

Plug to be pulled on two mortgage giants

On the
Prairie Dog
Steve Haynes



Congress appears to be ready to pull the plug on the unmanageable mortgage giants known as Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, or more formally, the Federal National Mortgage Association and the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corp. About time, we say.

It cost taxpayers \$187 billion to keep the two from crashing during the recent financial crisis. Pushed by Congress to keep rates low, the two had helped bankroll a huge bubble in housing prices. When the bubble collapsed, as bubbles always do, so did the twins.

These government-sponsored corporations had grown to the point where they own or back about half of all home mortgages. As with many fields today, they dominate their market and have become "too big to fail."

Formed to help middle-income people get into home ownership, they have become a threat to everyone's financial security.

In these partisan times, the Republican-controlled House has a bill that would essentially get the government out of the mortgage market. The more divided, Democrat-led Senate has a bipartisan plan which preserves a limited government role and has the president's support.

A compromise is expected. Perhaps Congress, fresh from plaudits for "solving" the crisis over doubling of interest rates for student loans, can come together to solve another problem.

This situation illustrates two problems all too common in our country today:

- Excessive bigness. Consolidation of everything from banks to airlines to railroads and manufacturers leaves many markets depending on too few key players. How many times have we heard the phrase, "too big to fail."

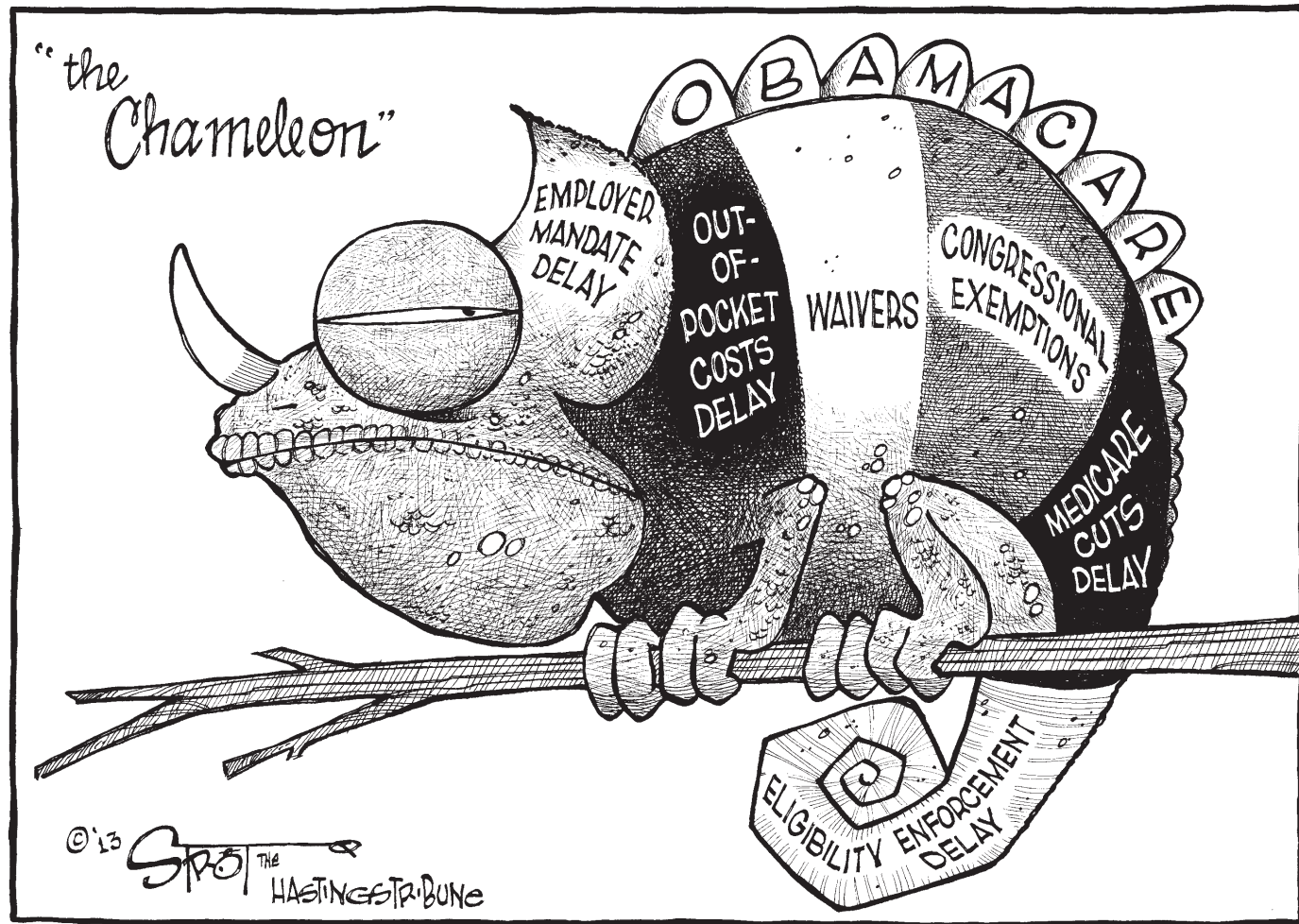
When any industry or market is dominated by players which the government will have to prop up if they fail, it's time to change something. Our government has to stop pushing bigness and allowing mergers, even as an expedient to prevent bankruptcy, and get back to enforcing the antitrust laws. Diversity, not monopoly, is what the economy needs.

- Excessive government involvement. The heavy hand of government usually creates more problems than it solves. When government moves beyond policing a market and tries to enforce policy goals – such as cheap mortgages – it has a way of creating more problems than it solves.

The bills in Congress right now would go a long ways toward backing government out of the mortgage market while eliminating the two giant players we've had to prop up one time too many already.

Let's hope our representatives can keep talking long enough to once again get something done. It might be addictive.

– Steve Haynes



Fair time is a great time for reunions

County fair season is finally over. It's a relief to some – a downer for others.

All over western Kansas, little towns have started their own homegrown carnivals to coincide with their county's fair. What a boon to those town's economies these annual events have become. Not only does local money stay in the county, but lots of out-of-town money is drawn in. The added bonus is nobody minds spending their money because they know it helps fund the carnival and that profits will be spread throughout the community.

Moms and dads usually tuck a little back each month during the year to help finance carnival tickets. Children are encouraged to save a portion of their allowance or are given ways to earn money for the fair. It becomes a good teaching tool. Work toward a goal, then enjoy it.

When my girls were little, our summer vacation was planned around the fair. They didn't have to save money for the fair, though. They knew their Grandpa Kelley would be sitting at the corner of the Bingo stand with an unlimited supply of dollar bills and

Out Back
Carolyn Plotts



quarters. Now they're grown and their children come every year.

Family reunions are held during the fair. Kids don't even mind attending what, might otherwise be a boring get-together of old people. They know they can have the carnival all to themselves while the adults camp out at a table on the midway to talk.

That's exactly what our family did this year. Several of the Kelley grandkids met at the fair and had their own reunion. Parents were optional. These kids had spent countless hours/days/months together out on the farm when they were children. And for just a few days last week they recaptured some of those memories.

During their texted planning

sessions, the one requirement was to bring pictures. Old pictures of their times on the farm as children. My niece, Pam, even scanned hers. With all the technology these kids are so comfortable with we were able to watch them on a TV.

Laugh. I laughed so hard my jaws hurt. The running commentary from the audience about the pictures was the best part. They were dissing each others hair cuts; their polyester plaid pants; their black, horn-rimmed glasses; and on and on. They all have quick, sharp wits, so you have to be quick to get a line in. It was all in good fun. We didn't want the show to end. Again, with the technology, pictures were posted on Facebook along with the bars. The fun went on.

All the cousins agreed their reunion was too much fun and they want to make it an annual event. Good, cause that will give me time to really search my photo archives and find the "special" pictures I've hidden away.

They don't know it, yet, but I know how to scan and post on Facebook, too.

Protect yourself when you are in the sun

My dermatologist recently shared with me a list of five ways to die on a golf course. The five ways include hit by a golf ball, run over by a golf cart, whacked by a golf club, struck by lightning and forgot your hat.

While none of these possibilities is pleasant to contemplate, the threat of skin cancer is real and should be considered carefully.

Every year one million new cases of skin cancer are detected, according to the American Academy of Dermatology. One out of five people in this country develops skin cancer during his/her lifetime.

Americans love vacations with their families – many of these trips include trips to the beach or outdoor amusement parks. Many others work for long hours in the sun during the summer months – farmers, ranchers, construction workers and amusement park attendants.

If you spend several hours in the sun, protect yourself. Avoid the midday sun if at all possible. Cover up. Always wear a hat. Work in the shade whenever possible. And don't forget to wear sunscreen.

Melanoma is the deadliest form of

Insight
John Schlageck



skin cancer. One person dies every hour from this disease in the United States, according to the American Academy of Dermatology.

Fortunately, melanoma can be completely cured if it's caught early enough. Dermatologists advise us to examine our skin regularly.

If you find a blemish larger than a pencil eraser, multi-colored, asymmetrical or irregular at the edges, you may have melanoma and should see your dermatologist.

While we should protect ourselves from potential skin cancer, we should be every bit as aware of this danger for our children. Overexposure to sunlight during childhood will affect children for the rest of their lives.

Studies show that damage from the sun to a child's skin can actually increase the odds that he or she will

develop skin cancer as an adult.

The American Academy of Dermatology estimates 80 percent of a person's total lifetime sun exposure occurs in the first 18 years.

Protect your children. Cover them up. Teach them to wear long-sleeved cotton shirts that breathe. Make sure they wear head protection at all times. Make wearing sunscreen part of the ritual for gearing up for the sun.

While skin cancer can kill you, it's much more likely to disfigure you. Each year, thousands of Americans lose chunks of their skin to this disease. Some people lose their nose; others may lose their ears, while others may get off with only the loss of an eyebrow.

Examine your skin regularly, at least once a week. Look for warning signs.

If you find anything bleeding, crusting or not healing, see your dermatologist immediately. And if you want more information on how to identify skin cancer visit www.aad.org.

It's all right to enjoy the sun and spend time outside. Remember these common-sense suggestions, have fun, and like everything else in life – enjoy the sun in moderation.

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