not the an-

swer – is codified and sold to voters. If those lawmakers develop a sense of independence, they are reminded of the price of disobedience, and the power of lobbyists' scorecards. Lobbying has its purpose, but when lawmakers feel subordinate to lobbyists, democracy has been subjugated.

This problem is exacerbated by the U.S. Supreme Court ruling that money is speech, and can't be restricted. Consider recent campaign finance reports for the gubernatorial race between Brownback and Democrat Paul Davis. While Davis recorded more than twice the number of individual donations, the governor raised

more money. Many of Davis' contributions were small – 2,517 donations under \$250, compared to 767 under-\$250 donations to Brownback; the governor made up the difference with larger donations.

Kansans weathered by harsh elements and life on the plains historically don't like the taste of a consolidated, powerful majority that aims to enrich itself while making life harder for the farmer, laborer, the sick and the poor. Yet, we seem to have in place a plutocracy in which its architects feel more powerful than the lawmakers elected to do the people's work. And while there is an argument that such a system is at work on both sides of the aisle – certainly true at the national level and in other states – that is not the case in Kansas. Here the GOP rules, and the split is between those who labor for their constituents and those

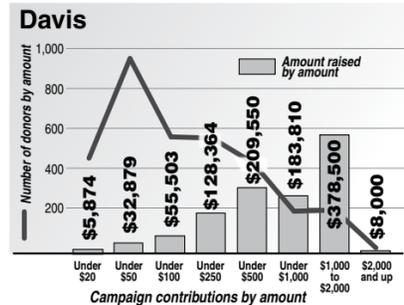
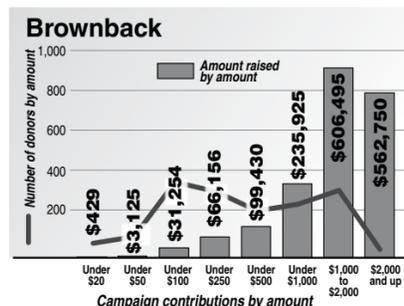
who pledge allegiance to their sponsors.

Does this form of government work for Kansas? Does a system that recruits, supports and influences lawmakers function as a Democracy? Does a system intensely focused on winning a political game truly have Kansans' best interests at heart?

If the answer is no, you don't have the luxury of watching from the sidelines and shaking your head at the dirty world of politics. The only cure is to restore Democracy through active engagement in the political process, counter the illegitimate messages of special interest groups, and use your vote – which despite all the money and effort spent to capture and control it, still matters in Kansas.

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Campaign contributions

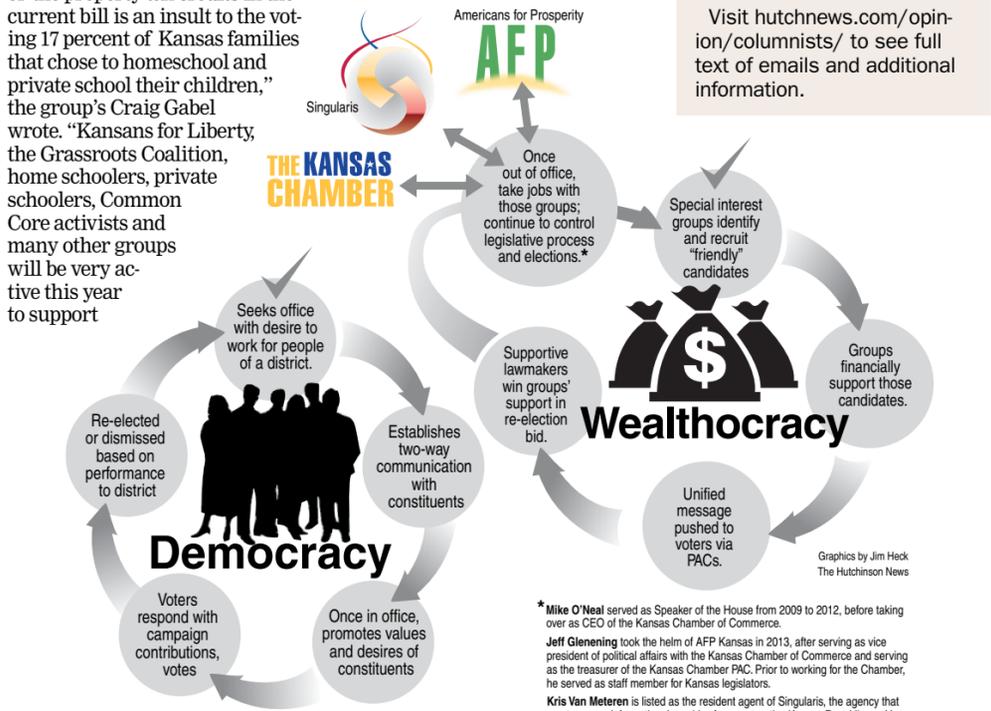


swer – it is important to keep our eye on the ball and focus on what is best for our children."

There's good reason to co-opt the Chamber's message, and for moderates to take threats to heart. In 2012, those same groups and Gov. Sam Brownback exorcised moderates from Topeka. Money flowed to senate districts carrying a deliberately misleading message about moderate lawmakers. Much of that material was produced by Singularis – a company that specializes in political material for conservative candidates. Not incidentally, the company is owned by former Kansas Republican Assembly Chairman Kris Van Meteren, who was instrumental in seating conservatives to the board of education in 2002.

While a Democracy is designed to elevate elected officials who communicate with and work for their constituents, a Wealthocracy works in reverse – lawmakers are chosen for their potential compliance. The message – however

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* Mike O'Neal served as Speaker of the House from 2009 to 2012, before taking over as CEO of the Kansas Chamber of Commerce. Jeff Glendening took the helm of AFP Kansas in 2013, after serving as vice president of political affairs with the Kansas Chamber of Commerce and serving as the treasurer of the Kansas Chamber PAC. Prior to working for the Chamber, he served as staff member for Kansas legislators. Kris Van Meteren is listed as the resident agent of Singularis, the agency that creates many informational graphics for conservative Kansas Republicans. Van Meteren formerly served as chair of the Kansas Republican Party and the Kansas Republican National Assembly.

This graphic was created from various news accounts, campaign finance and lobbying reports

COLUMNIST

... and this is Overkill Network

Enough, already.

Please, for the love of Cronkite: Give us a break from the missing plane. Yes, we all wonder what happened to it. Yes, our hearts go out to the families seeking resolution. But really, CNN ... enough. Put your hands up and step away from the story.

I'm in the doctor's office the other day, right? I'm waiting for my missus and the TV is on and I'm half watching, half reading and you're covering the plane. And time passes. And you're covering the plane. And commercials intervene and you come back and you're covering the plane. And my wife comes out and it's time to go and it's been a solid hour and you're still covering the plane. Nothing but the plane.

I'm on your website maybe six times a day, CNN, grazing for news. Have you had another lead story in the last month? Has nothing else of importance happened to any of the 7.1 billion people on this planet? I look at you and I want to start screaming like Tattoo on Fantasy Island: "De plane! De plane! De plane!"

And CNN, is it true your "coverage" includes asking whether aliens abducted Malaysia Airlines Flight 370? Or whether it was swallowed by the Bermuda Triangle? Did you actually wonder aloud if it had flown into a black hole?

Sigh.

You know what, CNN? I don't even watch cable news anymore. Haven't for years. Not interested in imbibing MSNBC's perennially aggrieved liberalism nor Fox's angry-all-the-time conservatism. Not interested in watching you play with your holograms, either. But there are days when you've got no choice. There's been a school shooting, a terrorist attack, a national election. On those days, CNN, I turn to you on the theory – or maybe just the faint hope – that there still flickers within you some faint, vestigial notion of what news is – some last bit of fealty to the ideal of getting the facts and telling the story, giving people information they need to understand their world and make decisions about their lives.

Yes, you're right. That's so 1978 of me.



Leonard Pitts

Look, CNN, I know that before this happened your numbers were in the tank and you were down to your last dozen viewers or so. I'm not without sympathy. Still, there's something sadly ... whorish in the way you chase the ratings bump this story has given you. One struggles to imagine the aforementioned Cronkite, much less the sainted Edward R. Murrow – peace be upon him – selling their newsmen's souls so nakedly just so their network might charge a little more for toilet paper commercials.

But then, Ed and Uncle Walter have left the building, haven't they? And yes, maybe they had the luxury of regarding the news as a public service, a sacred trust, consonant with Thomas Jefferson's belief that an informed electorate was vital to a self-governing nation. But you have no such luxury. What you have is a 24/7 news cycle and the need to fill it – if not with news, then speculation, if not speculation, then controversy, if not controversy, then opinion, if not opinion, then froth.

Fine. But this is not a trend without impact, CNN. We are becoming a stupider people. You see it in test scores, but you see it more viscerally in the way some of us equate higher volume with sounder logic, wear party as identity, refuse new information that challenges old beliefs, act as if everything must entertain us. Even the news.

It seems like somebody ought to take a stand against that. Just saying.

Granted, the missing jetliner is not an unimportant story. But neither is it a story deserving of the kind of round-the-clock, man-on-the-moon, war-is-over, presidential-assassination coverage you have given it.

CNN, that jet isn't the only thing lost. Have you seen your credibility lately?

Email Leonard Pitts at lpitts@miamiherald.com.

WESTERN FRONT

Everyone can be a hero

Responding to W. M. "Mac" Stromberg's Western Front letter in the Hutchinson News on April 8 concerning "The True Heroes." Mr. Stromberg is the true misguided individual here. Along with being uneducated and outdated, he shows a true showing of discriminatory and bigotry beliefs toward individuals who also show great courage in "coming out."

There is no doubt that those special brave individuals who

have chosen to enter into serving as police officers, firefighters, and our military deserve our respect and are indeed heroes, along with being role models, some who were born LGBT individuals. However, any individual, born male, female, LGBT, various race color, can be and often are also true heroes by being allowed to be who they were born to be, and are also true role models and deserve everyone's respect, even Mr. Stromberg's.

MYRON TAYLOR HARRIS
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