

Fighting for Kansas Veterans

U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp gave this speech to a recent meeting of the American Legion:

Over a quarter of a million veterans call Kansas home – including more than 50,000 in the First District alone. In my own family, eight uncles have served with you to defend our nation and our way of life. Thank you.

As your representative, I am committed to ensuring the benefits and services promised by the government are accessible and of high quality. Cutting through red tape and bureaucratic incompetence is the No. 1 issue about which Kansans contact my office and seek help. In three years, we have assisted over 500 veterans.

I proudly serve as one of the most active members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee. And let me report – the (Department of Veterans Affairs) does not have a good track record on delivering timely, quality care and benefits. And you deserve better than that.

Instead of a mediocre system where too many bureaucrats seem more concerned about keeping their bonuses and lifelong federal careers, you deserve a system that works for you.

I serve on the Health and Oversight and Investigations subcommittee, and we have been tracking some serious problems. Here are a few:

- Last year, a whistleblower revealed that foreign agents (including Russia and China) had hacked into the medical and financial records of 20 million veterans and their families.

Our investigations into these shocking breaches confirmed that security failures continue to exist within the VA system.

Since 2010, the network has been breached at least nine times. To combat this threat, I co-sponsored the Veterans Information Security Improvement Act, which will require the VA to crack down and secure your personal data, so you can rest assured your family's personal information does not fall into the wrong hands.

- Another VA shortcoming is a severe lack of accountability. Despite undeserved five-figure bonuses, preventable deaths at VA facilities and the large backlog, it seems no one has been fired for not doing their job.

Under current VA leadership, an employee who has presided over negligence or mismanagement is more likely to receive a sizable bonus than to be disciplined. For these reasons, I am working on the VA Management Accountability Act which would give Secretary Shinseki and future secretaries complete authority – and the responsibility – to fire or demote senior bureaucrats based on performance.

On another critical topic – one of access – I have had multiple opportunities to question publicly VA bureaucrat after bureaucrat and ask why veterans cannot receive health care services closer to home.

Whether it is the veteran I met in Syracuse (Kan.) who had to make three round trips to Wichita in 10 days, or the veteran in Liberal who has been promised a doctor for two years, or a veteran in Topeka who is refused emergency care, veterans and their families deserve quality care close to home. The answer is pretty simple – let these veterans choose where they want their care, whether it is a VA hospital, a remote clinic or their local doctor's office or community hospital.

Instead of fighting to preserve the status quo, it is time to ensure that veterans receive quality health care closer to home.

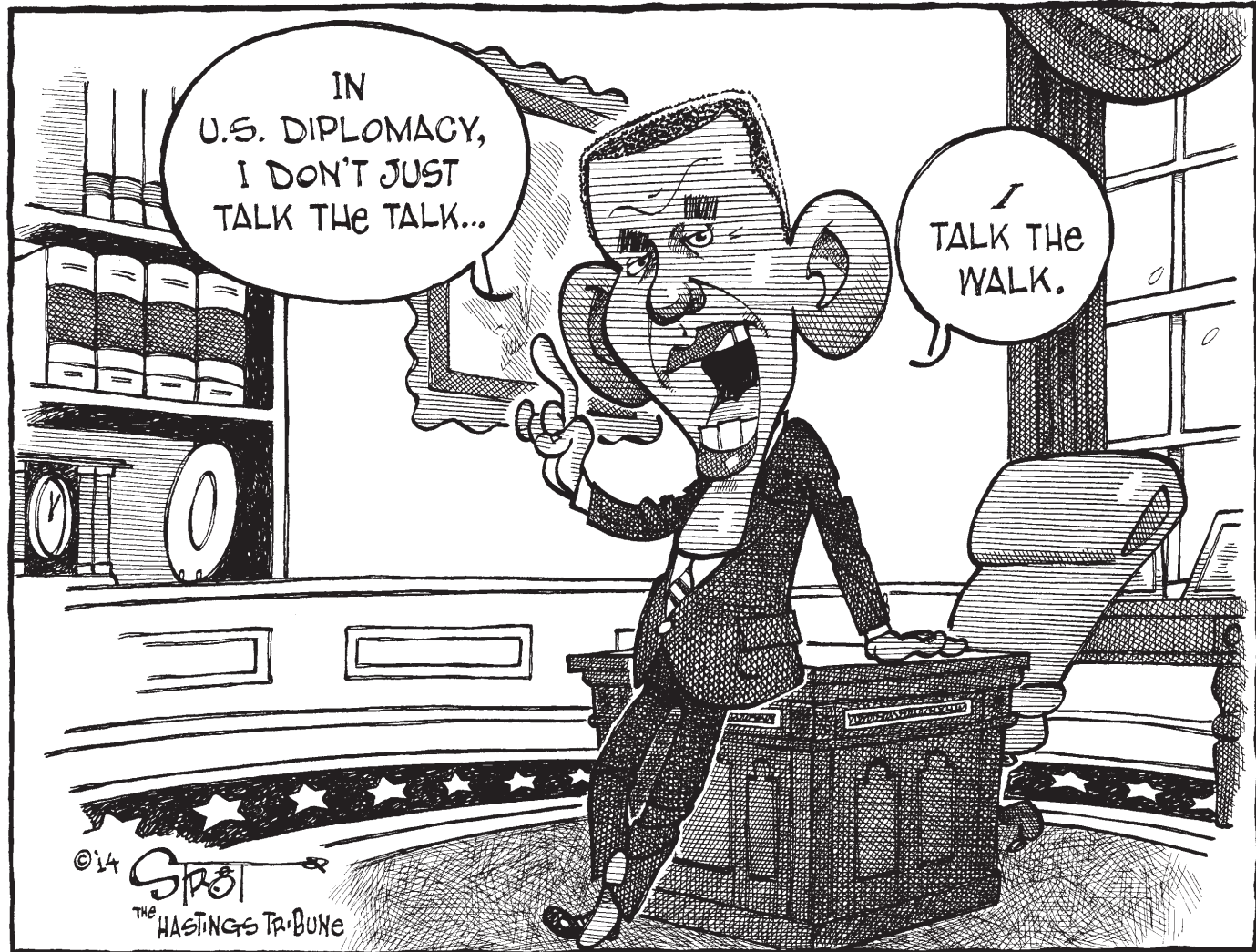
Serving and representing those who have so selflessly devoted themselves to our country is an honor and responsibility I will never take for granted. I want to commend the American Legion for your outstanding leadership and advocacy on behalf of veterans, as well as your involvement in your local community. You truly are making a difference "For God and Country."

To all the veterans here today, thank you for your service and dedication. The selfless example you have set is an inspiration and testament to the values our country was founded upon.

If I can ever be of assistance to you, your family or your American Legion post, please do not hesitate to contact my office.

May God bless you, our armed forces and these United States of America.

Congressman Tim Huelskamp represents the 1st District of Kansas in the U.S. House of Representatives. In addition to his membership on the Veterans Affairs Committee, Rep. Huelskamp serves on the Small Business Committee, the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Energy and Trade, the Subcommittee on Health and Technology, and the Subcommittee on Contracting and Workforce.



Open season for deer and wrecked cars

After our recent encounters with four-legged wild life, Jim and I have been accused of hunting without a license. That's not true. We both have a driver's license.

I have always prided myself on being ultra-vigilant concerning watching for deer while driving. Especially at night, I constantly scan for that tell-tale reflection of eyes-in-the-headlights. What's that expression? "Pride goeth before the fall."

Don't know if it was "pride" or not, but a full-grown doe "went-eth" before my van. It was about 8:30 at night and my internal radar was on, scanning, scanning. And then – boom! There she was. I hit her broadside, launching her into the air.

The deer, of course, was dead and so was my van. The first call was to dispatch, the second to my husband. After confirming that I was OK, he wanted to know if I could drive the van home. It started and steered so I limped it on home, leaking anti-freeze all the way.

Damage report: shattered grill, bent radiator, demolished headlight, crumpled hood and damaged a/c condenser coil. Cha-ching! After both vehicles

Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



were "totaled" three years ago during a hail storm, we only carried liability. This would be on us.

Three days later, Jim was coming to get me after work (because I didn't have a vehicle) when he met the same fate. A deer jumped right out in front of him, doing almost identical damage to his truck. Now, we were both on foot.

Here's where living in Small Town, America comes in handy. A phone call to my friendly neighborhood used car salesman located a set of cheap wheels that would get us around and a call to the banker assured us that we were "covered" for repair expenses. I'm so glad I live in a place where your word still means something and a good reputation is worth its weight in gold.

The added bonus is, Jim is an excellent shade tree mechanic. He's been

ordering car parts, in duplicate. We are drowning in cardboard boxes, but repairs are almost complete. His truck is road worthy again. He's still waiting on the grill to arrive, but he can drive it without that. My van was done, but when it was started the reservoir to the radiator began to leak, so one more day while he works on that.

No worries. If money can fix it; it ain't a problem.

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My sis, Kathryn, is staying until after our brother's memorial service on Saturday. We've had a good time looking at old pictures and hitting a few thrift stores. One day we did a little "side-walk shopping" while an old apartment house was cleaning out to remodel. I found two operable vacuum cleaners and a beautiful cut glass fruit bowl. She picked up a couple of books and a knick-knack or two.

We're going to cap off Kathryn's visit by visiting our Aunt Bernice in Denver before she flies back to Orlando. She thinks we "go" a lot. But I've noticed she keeps pace with us and is almost always ready to go.

In 20 years, I hope I can do as well.

Making sense of new truck regulations

Once again farmers and ranchers are scratching their heads about how the new CDL (commercial driver's license) regulations will impact them when they transport livestock and crops to market.

Kansas transportation regulations already impose an extensive array of documentation, testing, certification, inspection and record keeping on the trucking industry. These regulations are further complicated when farmers and stockmen operate their vehicles across state lines where other states may have different rules than Kansas.

Agricultural producers received help in July 2012 with the announcement of expanded exemptions from federal and state rules, says Mike Irvin, legislative counsel for Kansas Farm Bureau.

"Farmers and ranchers may be exempt from the requirements of commercial driver's license drug testing,

Insight

John Schlageck



physical examination or hours of service regulations if their farm vehicles meet certain criteria," Irvin says.

First, the vehicles must be operated by a farm or ranch owner, an employee or family member of the farmer.

Secondly, the vehicles must be used to transport agricultural products, machinery or supplies from a farm.

Third, farm or ranch vehicles cannot be operated for hire (hauling for others for compensation).

Fourth, vehicles of 26,000 pounds or less can be operated anywhere in the

United States.

Finally, farm or ranch vehicles, between 26,000-80,000 pounds can operate in Kansas and may also operate across state lines within 150 air miles of the farm or ranch.

All CDL holders must apply for medical self-certification with the Department of Revenue's Driver's License Agency when they receive, renew, upgrade or transfer their CDL no later than January 30 of each year, Irvin says.

Unfortunately, the manner, time, implications, and consequences of these proposals have made it difficult for farmers and ranchers to fully understand and participate.

"We believe extension of the certification process will help alleviate some of the fears farmers and ranchers are having over these requirements," Irvin says.



Letters to the Editor and Thumbs Up: e-mail dpaxton@nwkansas.com or to write 215 S. Kansas Ave.



Remember there is no charge for rendering a Thumbs Up. Thumbs 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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