

## Mystery phone bill fees might be result of a scam

If Congress ever does anything except debate the budget, it needs to change the federal laws which allow unscrupulous scammers access to our phone bills.

Unauthorized charges cost Americans about \$2 billion a year, according to a study by the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee. Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-West Virginia), who is leading an effort to change the rules, says these "mystery fees" show up on landline phone bills through a process known as "cramming."

Cramming started after changes in the industry, and federal law, following the breakup of the Bell System monopoly. Sen. Rockefeller blames major phone companies like AT&T (the former Southwestern Bell, or SBC) for not cleaning up the problem.

"It's illegal, it's wrong, it's scamming," he asked at a recent hearing. "Why haven't you cleaned up your act?"

An industry spokesman claimed the companies had made progress, but acknowledged the problem continues.

Scammers get access to the billing system through small firms which supposedly offer some legitimate telecommunications service. They attach bogus bills to home and business accounts, and the phone companies claim they are obligated to include these in your monthly bills. Apparently, they make no effort to scrutinize these charges.

When an odd charge appears on a phone bill, the companies routinely tell people that it's their job to contact the firm making the claim. Services may be described as voicemail, directory service or web hosting, among others.

These firms usually will remove the charge, but it costs the consumer or business time and money to accomplish that. When the charge is small, some people just pay rather than challenge it. One expert described spending 15 hours to straighten out bills for a group of restaurants.

Whatever the case, when people pay, the scammers smile all the way to the bank.

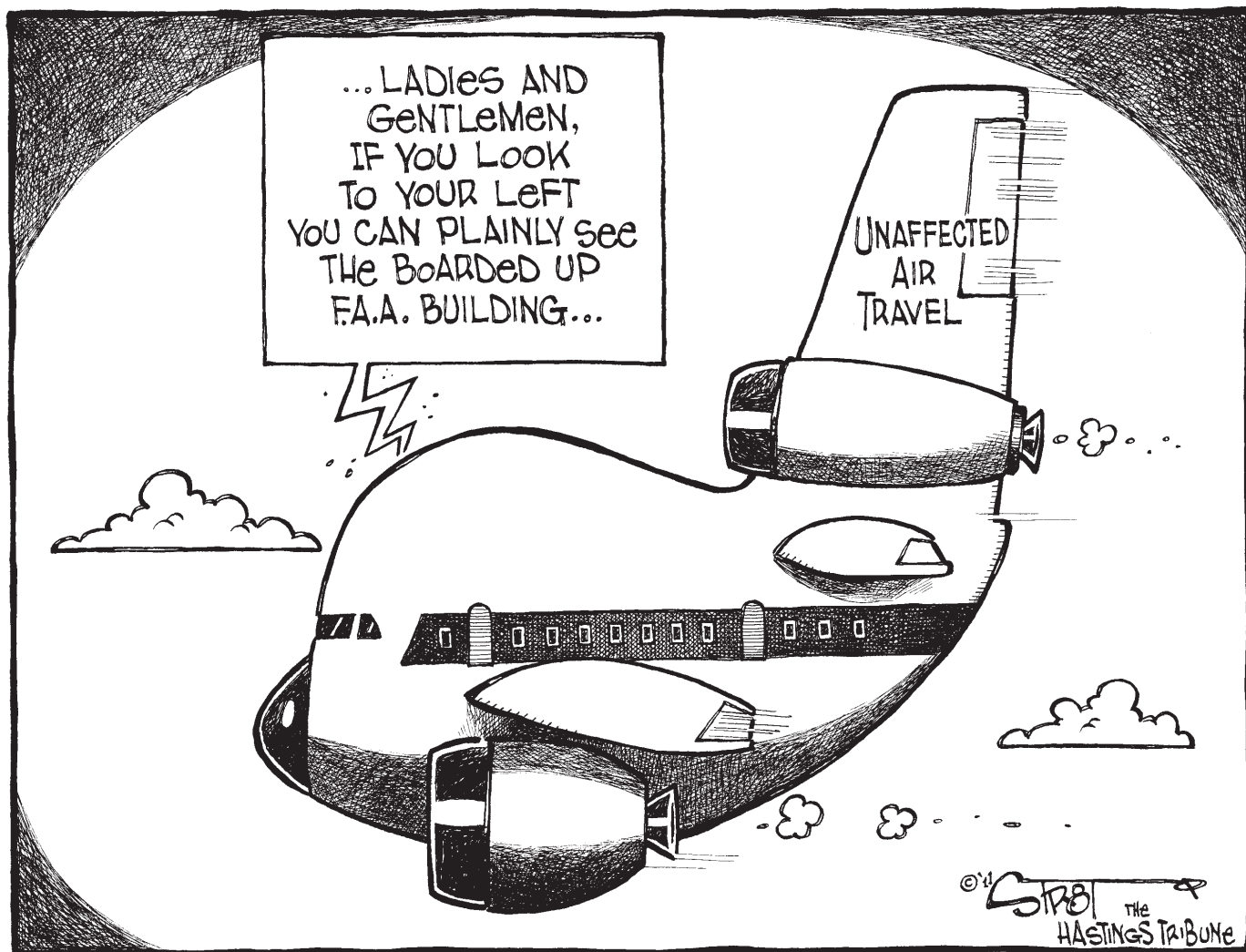
The easy solution, rather than try to make this system work, would be to repeal the law which allows telecoms to piggyback their charges on landline bills. That would save the big telcos money and save consumers from having to pay for this cumbersome and unworkable system.

Small firms would have to bill people on their own, but the legitimate need appears to be just the tail that wags this big, smelly ol' dog.

Right now, the effort to reform the billing system is bogged down in the general morass of delays in Congress, partisan infighting and the overall budget battle. What's needed, though, it's not a reform, but an end to third-party billing on phone statements. It seems that most are bogus, anyway, so "reform" will accomplish nothing.

If you have received a bogus bill and think this system stinks, it's time to write our senators, Jerry Moran and Pat Roberts, and Rep. Tim Huelskamp and ask them to join with Democrats to end this travesty. — Steve Haynes

On the Prairie Dog  
Steve Haynes



## A menagerie of weddings, inventions and writers

The main event of our weekend was the wedding of Jim's great-nephew, Everett, and his beautiful bride, Jordan. Jim performed the ceremony and, as always, I cried when he got to the part about God saying, "It's not good for man to be alone".

And, he caused a deep sleep to come upon Adam. Then, God removed a rib from Adam and created Eve. Not from his head so as to lord it over her; and not from his feet so as to trample her; but, from close to his heart so that he might protect her. I just love that part.

It was a beautiful outdoor wedding set beside a lake. The stone steps leading down to the water were the altar and the whole outdoors their cathedral. I was glad to see Jordan remained true to her country roots. Because, even though, she was the picture of poise and beauty...if you looked real close, you could see her bare feet peeking out from beneath her gorgeous gown. Yep! Country girl all the way.

-ob-

We have the squeakiest desk chair in existence. Jim just complained that I am making too much noise for him to get his nap. I try to sit quietly, but, evidently I wiggle more than I was aware of. Now

Out Back  
Carolyn Plotts



would be a good time to break out the WD40.

Not sure if this is true or not but, I heard that WD40 got its name because it was the 40th experiment that worked when chemists were trying to create a new lubricant. The other 39 attempts were failures.

That's how lots of things came to be. I call them happy accidents. How many failures did Thomas Edison have before he finally found the right way to make an incandescent light bulb? Hundreds. But, he never gave up.

Silly Putty was the result of a mistake in the laboratory. So were Post-it-Notes. Not sure what all that has to do with anything but, that's where my thoughts took me. Wandering the little rabbit trails of my mind.

-ob-

One day when leaving the bank in our

little town a stranger, whose car was parked by the sidewalk, asked if there was a library in town. After giving him directions I asked what brought him to our town. He told me he and his wife had researched the Great Western Cattle Trail for several years and had recently written and published a book about it. I thought it sounded interesting and knowing what a history buff my husband is, I bought one right out of the trunk of the author's vehicle. Had him autograph it and everything.

Jim has poured over that book comparing its maps to local plats and trying to identify exactly where the trail cut through this part of the country and whose land it is now.

When I found out the local museum is taking an excursion bus to revisit the trail and unveil a trail marker I immediately booked passage for two. The authors will be there along with the author of a new book about the Indian's point of view about the last Indian raid in Kansas. It's almost two months from now, so it should be nice and cool. I'm really looking forward to it. If you're a history nut, like Jim, or just a curious gawker, like me, sign up and let's have a good time together.

## The things that come out of the mouths of babes

Insight

John Schlageck

Ever have an 11-year-old farmer's daughter give you a tour of their farm?

I did and it was top notch.

Last week I traveled to Dickinson County to meet with Jeff and Charity Bathurst. The young farm/livestock family have six children ranging in ages from 11 to three weeks old — four girls and two boys.

As I pulled up to the farmstead, Jeff and I shook hands and he told me he had to drive to town for parts. He said, I could come with him or his 11-year-old daughter, Emma, would give me a tour of the farm.

I opted for the tour with Emma knowing I'd spend several hours with him in the hay field when he returned. We walked into the house where his wife literally had her hands full with her new baby and five other youngsters.

"Emma, come here and meet John and show him around the farm while I run to town," Jeff says.

Emma and I shook hands and outside we went to tour the Bathurst farm. Tall and slender for her age, Emma sported shoulder length blond hair and blue eyes. "Pretty as a peach," my Grandpa Bert used to say. And bright, articulate and the perfect hostess. I couldn't have asked for a better guide.

As we walked west of their home the first stop on the tour was the rabbit hutch. There I learned more about rabbits than I can write about because of the space constraints of this column.

One highlight Emma shared with me is how to hold a rabbit properly especially when showing them at the fair. She looked me squarely in the eye and they sparkled with enthusiasm, joy and pride

as she told me about her family's farm.

She also demonstrated the proper way to hold a rabbit upside down, snugly while grasping the ears near the base of the bunny's head. Her favorite rabbit was a Blue Dutch breed and gray in color.

"I have three different breeds," Emma says. "I like the different body types, eye colors, lengths of their ears — I especially like to feed, water and care for them."

By the time we finished with the bunny visit, Emma's younger sister, Annie, 9, showed up to talk about their three lambs. Here the girls told me the breed of sheep, age, how much they ate each day and they would one day be used as food for people.

Although I'd never met these youngsters they were as comfortable and at ease with me as if we were old friends or I was a nearby neighbor. Sure, they were still kids, but their manners, hospitality and authenticity was a sight to behold and warmed my heart.

Just a few steps from the lambs, we entered the chicken fence where 11 birds were crowing and clucking. By this time, seven-year old Alice had joined the tour and went into the roost and brought out fresh-laid eggs for me to eye ball and handle.

Out of curiosity, I asked the girls if they ate these eggs and here's what Emma told me.

"Yes, they're one of my favorite foods," she says. "My mom thinks there's

no difference between our eggs and store-bought eggs, but I think they're better. We know where they come from."

About 45 minutes later when their dad returned we headed for the hay field where their granddad, Tim, was already busy windrowing hay. Jeff fired up the tractor and began baling. By now, two-and-a-half year old Wyatt had joined the farm tour. They all accompanied me as I roamed about the hay field shooting photos and visiting.

All were more than happy to be out in the field where their dad and granddad were working. Not that they didn't want to be home with mom, but what farm kid wouldn't want to be out in the open air and clear blue sky even if the temperature was approaching 100 degrees?

By the way, before we left to go to the hay field, Emma took me inside to meet the latest member of the family, baby Wade. As she took the tiny child from her mother and gently cradled her youngest brother in her arms, a smile spread across her face.

"He's pretty fun," Emma told me keeping her eyes glued on little Wade. "I've always liked babies from the time my little sister, Annie, was born. I especially like babies when they have their eyes open because they seem like they're listening."

Out of the mouths of babes come pearls of wisdom.

John Schlageck is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. Born and raised on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.



Thumbs up to the gentleman for calling about the lost photo album. The outcome wasn't as we wished but we at least learned of its whereabouts. Brought in.

Thumbs up to Justin Griffith, Andrew Otter, and David and Jacob Mizell, for their help in a heavy moving job and then, their refusal to be paid. Their parents and Norton should be proud of these great young men. They will represent Norton well wherever they go. Emailed in.

A big thank you to Ed Lawrence and the other angels in disguise, who came to the rescue of two 'not quite elderly' women as they were sprawled out on the corner near Pure Prairie. Your concern and aid is greatly appreciated. Emailed in.

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Remember there is no charge for rendering a Thumbs Up. Thumps Up are meant to give recognition for a positive person or event in the community. Also remember all Letters to the Editor must be signed.

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ISSN 1063-701X  
215 S. Kansas Ave., Norton, KS 67654  
Published each Tuesday and Friday by  
Haynes Publishing Co., 215 S. Kansas Ave.,  
Norton, Kan. 67654. Periodicals mail postage  
paid at Norton, Kan. 67654.

Postmaster: Send address changes to Norton  
Telegram, 215 S. Kansas, Norton, Kan. 67654  
Official newspaper of Norton and Norton  
County. Member of the Kansas Press Association,  
National Newspaper Association, and the  
Nebraska Press Association

Nor'West Newspapers  
Dick and Mary Beth Boyd  
Publishers, 1970-2002

Kansas Press Association



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