

Opinion



BLOG BIT Remember all the great news a few weeks ago that Ford would invest \$1.1 billion in its Claycomo assembly plant and add 1,600 employees? It came with a catch and it's a big one: Ford employees nationwide have to approve a new contract for this deal — and the automaker's other U.S. expansion plans — to go forward. Kansas Citians have a lot at stake as Claycomo workers prepare for a vote scheduled for today on that proposed contract.

Yael T. Abouhalkah, Kansas City Star editorial page columnist, on the Midwest Voices blog at voices.kansascity.com

THE STAR'S EDITORIAL

A new crime lab and police station are planned near 27th and Prospect

A project for the neighborhood, and the city

Transforming the long-troubled intersection of 27th Street and Prospect Avenue into a safe hub for Kansas City's urban core neighborhoods is a worthwhile mission. It's also extremely challenging, given the area's history.

The intersection was the epicenter of destructive riots in 1968 after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. By the 1990s, small crosses were planted there to honor the city's murder victims, many killed in nearby blocks. Mayors Kay Barnes and Mark Funkhouser both chose the spot in the last decade to discuss their urban renewal visions.

Now comes a bold plan to boost the area's fortunes: Build a new police station and a regional crime lab on a 20-acre parcel northwest of 27th Street and Prospect Avenue.

The project would be a marked improvement over much of what exists on Prospect and Brooklyn avenues and other streets in the four-block area: vacant properties, dilapidated houses and piles of litter on sidewalks.

Still, about three dozen owner-occupied houses make up about one-fourth of the area. The city is using federal funds to help with relocation, so it has pledged to boost payments for owner-occupied houses up to 150 percent of appraised values and help homeowners find adequate housing elsewhere.

Suburban dwellers and Kansas City resi-

dents alike know all about the disturbing problems that afflict the city's core. Blight is widespread. Crime is too high. Successful businesses are few. For this entire region to thrive in the future, those troubles need more attention.

The Police Department's \$57 million proposal was the top priority on the list of public safety projects funded by a voter-renewed sales tax in 2010.

The project is designed to tackle a number of problems. It will:

- Encourage more private investment in surrounding blocks.

- Increase positive interaction between local residents and officers.

- Remove blight by tearing down abandoned houses.

- Offer fair relocation benefits for homeowners.

Many of these steps are connected. Eliminating blight — and boosting the presence of police officers — could make it more attractive for businesses to invest nearby.

Offering a community meeting room in the future station to residents could lead to improved relations with officers. The city chose the site because it met all the factors used to evaluate potential locations. The city reasonably ruled out sites with environmental problems and those too close to highways or rail-



FRED BLOCHER | THE KANSAS CITY STAR

Prospect Avenue looking northwest from 27th Street, toward a portion of the proposed 20-acre site for a new crime lab and police station.

roads, which could cause ground vibrations and thus problems for sensitive crime lab equipment.

The new East Patrol station will be many miles from the easternmost parts of the city. Police promise response times to those areas won't suffer because patrol cars aren't dis-

patched from the station. Still, those times must be monitored in the future.

The new station is a high priority for the East Side, and the crime lab will benefit the entire region. They are sound public investments, with the potential to create a brighter future for nearby neighborhoods.

LETTERS

Ending illegal dumps

I offer a plan that will eliminate a large portion of the material that people dump illegally: In certain areas, stop limiting households to two bags of trash a week.

Offer more special-item dump sites, such as for tires, and pick up all trash put on the curb.

Curb trash is an even bigger problem. The last time I drove through the area, it looked like large-item pickup day in Johnson County.

What the city is doing is not working. Change it. Assign trucks to roam the area picking up all trash at curbside.

It is a service that will cost more money so cut something else. But it will add to the area's appearance.

It's not fair to residents who do care and who would want to invest in the area when it looks like it does.

Just fix it. Pick up the trash.
Marlin Weyer
Overland Park

Violence in schools

I am really concerned about the safety of the children in our schools. Why is there so much violence?

I sometimes wonder whether home schooling is the safest way to go. I also wonder what makes the kids so violent at school.

Is it because of the treatment they are getting there, or is it something else?

Brandi York
Overland Park

Obama missing in D.C.

If doing nothing to help the economy is not an option, as President Barack Obama says, then Mr. President, stay in Washington, D.C., and work with those who can do something.

Going to every corner of this country does nothing but give you face time, not work time.

Marilyn Lager
Overland Park

Ford jobs to benefit KC

Kansas City is still struggling in the current economic downturn. Yet despite all that, there has been some remarkable news in our community this year.

The United Auto Workers recently negotiated a new agreement with Ford Motor Co. that will add 12,000 new jobs throughout the country and make significant investments in domestic manu-

JUDGE'S OPINION



"THERE'S ABSOLUTELY NO NEED FOR CONGRESS TO GET INVOLVED IN POLICING HUMAN GROWTH HORMONE... NOW PUT ON YOUR SIZE 12 1/2 HELMET AND GO PLAY."

facturing.

Ford will invest about \$1 billion in its Claycomo plant and add 1,600 jobs (10/5, A1, "Ford to add 1,600 jobs").

The prospect of new American jobs marks a step forward, especially considering how often we hear about companies moving jobs to Mexico or overseas.

Ford's local impact is hard to overstate. Ford alone employs 4,000 people and provides business to nearly 100 Missouri suppliers.

The United Auto Workers should be congratulated for negotiating an agreement that expands this footprint and continues to make American manufacturing a priority.

UAW members will vote this afternoon on its tentative agreement with Ford.

The agreement, if approved, will be a victory for our community and for the Ford workers at the Claycomo plant.

I hope, when the voting is over, we are celebrating that victory.

Jim Hampton
Executive Director
Clay County Economic
Development Council
Kansas City

Buses, not streetcars

Many years ago I worked downtown, and they had a bus that ran from Crown Center to the River Market. The fare was

low, and it ran (as I remember) during the lunch hour.

Instead of spending all that money on installing rails, why not use buses for the same thing? They're infinitely more maneuverable.

Teddi Oppenheimer
Overland Park

4th District dud

Voters of the 4th U.S. Congressional District, do we need Rep. Vicky Hartzler? Do we want a representative who takes federal farm subsidies, and then expects the government to stay out of how taxpayers' money is spent?

Ours does.
Do we want a representative who worries about light bulbs while the national debt is falling apart?

Ours does.
Do we want a representative who allows billions of dollars of subsidies to oil companies that make billions of dollars in earnings?

Ours does.
Do we want a representative who votes for large cuts to Medicare, Social Security, Medicaid, education and unemployment benefits while giving large subsidies and tax cuts and breaks to the wealthy?

Ours does.
Do we want a representative who is a tea party favorite, with the likes of Michele Bachmann, Sarah Palin and Rand

Paul?

We have one.

Of course if all people in the 4th District are wealthy, I can understand the high approval of voters.

My goal is to keep the truth highlighted on the representative. She signs pledges for people other than the 4th District and beats down the poor and middle class to boost the wealthy.

George Wheelton
Archie, Mo.

Backward in Kansas

Topeka's repeal of its misdemeanor domestic battery law shouldn't surprise anyone after the Gov. Sam Brownback-led march of Kansas into the 19th century.

After scrapping the Arts Commission to save a few bucks ("We don't need no stinkin' arts"), we can count on the guardians of Kansas to solve its budgetary woes by eliminating any frivolous uses of taxpayer dollars.

Perhaps the rumors are true that Governor Sam is also contemplating reliance on vigilantes to save the money spent in the courts dealing with capital murder cases if he can't convince Marshal Matt Dillon to leave his Dodge City nursing home to protect us.

Martin Zehr
Kansas City

Voice for voters in U.S.

As this is still a republic I'm displeased with the leadership of the House and Senate that saw fit to silence my voice. In circumventing Congress they turned their backs to the electorate and reinforced Congress' lack of fortitude.

The very principle set forth in our Constitution in James Madison's vision of a passionate House and a deliberative Senate has been thwarted and makes obvious to me that Thomas Jefferson's fear of a political class may indeed have come to pass.

If there is to be compromise it should be made in the light of day not the dead of night. At such a critical juncture if the members of the House and Senate are at such an impasse that they can't put aside their differences to do what is painfully right for the future and good of our nation then everyone of them should abdicate and allow the voice of the people to shake Washington, D.C., loose from the shackles of bureaucratic self-preservation.

We need true innovation in streamlining government functions and a lengthy public discussion must begin of its boundaries within the confines of our traditional economic heritage.

Michael Bolton
Shawnee

Fixing Social Security

In discussing taxes and expenditures, it is misleading to claim that most people don't have any skin in the game. Every wage earner has skin in the game.

Most have more at stake than the top executives and those whose income from capital gains is capped at 15 percent.

How can that be when right-wing propagandists shout that "47 percent of Americans pay no income taxes?" Easy. Those 47 percent pay payroll taxes on every penny they earn, while those who make more than \$106,000 in taxable income pay nothing above that limit.

And that suggests the fair solution to what the right-wing touts as the Social Security "crisis."

Lifting the cap off the payroll taxes will take care of much of the "crisis," which, by the way, won't occur even at today's levels for many years.

Albert de Zutter
Kansas City

Costly pothole blues

After my car had four new tires put on at NTB, less than 30 minutes later I ran into a two-foot deep pothole on Ward Parkway.

Hundreds of dollars for a new wheel and hours spent later, the city won't pay anything for my wheel because I was told "the city must have had prior notice of a defective or dangerous condition and failed to correct the condition or barricade the area in question."

So if I were clairvoyant and informed city officials before I hit the pothole — maybe the week before I hit it — it would be fixed and would never have happened?

Maybe I should report it to my insurance company.

So if you hit a pothole in Kansas City expect the city to be in no way responsible.

Drive the streets at your own risk. That's the message from Kansas City officials.

It certainly makes me feel better about paying taxes to the city for what services?

Again I forget — public works, was it?

Maybe it was the legal department so it can shut the door in my face.

That must be my tax dollars at work.

Imagine my confidence in local public affairs.

Drew Hodgdon
Kansas City

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