

Department heads cause president pain

President Bush has got to be seeing red. If not then he's insensitive to some pretty touchy issues.

Comments from Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan and Education Secretary Rod Paige are what you would call "ill-timed" as Mr. Bush kicks off his campaign for re-election.

But he will be pestered time and time again by media, baby boomers nearing retirement and teachers.

Greenspan yesterday urged Congress to deal with the nation's ever-bulging budget deficit by slicing benefits for future Social Security retirees rather than raising taxes.

Paige called the nation's largest teachers union a "terrorist organization."

Greenspan said the deficit situation with a projected record red ink of \$521 billion this year will get much worse once the baby boomer generation becomes eligible for Social Security benefits in just four short years.

Greenspan said the benefits now received by current retirees should not be touched but suggested trimming benefits for future retirees and doing it soon enough so they can begin making adjustments to their own finances to better prepare for retirement. Also mentioned was raising the retirement age.

All of that's going to go over like a lead balloon.

Bush's face had to resemble a pretzel when he heard Greenspan spit those words out.

His education secretary is trying very hard to excuse his absolutely asinine comments about the National Education Association being a "terrorist organization." He said he chose poor words but continues to stand by his claim that the group uses "obstructionist scare tactics" in its fight over the nation's education laws. They, the NEA, is using scare tactics to no greater degree than this administration does when it wants to sell us on a questionable need, cause or program.

Add Greenspan and Paige to Sen. John Kerry as reasons for the Bush re-election troops to be mighty concerned at this point in time. You don't fool around with Social Security benefits and with the guys and gals in education, such as these Bush appointees are doing. That adds up to millions of votes.

It spells trouble no matter how the President tries to distance himself from Greenspan's recommendations and Paige's comments.

— Tom A. Dreiling



Seeds are sown, now we wait for crop

This is the time during the legislative session where all the seed is in the ground and it is time to wait and see what sprouts and then determine the quality of the stand.

The temptation is to talk about the seed and to dig around and make sure it's OK but I am going to leave the seed alone for a week. This session I have testified in several committees where I don't expect a harvest for a couple of years because an education process has to prepare the seed-bed.

Medicaid is the largest health care program in America serving 51 million people at an annual cost of \$280 billion which increases from 8 to 13 percent annually. It provides health care coverage to one in four children; pays for 37 percent of all deliveries; and over 50 percent of all mental health care. Up to 45 percent of all federal grants to states are through the Medicaid program and 17 percent of all health care is paid by Medicaid.

Medicaid today serves 11 million more people than Medicare. Within five years it will be larger than the retirement benefits paid by social security. If state budgets would increase tax receipts by 5 percent annually and Medicaid costs continue to increase at their current rate, by 2020 Medicaid will consume the entire

Senate Doings

Sen. Stan Clark



budgets of every state in the union.

Doing nothing is not an option. Last fiscal year Medicaid costs in Kansas were \$1,561,529,097 which is an increase of \$61 million over 2002 which saw an increase of \$221 million 2001.

What can be done?

I want to outline 14 initiatives for the Legislature, but only when we address health insurance costs do we start to take the pressure off the Medicaid system. Medicaid has to exist as a safety net. Our state has to be an advocate for health coverage options.

One of these options is Health Savings Accounts. These are part of the Medicare reform measure that passed Congress in November. They operate under the theory that people should have a financial stake in their health care dollars. A high-deductible health insurance policy is purchased to cover catastrophic medical needs and annual contributions to the savings ac-

count are limited to 100 percent of the deductible or up to \$2,600 for an individual or \$5,150 for a family. Contributions are tax-exempt. They will help families pay for routine medical expenses, premiums on long-term care policies and for health insurance when a person is between jobs.

When you retire any unpaid sick or vacation time can be put into this account, tax-free, to pay future Medicare premiums. I have suggested to the governor and to legislative leaders that this concept should be an option for participants in the Kansas State Employees Health Plan. My family would jump at this option.

The president is proposing this year to establish refundable tax credits of up to \$1,000 for individuals and \$3,000 for families to help low income workers buy health insurance.

This year the Kansas Legislature changing health insurance laws to allow and encourage these accounts.

The individual has to have a personal stake in the costs of his or her health care.

Contact me on this or any issue. I can be reached by writing to Sen. Stan Clark, State Capitol-Room 449-N, Topeka, KS 66612; by calling 1-800-432-3924 or 785-296-7399; by FAX at 801-457-9064; or by e-mail at sclark@ink.org.

Trip is less than romantic

Maybe every adventure these days has to begin in the back of the coach cabin of an overcrowded 777.

I can tell you, it's not very romantic.

They have taken all the "leg room" out of coach, and they've started shaving away the lap room. And planes are full of boorish people who think it's still OK to lean back and drop your seat into the next person's lap.

I am writing this with the keyboard resting on my chest. The woman ahead of me is reading a novel and probably had no idea the havoc she is causing back behind.

I know, there are some who would lose no sleep if I could not write, but where there is a will, there is a way.

It would be bad to pour my soda down her back. So I will take my revenge out in print.

I can't see out the window, so I'm not sure. The woman to my right wears a mask to protect her from germs and spends her time reading New Age religious tracts. She is reading the Bible right now, but she seems pleasant enough. I read the Bible, too.

With new security, we are strapped into

On the Prairie Dog

Steve Haynes



our seats while we approach Washington. There is so little room in coach that it would be difficult to stage an uprising.

Time was when flying was an adventure eagerly awaited. Today it more to be endured.

Over the years, the airline meal shrank from a lunch on a tray to a sandwich to a snack contained in a tiny box. Still, the snack usually was edible and nourishing.

Such opulence is a thing of the past. If you want a box lunch, it's \$10.

And the quality is worse than the former free snack. It is plastic food at it's finest.

Why am I complaining? I can type by contorting myself. I don't have to eat.

I will change planes at Dulles, leaving there on Air France. And you know how the French feel about their food, their wine and their service.

High school wasn't always automatic

Mother tells the story of running across the bridge to the post office in Edmond. She was in eighth grade (about 1917) and her future well might be contained in an envelope from the Norton County Superintendent.

If she didn't pass the exams she could not go on to high school. She would run quickly, ask for the envelope and day-after-day for over a month it didn't arrive.

Then finally one day, the dreaded and anticipated letter was handed over. The feelings of excitement and fear penetrated the red-headed child.

When she got to the bridge south east of town, she sat down on the railing and just looked at it. Once opened there was no going back.

She doesn't remember how long she remained perched on the wooden rail before summoning up her courage. Finally she tore it open, read over the words carefully and ran home as fast as she could to share the good news.

Phase II

Mary Kay Woodyard



Times are not so different, as I listen to my great nephews as they await word from the colleges that will seal their fate, at least for the coming year. Certain aspects are different; the amount of income needed to pursue a career is a larger percentage of our take home pay than in Mother's day, certainly a girl's choices are more varied and attainable, but the feelings of excitement and dread remain.

Hope for tomorrow looms high in the thoughts of those ready to embark upon their future.

You often hear people say, "I would love to go back with the knowledge I have now."

But how many things would our experiences keep us from doing. We tend to only think of the ways we would succeed if we had that knowledge, we fail to look at the missed opportunities our "experiences" and "wisdom" would keep us from trying and frequently those become our most treasured successes.

Preparing to our children into another chapter in their lives is difficult for us parents.

How will they know where to go, what to do and with whom? Who will impart those words of wisdom from the parenting manual? How will they get along without us?

I always tell my children that God talks to me about what they should do until they are 18, then He talks to them directly, but once in awhile I'm still needed for interpretation.

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