

OPINION

THE HUTCHINSON NEWS

Editorial Board

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EDITORIAL

Wiley saga

With problem spreading to Fox, city should revisit acquisition

The latest flap involving the Wiley building significantly underscores the "silliness factor" associated with an owner who not only is absent but cannot adequately maintain the building he owns.

All of which prompts a necessary return to discussion that the city of Hutchinson purchase the building for a new City Hall quarters, or if necessary, begin the process of eminent domain to wrest the building from the hands of owner and Arizona resident George Nerhan.

The latest incident involving Nerhan centers on who owns a fourth-floor building bridge that connects the Fox Theatre, 18 E. First Ave., and the Wiley building, 100 N. Main St.

Fox Theatre officials say they have the documents to prove the Fox owns it. Nerhan argues he has a lease agreement dated March 1997 that states that Timothy Shaffer assigned the lease for the bridge and the third and fourth floors of the Fox Theatre to Nerhan. But the document also states the lease expired on Aug. 31, 2000.

The latter seemingly would resolve the dispute. But not in Nerhan's view. Wiley management recently reported criminal damage and criminal trespass to Hutchinson Police after a hole was cut into the fourth-floor door. Fox officials admitted they authorized the entry because they own the door.

The theater's legal counsel, Brad Dillon, said property title documents show the theater owns the bridge and upper floors. Dillon

plans to file a lawsuit in an attempt to settle the ownership battle, a move supported by Police Chief Dick Heitschmidt, whose department seems caught in the middle.

"This whole situation is going to have to be decided by the district court," Heitschmidt said. "We aren't going to be able to determine who is the actual property owner."

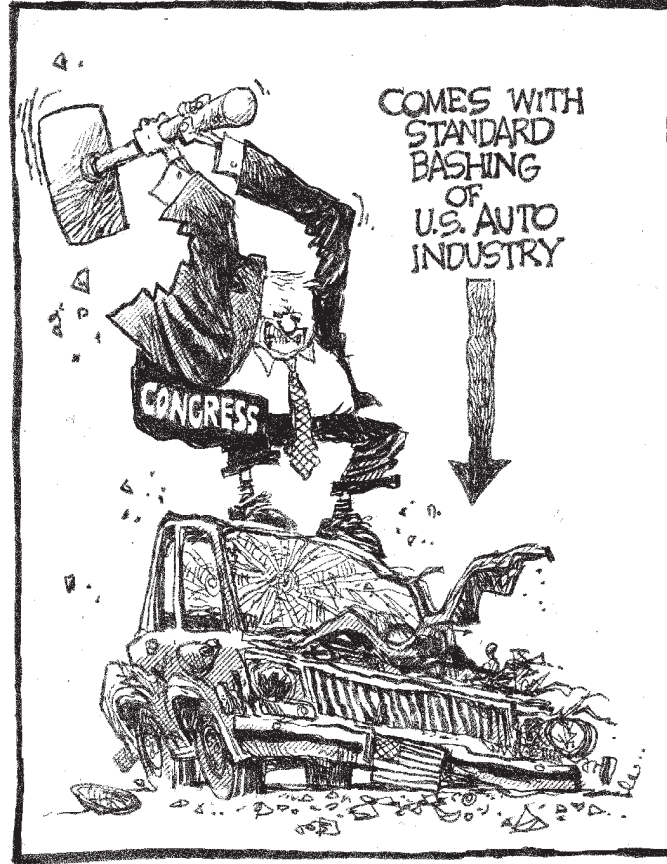
It would seem that an outdated agreement ought to be proof enough that Nerhan no longer has leasing power. But he seems intent on making a nuisance of himself, based on past squabbles with the city and his inability to maintain the Wiley building, which ultimately affects the nearby Fox.

Nerhan claims he is unable financially to replace Wiley's boiler, which conked out last winter. The Fox's executive director, Mary Hemmings, noted the Wiley's condition might be contributing to humidity issues the Fox is experiencing.

The city needs to do something, or Hutchinson risks continued deterioration of a once-grand building in the heart of downtown and possible damage to a beautiful and historic theater that cost millions of dollars to refurbish.

The Hutchinson City Council previously gave a thumbs-down to buying the building and moving City Hall. Acquiring the building through eminent domain is a distasteful thought and certainly a last resort.

But Nerhan's latest silly dispute, added to his continued inability or unwillingness to care for the Wiley building properly, should move the city to revisit how to acquire the building.



COLUMNISTS

Nightmare on Facebook



Kathleen Parker

WASHINGTON – It always seems like fun at the time. Then the photo surfaces.

Two guys, some beer and a cardboard cutout of Hillary Clinton have created fresh grief for the young and uninitiated to Washington Rules.

In the latest blog scandal-ette, Jon Favreau, a Holy Cross valetictorian and 27-year-old wunderkind speechwriter for Barack Obama, was captured clutching the prospective secretary of state's, um, pectoral area, while a fellow reveler, wearing an "Obama Staff" T-shirt, nuzzles Clinton's ear and holds a beer bottle to her smiling lips.

The photo popped up on Facebook for a couple of hours before being removed ... too late. The moment was captured and the rest was instant and persistent history. On the Information Highway, alas, roadkill is never really dead.

One day, Favreau was the golden boy of silken tongue. The next, he was just another dimwitted dude acting dumb.

The blogosphere the past few days has begun to resemble Durham, N.C., circa 2006 following the alleged Duke lacrosse team/strip-rape nonincident: Pitchforks ready, torches lit.

Feminists groups such as NOW and The New Agenda are outraged that Clinton – or at least her image – is being treated disrespectfully by the boys. Conservatives are outraged that there's not enough outrage, as would be the case were the party boys Republicans.

An attorney wrote on the Feminist Law Professors blog that Favreau should not be excused for "youthful indiscretion" and questioned Obama's judgment "in continuing to rely professionally on someone so young and irresponsible and offensively sexist."

FitzWalter, quickly, my smelling salts! Oh, and dust off the guillotine

while you're at it.

Only Hillary Clinton has made light of the "incident," hereinafter known as Night of BBB (Boys Being Boys). In an e-mail to The Washington Post's Al Kamen, a Clinton adviser wrote: "Senator Clinton is pleased to learn of Jon's obvious interest in the State Department, and is currently reviewing his application."

Hear, hear: Nipping nonsense in the bud is an essential skill for a secretary of state and Clinton used her shears deftly. If anyone recognizes a little harmless male sport, it would be the bride of President "Is." One thing is harmful; another thing isn't.

Nevertheless, Clinton's response has fallen short of what some deem appropriate. CNN's Campbell Brown charged Clinton with forfeiting her feminist cred, especially after issuing her own charges of sexism throughout the presidential campaign. Now that Clinton's a member of the Obama team, she suddenly has a sense of humor?

All of the above would be nonsense except that almost nothing any longer is. Nonsense is the new standard for controversy; and even party shenanigans qualify.

Puritans and prohibitionists would adore our brave new world of shutter-bug infamy. The fact is, no one's having fun anymore, especially in the nation's capital, where one can't afford to let the tongue slip or risk being caught in the cross hairs of a cell cam-

era. Political veterans have learned, sometimes the hard way. This new generation – the Obama cohort – needs to review The Rules. Smart grown-ups in Washington don't get drunk in public. A glass of wine is a prop that rarely gets drained.

At a small, private dinner recently, where wine flowed freely (and no one took pictures), conversation turned to the day when politicians and others routinely enjoyed three-martini lunches. How did they do that? Not just the drinking, but the escape from scrutiny?

It was all about time. In low-tech America, people had time to sober up. There was no e-mail light blinking to demand your immediate attention, no insistent cell phones blasting "Fur Elise" into one's pocket or purse; no 24/7 news producers demanding instant responses to urgent claims and counterclaims. Several hours – or even a few days – could pass before anyone had to Do Something.

For all the gratification and convenience of real-time everything, downtime was underappreciated while it lasted. Even 10 years ago, BBB would have been vaguely recalled over Bloody Marys – and quickly forgotten. Now young men goofing around are immortalized as misogynist maulers, portentous reminders to the rest of us that the gender wars won't end until irreverence and humor are dead.

In the meantime, feminists might channel their free-ranging anger toward, say, Iran, where yet another woman recently was sentenced to death by stoning for adultery.

And Facebookers might heed the saloon owner's orders: Check your weapons at the door. Cameras are lethal.

Kathleen Parker's e-mail address is kparker@kparker.com.

WESTERN FRONT

Automaker bailout vital

One out of every 10 jobs in this country is auto-related, with the big three supporting five million jobs across all 50 states. This is why the federal proposal to help the auto industry is so important, especially in Kansas, where thousands are employed at the General Motors Fairfax Assembly Plant.

In these difficult times, history is the best teacher. In 1979, Chrysler Corp. faced a situation remarkably similar to the current crisis facing the auto industry. After a year of record high gas prices, economic turmoil, and with a stockpile of inefficient vehicles, Chrysler was on the verge of bankruptcy. In response, President Carter proposed a \$1.5 billion loan guarantee program. The plan required Chrysler to curtail executive pay, generate major concessions from unions and adhere to strict government oversight. The loans were paid off within three years, and thousands of jobs were saved. Additionally, the government made more than \$330 million from fees and the sale of stock warrants.

As we work through the crisis of 2008, hard-working Kansas families must not be expected to foot the bill for executive mismanagement. United Auto Workers have been actively working with GM leaders to help restructure and save the company. Already retiree health insurance has been conceded as part of negotiations. Suggestions that Fairfax workers make \$76 an hour are highly exaggerated. Midline employees at the Fairfax plant make approximately \$15 to 16 an hour, with average earnings at approximately \$26 an hour and highly skilled professionals earning approximately \$32 an hour. This is well below the inflated rate circulating in the media. The auto industry must be saved, but not at the expense of workers.

GM's Fairfax Assembly Plant in Kansas City employs 2,640 workers and pays over \$10 million per year in property taxes. With the Fairfax plant already facing slowdowns and layoffs, a GM bankruptcy would devastate the Kansas economy. In addition to the employees actually working at the plant, numerous local businesses rely on the plant's purchase of their products and services. A crash in this backbone of America's manufacturing sector would create a devastating ripple effect, leaving just a matter of time be-

fore the aerospace industry (which has already lost 1,800 jobs in Wichita in recent months) could suffer the same fate. We all have a vested interest in urging our senators and congressmen to save the auto industry, protecting both Kansas jobs and the hard workers filling them.

**DENNIS MCKINNEY
 JIM WARD
 Kansas House Democratic
 Leaders
 Topeka**

Law filled with loopholes

Under our Constitution the first responsibility of the government is to protect its citizens. When it comes to marriage fraud, the United States government has failed and in many instances will collaborate with perpetrators.

Because of the Violence Against Woman Act, a foreign national, man or woman, can claim they were abused, verbally or physically, by their American spouse and they may be granted a visa. The standards of proof held by the immigration service under VAWA are so low they are nonexistent.

The American spouse of the foreigner has no right to know of claims made against them unless a criminal charge is filed. In effect, the foreigner can say anything, and you, a citizen of the United States, have no right to defend yourself, no matter how scurrilous the lies may be.

Keep in mind the foreigner making the claim of abuse has a vested interest in making you sound as bad as possible and will be represented by an attorney who specializes in doing whatever it takes, no matter how unethical, to destroy your good name.

Who is there to defend this citizen? No one; you are at the mercy of whatever distortion a high paid lawyer can conjure, all done in darkness, behind closed doors – a government turning against its own citizens.

On the surface, VAWA sounds great; how can anyone be against violence against woman? But with any legislation, the devil is always in the details.

VAWA has opened loopholes in the law big enough to drive a bus through. And many predatory foreigners armed with foreknowledge of these loopholes and ready lists of attorneys are boarding that bus for a free trip to the U.S. at the expense and welfare of an American citizen.

**GREGORY H. BONTRAGER
 Hutchinson**

WESTERN FRONT POLICY

The News accepts Western Front letters from readers who want to share an opinion.

Please sign your name and include your phone number and address. We call to verify all letters before publication and strive to publish them within

one week of verification. Please limit letters to 500 words. No poems, consumer complaints, business testimonials or group petitions will be accepted. All letters are subject to editing for space considerations and libel concerns.

Thanks to legal community

Nov. 14, 2008, saw Marvin J. Gifford Jr., appear in Reno County District Court before Judge Richard Rome. He entered guilty pleas to all 13 felony counts with which he was charged, included capital murder, two counts of attempted capital murder and related sexual batteries. Although he shed tears, we should not be duped. During the hearing, Gifford stated that he had intended to kill other victims.

The conclusion can easily be drawn that Gifford entered a guilty plea because law enforcement investigators and prosecutors from Reno County District Attorney Keith Schroeder's office, the Kansas Bureau of Investigation, Reno County Sheriff's office, Buhler Police Department, Hutchinson Police Department, South Hutchinson Police Department and McPherson Police Department dedicated an enormous amount of time and effort toward apprehending him and amassing evidence against him. He knew a jury would convict him and feared he would be sentenced to death. Overwhelmed by the evidence, he became concerned only with saving his own life.

Having received a life sentence without parole plus 114 years, Gifford is now out of circulation forever.

Where he resides, there will be no defenseless, elderly ladies over whom he can exercise his twisted desire for power as he tortures and murders.

We offer our heartfelt thanks to members of the task force who worked so hard, so quietly, so efficiently and prosecuted so brilliantly that this immensely important case was brought to a successful conclusion without the need for a trial that would have been extremely difficult for victims and families. Criminals such as Gifford frighten us and threaten our security, but we can rest assured that he will not assault and kill innocent people again.

**JACK L. HEIDEBRECHT
 Brother of Pearl Arthaud
 Glen Haven, Colo.**

Remember charities

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the heartfelt efforts of the Reno County Salvation Army. Not just in times like these, but in everyday living. They have taken steps to lower prices and had their yearly coat drive this year.

I have heard many residents of this county constantly worried about how they would be able to supply the domestic needs of their families on some of the income they bring in. Most feel after housing, food, gas and taxes, they

have little or none left for the extras. This year the used clothing stores and free clothing/domestic have, or at least some have, done their best to keep the costs free or affordable to be able to supply their needs.

It, however, was a great sadness to not only hear of but also see for myself some of our self-help used clothing/domestic stores raising prices (coat in one store: \$40). The department stores are doing better than this for our community. I am appalled. I understand overhead, and much of the profits go to charities. I do, however, feel that raising prices, or the existing prices, is unrealistic to the economic structure of our economy today.

I urge all of us to give wisely. Please find that the following charitable places will either sell items at a reasonable price or give them away. If you are in need, please look them up. If you have items to give, please be generous.

Grace Episcopal Church – 2 Hyde Park Drive
 The Soup Kitchen
 The Salvation Army
 I am not affiliated with any of the above, but I have found that they are the best examples of care and compassion for our community.

**DARLENE JOHNSON
 Hutchinson**

Doonesbury

