

## Health care law shouldn't hurt religious beliefs

It looks like the Supreme Court will at least consider the plight of Catholic hospitals and colleges, and other religious institutions around the country, which the administration seeks to force to pay for abortion drugs, contraceptives and sterilizations under the "Obamacare" health-insurance reform.

Backers of the Affordable Care Act see this as enforcing women's rights to control their own reproductive systems. Church-run institutions see it as the court ordering them to violate the principles they stand for.

Last week, a Supreme Court justice and at least one Circuit Court of Appeals issued injunctions preventing the government from enforcing the regulations. It could be some time before the court actually hears the case, however, and it's anybody's guess how the full court might rule.

It's also unclear whether a victory by religious nonprofits like hospitals and colleges might help private firms and individual employers like Hobby Lobby and thousands of others whose owners and managers have similar beliefs.

As the law stands, churches and other religious congregations are exempt from the rule, but church-run institutions such as hospitals, schools and charities are not. However are private businesses that happen to be run by believers.

Here's our take on the situation: The backers of this law won a long battle, and now they should be magnanimous to the losers. The government has no business forcing people to violate their religious beliefs anyway.

And besides, no one has to work at a church-sponsored hospital or college. Workers knew the policies when they took their jobs, and if they really want insurance that covers birth control, they could quit and find a job at a secular institution.

The government has no real purpose in forcing these church-related institutions to comply with this limited part of the new law. Its interest should be served by overall compliance with the law's goals, unless those go beyond providing health-care coverage for all Americans.

In short, this is a fight the government should not be involved in. Liberals may be unhappy that many churches still cling to what they feel are outdated beliefs. But that does not make the beliefs any less sincere, or these groups' First Amendment rights any less real.

If our country still believes in the rights the Founding Fathers staked out for all Americans, then the courts should strike down this move to force everyone to conform to one set of beliefs.

It's not a matter of whether we'll have health-care "reform"; that's already the law. It is a matter of whether we intend to trample the rights of minorities left and right in the name of doing good.

Let's not. — Steve Haynes



## True neighborliness still in style

You caught me reading some excerpts from my mother's book, "Out With the Kansas Hillbillies."

I was browsing through February of 1949. That was the winter my dad lost the sight in his right eye when a piece of kindling he was chopping flew up and hit him. In a separate incident a few days later he cracked a kneecap and between the two was laid up for days on end.

But neighbors then were as good as neighbors are now. It was the end of March that year when 19 men brought their horses, wagons, a corn picker and sheller plus their wives and plenty of food to my parents' place and picked a 20-acre field for my folks.

That act of kindness left my mother almost speechless.

That is what people do out here. When a neighbor is down through illness or accident, his or her friends and neighbors pitch in to help. That's the way it's always been. That's the way I hope it always stays.

-nt-

## Out Back Carolyn Plotts



In that same column she mentioned that "the pup and the baby (that would be me) are at about the same stage of development. And no matter what is missing or damaged around the place, one or the other gets the blame for it."

-nt-

One night last week a young mother friend of mine had volunteered to drive another friend to the closest airport at two in the morning. I insisted that her 3-year old didn't need to be dragged out that late on a cold night and that she should stay the night with us. The mother reluctantly agreed but didn't think she could stand being away from her child. I assured her that neither one of

them would die. I asserted that it would, indeed, be good for both of them.

The overnight stay was a success. The 3-year old never even asked about her mom and was asleep in her car seat before we got out of the city limits. I kept Mom at bay by texting pictures of her little darling sleeping soundly and another the next morning of her sitting in my recliner, eating bacon and eggs off a silver tray while watching cartoons.

I think Mom was disappointed. Deep down, I think she wanted to hear cries of, "I want my Mommy!"

What really hurt Mom's feelings, though, was when I returned the 3-year old home and she cried to go back with me.

-nt-

Weather forecasters are predicting record-breaking cold temperatures over the next few days. Good time to stay indoors, bundled up with a good book.

I think I'll make a big pot of chili, some cornbread and cinnamon rolls.

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## Senator does 1,000th tour stop

### Capitol Views

Rep. Jerry Moran



The pioneering spirit of the earliest Kansas settlers lives on. We know our neighbors and look after them. We teach our children to be moral and responsible. And we work hard to build a better future so our kids and grandkids can pursue their dreams.

This is the reason I became interested in public service, and it is the reason I remain involved today. As your U.S. senator, I am committed to listening to Kansans and making certain your voices are heard when decisions are made in our nation's capital.

Since coming to Congress in 1997, I have made it my top priority to return home each weekend to visit with the folks. Whether the conversations occur in line at the grocery store, at church or when I'm filling up my truck at the gas station, the input I get from Kansans matters to me and affects the decisions I make in Washington.

When I was first elected to the House of Representatives, I launched the "Big First Listening Tour" and held annual town-hall meetings in each of the 1st District's 69 counties. I have continued this tradition as a senator and have traveled throughout all 105 counties in our state to hear directly from Kansans.

Last week, I returned to Marion to hold my 1,000th town hall meeting since being elected to Congress — the same community I held my first town hall in as a U.S. representative on July 18, 1997.

More than 125 Kansans from Marion and the surrounding areas turned out for a conversation, including a high school government class from Marion-Florence High School. It was inspiring to see the next generation interested in

learning about our democracy.

Topics discussed ranged from Obamacare and the "nuclear option" on filibusters to the government shutdown and water conservation. One question was raised by Peggy Blackman, the watershed restoration and protection strategy coordinator for Marion Reservoir. She wanted to talk with me about the importance of solving the reservoir's blue-green algae problem.

It was great to see Peggy, who was at my very first town hall meeting back in 1997 at the county courthouse. In addition to water-conservation issues, Peggy visited with us about why making her voice heard is important.

"We choose to live rural because we like the slower pace," she said. "I'm thankful for the wonderful family life and caring, concerned and compassionate community rural Kansas provides."

"I'm concerned that ... Washington doesn't understand our way of life. We're sitting out here, the breadbasket for the country and the world. It takes a greater effort by us to get our point across because we are so few in numbers."

Peggy is right. I've often told people on Capitol Hill that where I come from in rural Kansas, economic development can come down to whether or not there's a grocery store in town. Few people in Washington understand

how these things can be major issues. It's something they don't have to think about, but in so many of our communities across Kansas, keeping a local economy alive and well is about having a Main Street with a hardware store, a grocery and a pharmacy.

The reality is that without a change of direction in Washington, the future of rural America is in jeopardy. We must address the challenges our country faces, from the increasing costs of Obamacare and government regulation, to out-of-control spending and providing certainty to the agricultural community.

Though some things have changed since my first town hall meeting, my efforts in Washington remain much the same today as they were when I was first elected — to see that we have prosperity in the communities we call home.

I will continue to fight on behalf of Kansans on Capitol Hill, and appreciate the input I get from you during my Listening Tour stops. Please continue to give me your questions, complaints and marching orders.

Thanks again to the folks who joined me in Marion. I appreciated discussing national policy, but also enjoyed hearing Kansans share their stories of success and achievement. It was an enjoyable event that reinforced my long-held belief in the strength and spirit of our communities and the values that make Kansas a great place to live, work and raise a family. Our state will continue to thrive, thanks to the work ethic, concern and kindness of its people.

You can learn more about my upcoming Kansas Listening Tour stops by subscribing to my weekly newsletter at [www.moran.senate.gov](http://www.moran.senate.gov).