

A difference of opinion is not a bad thing

The Norton School Board didn't take our suggestion on what to do with a refund from its health insurance company, and that's fine.

The board had several options for using the money, which it received because Blue Cross and Blue Shield overestimated the cost of employee health insurance over the last year.

Part of the refund automatically went back to employees who had paid into the plan. The rest came from the district and could be used in any way the board felt was good.

The board looked at giving the money back to the employees — all or just those in the health insurance group — or putting it into a special account, like capital outlay.

We thought the money should be put in capital outlay. We wrote an editorial saying so and we received some comments from teachers telling us why those who had put money into the plan should get the money.

One woman in particular talked to us. She had questions about the editorial. Her arguments were well formed and she was cordial and open.

At the end of our discussion we parted, not agreeing, but believing that dialog is sometimes more important than perfect agreement.

We continue in that belief.

We don't agree with what the board has done — give the money back to those who paid into the plan — but we honor them for their discussion and their openness.

Open discussion and disagreement are as important to a free society as air, light and water are to life.

The scariest thing for our freedom is to see a board, committee or group agree on everything all the time. If that happens, people are not thinking and acting freely.

OK, so we don't agree with the board. Maybe next time we will.

Thank you for taking the time and thought to look at the problem, examine the solutions and come up with an answer, one that may not suit all of us, but is what the majority thinks is best.

— Cynthia Haynes

Japanese decide to import beef again

U.S. Senator Pat Roberts and U.S. Congressman Jerry Moran applauded the decision by the Japanese government to reopen their market to U.S. beef.

"This is great news for Kansas producers at the holidays" Sen. Roberts said. "I am glad we were able to convince the Japanese to base their trade policy on sound science and recognize the quality and safety of U.S. beef."

"We must now remain diligent to ensure that the Japanese resume imports in a manner that is quick and consistent with the agreement between our two countries. We must also continue efforts to reopen all international markets to United States beef."

"After two years of negotiations, the lifting of this unscientific ban allows Kansas producers and American agriculture to regain access to this important market," Rep. Moran said. "The Japanese people can be confident the beef they have imported from the U.S. is among the safest in the world. This promising development is a step toward greater market access in Japan, as we continue working to expand the sale of Kansas products in the global market."

At issue was the delay by the Japanese government in resuming beef trade, based on internationally recognized science, with the U.S. Sen. Roberts and Rep. Moran each introduced legislation to impose tariffs on Japanese products if beef trade was not resumed.

Other efforts by them have included meetings with President Bush, the Japanese Ambassador, the U.S. Trade Representative and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

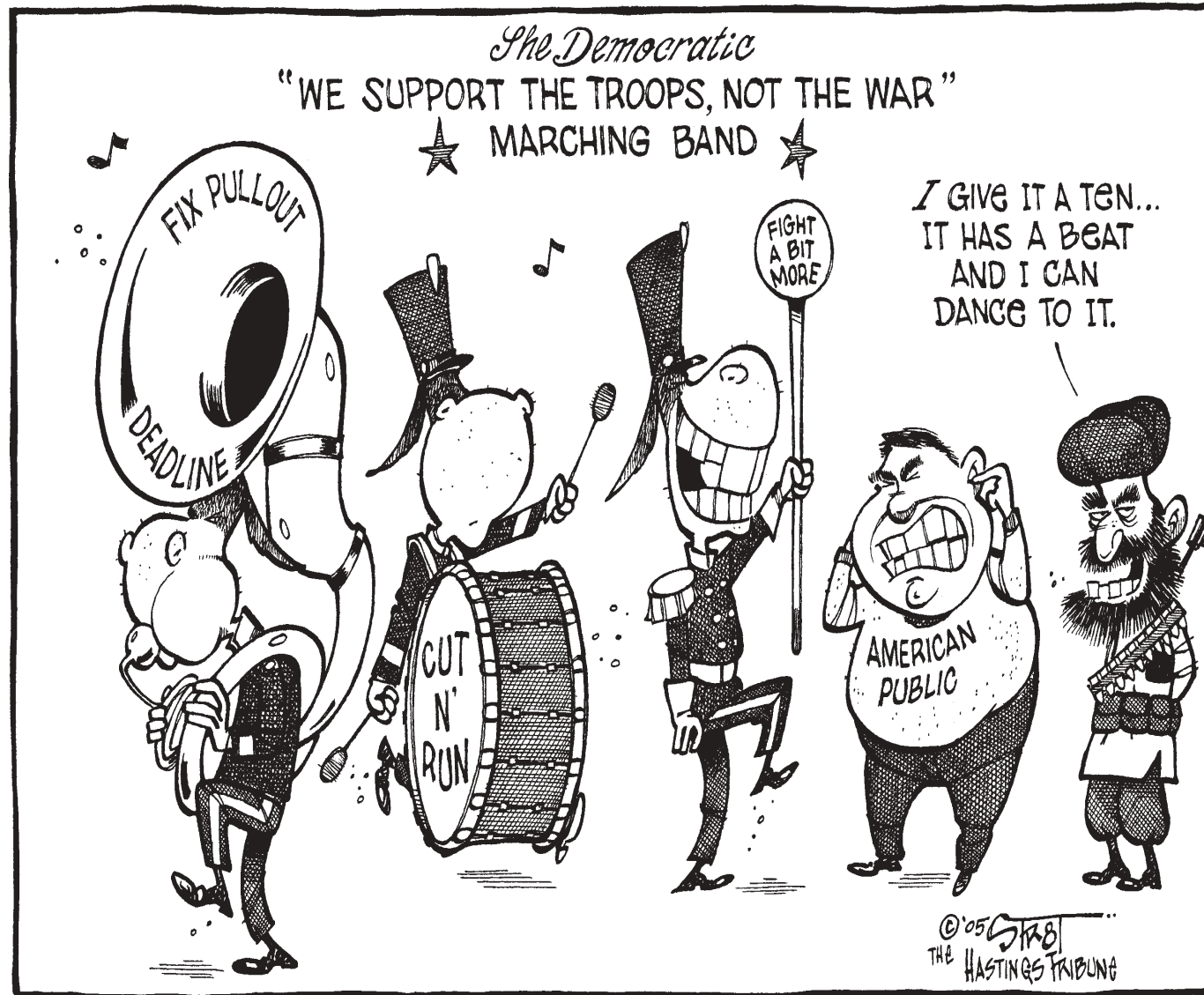
Both Mr. Roberts and Mr. Moran commend Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns and U.S. Trade Representative Ambassador Robert Portman for their commitment to resolving the issue.

According to USDA, the U.S. is now able to export beef from cattle 20 months of age and younger to Japan. More than 94 percent of total U.S. ruminant and ruminant products, with a total export value of \$1.7 billion in 2003, are now eligible for export to Japan.

In 2003, the U.S. exported \$1.4 billion in beef and beef products to Japan. Prior to the December 2003 discovery of the first BSE-infected cow in the U.S., the U.S. exported beef and beef products to 119 countries. With the opening of Japan, 70 countries have now established trade to at least selected U.S. beef and beef products.

The beef industry is one of the largest industries in Kansas — representing over \$5 billion in annual revenue. Kansas has 6.65 million head of cattle.

In 2003, cattle represented 62 percent of the Kansas agricultural cash receipts and the processing industry alone employs over 18,700 Kansans.



The birthday wasn't so bad after all

So, I got another year older. I'm beginning to hate birthdays. This year I had to get a new driver's license. I really prepared before I went. No, I did not spend hours making sure Iaced the test (although I did). I primed for my picture. Fat lot of good that did.

The driver's license examiner told me to smile big. Boy do I look like a goof. Of course I don't have the official license yet, just a paper receipt thingy. He told me the license will look better.

One can hope. This had all the makings of a disastrous birthday. I had to make my own cake for Pete's sake.

Elizabeth and Kate were going to Wichita to shop. I hinted I would like to go. They very pointedly did not invite me.

Last year Tricia came home on my birthday even though it was right before finals. She brought me a sweet little book about how I was the greatest mom. Her sisters think she is a total suck-up.

(Well, you know girls you catch more flies with sugar than you do vinegar.)

This year, all I got was phone calls. Elizabeth promised a present. Kate said she was sorry, she had forgotten and Tricia said she was broke but if I put some

Back Home Nancy Hagman



money in her account she would be glad to get me something.

But something wonderful did happen. My best friend Jody came to see me. We have baked cookies together for 22 years. So we baked. Since she lives in Lawrence now, it is not as easy to get together as it was when we lived down the road from each other.

In just three years she has become so citified she thinks it is closer for me to travel to eastern Kansas than it is for her to come out here! And I have the last two years. But this year I put my foot down.

"I'm not coming," I said. So she promised she would. And she did.

What fun we had. We made at least 12 different kinds of cookies. We went to the locker and got our Christmas hams. We ate birthday cake. Saturday night Junior

took us to town to eat.

"Wow, look how beautiful the sky is," she said. "I used to love driving home after dark and looking at the hoards of cats. You are so lucky."

Junior and I laughed, "Keep talking, maybe you will convince us."

And she did, all week-end long. She fussed over the dog and the hoards of cats. She has a beautiful new house at what was the west edge of Lawrence three years ago.

"You know it would be perfect if they had quit building there," she says.

But they didn't of course.

I ended up with a pretty good birthday after all. Tricia sold a textbook and bought me a present. The hubby took me out for supper. I shared my cake with one of the hubby's widowed aunts. She was so tickled it made my day.

I have a freezer full of cookies ready for whatever comes up. Jody finally came to see me. I'm so lucky I get to live in the wide open spaces where you can see for miles.

But just as it is for Jody, things are not quite perfect; if only they would just do something about the quality of those driver's license photos!

Ah, to be a first grader again...

It is sometimes through the eyes of a child we get a glimpse of just what the world was meant to be — a world of wonder.

As I watched my oldest grandson return from first grade recently, I thought how wonderful it would be if we each could reset our internal clocks once a year to be in first grade.

One of the great things about first grade is it has just enough of real life to not feel like fairy tale land — not every kid is nice, the food isn't always what you wanted and sometimes it is cold on the playground.

But there are enough new experiences to feel in awe of the world around you. That wonderful skill of reading is learned with such care.

Unlike me, my grandson doesn't skim over the tops of dotted "i's" or crossed "t's". Each sound is carefully formed and

Phase II Mary Kay Woodyard



thought about. He takes time to look at the picture and see how it relates to the story, sometimes inserting his own words rather than the printed ones. And although the books are good, sometimes his version is better.

To Harrison, his teacher has all the answers and when she doesn't his parents do. When was the last time we had that kind of faith in any other human?

When he talks about her it is with a look of adoration. Our once shy grandson finds

it very easy to walk up to her to talk to her and her husband at the local restaurant. He doesn't worry about the conversation, he just wants to let her know he is there.

He can fall asleep on the bus, head flattened against the window and not wonder what others are thinking. He knows his bus driver and doesn't wonder about his driving skills (which are great, I might add). He goes along for the ride, not terribly concerned about the fact that this is a means of transportation.

Homework is not a bad word.

It involves the fun things you do with Uncle Michael to show your family all the things you've learned since September.

Maybe I'll try to be a first grader for awhile.

I'll look more carefully at the world around me, make up my own story along the way and fall asleep on a bus.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR:

Norton woman feels cemetery is getting shabby again

To the Editor:
I just attended the funeral of a friend laid to rest in the Norton cemetery.
Once again I have to say "Shame on you to the city and Steve Cole."

Most of the drives are impassable due to snow drifts. The trees have broken limbs in and around them.
It has been 11 days since our storm. How long does it take to clean the mess

up? Is the cemetery even on your "To do list"??

Please do something!
Nancy Meyers,
Norton

WRITE:

The Norton Telegram encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of public interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

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We do not publish form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area. Thank-yous should be submitted to

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