

Senator talks about health care at public meeting

Sen. Stan Clark was in St. Francis and Bird City on Saturday with Rep. John Faber and Attorney General Phill Kline for a public meeting. One of the topics he touched on was health care.

In a recent publication, the senator talked about Medicaid and how it was the largest health care program in American serving 51 million people with the annual cost of \$280 billion. This dollar increases from 8 to 13 percent annually.

It provides health care coverage to one in four children; pays for 37 percent of all deliveries; and over 50 percent of all mental health care. Forty-four percent of all federal grants to states are through the Medicaid program and 17 percent of the dollars spent for health care in America is paid by Medicaid.

Medicaid serves 11 million more people than Medicare. Within five years at the current growth rate, Medicaid will be larger than the retirement benefits paid by Social Security.

If state budgets would increase tax receipts by 5 percent annually and Medicaid costs continue to increase at the current rate, by 2020, Medicaid will consume the entire budget of every state in the union. "Doing nothing is not an option," the senator said.

Last fiscal year, Medicaid costs in Kansas were \$1,561,529,097 which is an increase of \$61 million over the fiscal year 2002

which saw an increase of \$221 million over the 2001 fiscal year. "I have the opportunity to outline 14 specific initiatives for the Legislature to consider but I emphasize that only when we address health insurance costs and assist families in its purchase do we start to take the pressure off the Medicaid system," he said. "Medicaid has to exist as a safety net. Our state has to be an aggressive advocate for some of these health coverage options.

One of these options is Health Savings Accounts. These accounts are part of the Medicare reform measure that passed Congress last November. Essentially they operate under the theory that an individual should have a financial stake in spending their health care dollars.

To accomplish this goal, a higher deductible health insurance policy is purchased to cover catastrophic medical needs and annual contributions to the Health Savings Accounts are limited to 100 percent of the deductible or up to \$2,600 for an individual or \$5,150 for a family.

Contributions are tax-exempt to both the employer and the employee, they are portable and will help families pay for routine medical expenses during the year, to pay premiums on long-term care insurance policies, for health insurance policies when a person is between jobs and provide a tax-

preferred means of saving for future health care needs.

At the time a person retires, any unpaid sick or vacation time can be put into this account tax free to pay future Medicare premiums.

"I have suggested to the governor and to Legislative leaders that this concept should be an option for participants in the Kansas State Employees Health Plan. My family would jump at this option because my wife and son have always had a separate individual, high-deductible health insurance policy," he said.

This year, the president is proposing to establish refundable tax credits of up to \$1,000 for individuals and encourage the active marketing of these accounts. However, the first mandatory dollar coverage that currently exists on some health care policies will need to be removed.

"The individual has to have a personal stake in the costs of their health care," Sen. Clark said. "The responsibility is just as great for the wise use of health care dollars on the family with a Blue Cross-Blue Schield health insurance plan as it is on a Medicaid recipient.

"We have to inject a strong dose of responsibility and there has to be tangible consequences to those choices which encourage long-term changes in our individual health and relieve the demands placed on our safety net, the Medicaid system."



THINK SPRING!! With the cold weather moving out of the county last week, the spring like weather has replaced the winter blahs and this can be seen in a variety of the animals around.
Herald staff photo by Casey McCormick

Extension Notes

Manage farm stress to stay safe

Kansas farmers cope with more job stress than the average worker. In fact, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) reports that farming is one of the 10 most stressful occupations and one of the most dangerous occupations - with an accident rate second only to mining.

"The combination of stress and daily work around powerful machinery and/or large animals in varying and unpredictable situations can lead to accidents," said John Slocombe, K-State Research and Extension Farm Safety Specialist. "The most effective way to counter farm stress is to recognize that some events can be stressful and to plan ways to deal with those stressors effectively - before symptoms become severe."

Stress can manifest itself as physical symptoms such as headaches or stomach problems, or as emotional symptoms through angry

outbursts or depression. In most people, stress affects relationships with others and is often first noticed by someone other than the person experiencing it. Stress can also lead to action or behavior that results in a farm accident.

Research shows that even under similar circumstances, farmers react differently to the amount of stress they experience, Slocombe said. This is because some farmers develop more effective coping strategies than others.

With an extended dry weather pattern over much of the state again this year, stress levels among Kansas farmers may be reaching a critical level and so, too, the potential for an increase in farm accidents. Slocombe recommends the following tips for managing stress:

- Recognize your personal symptoms and make a conscious decision to do something about them.
- Eat nutritious foods daily. Just

Tye Faulkender
Director



as machinery needs quality fuel, our bodies need nutritious food to function properly.

- Keep machinery and equipment in good working condition. Eliminating potential breakdowns can minimize stressful events.
- Talk about your stress with family or a close friend. If you have no one to turn to, call the Kansas Rural Family Helpline at 1-866-327-6578 for help and understanding.
- Do something relaxing every day - even if it's just for a few minutes.

Book Review

Book review from St. Francis Public Library
Late for the Wedding
By Amanda Quick

An invitation to a country house party at Beaumont Castle provides a perfect solution to Tobias and

Beware of ID theft scam

Keep a watch out for people standing near you at retail stores, restaurants, grocery stores, etc., that have a cell phone in hand. With the new camera cell phones, they can take a picture of your credit card, which gives them your name, number and expiration date. Identification theft is one of the fastest growing scams today, and this is just another example of the means that are being used. Be aware of your surroundings.

Lavinia's most exasperating challenge: how to escape the chaos of London for a remote, relaxing — and above all romantic — retreat from prying eyes and wagging tongues. But the lovers' plans are foiled when their first cozy interlude of the weekend is disrupted by the appearance of a stunning woman from Tobias's past.

Aspasia Gray's beauty is as haunting as her connection to Tobias. Her long-deceased fiance was a friend of his — in addition to being an eccentric assassin. It seems Aspasia is seeking protection — and solace — after receiving an ominous message that eerily recalls the past.

When events at the castle suggest someone is imitating the dead killer's methods, the team of Lake and March fervently pursue the investigation — and each other. Soon Lavinia have to employ all her talents to flummox the scoundrel who so rudely interrupted her rendezvous. And then she and Tobias can get back to more pleasurable affairs ...

New York Times best selling author Amanda Quick returns with a thrilling new venture into romance and mystery, featuring the most unusual, highly compatible — undeniably combustible — pairing of Tobias March and his mesmerizing partner, Lavinia Lake.

Good Bye Winter ... Hello Spring!!!
... and it's "that" time again!

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DEADLINE MARCH 31
Calls received after the DEADLINE will need to wait until next fall.

THE CITY OF St. Francis will help residents of St. Francis dispose of their junked, wrecked, dismantled, inoperative or abandoned motor vehicles FREE until April 1, 2004. For more information contact JR at 785-332-3031.



Your cooperation and patience will be appreciated.
Thank You!

Presidential Facts

- Vice presidents were originally the presidential candidates receiving the second-largest number of electoral votes. The Twelfth Amendment, passed in 1804, changed the system so that the electoral college voted separately for president and vice president. The presidential candidate, however, gradually gained power over the nominating convention to choose his own running mate.
- For two years the nation was run by a president and a vice president who were not elected by the people. After Vice President Spiro T.

Agnew resigned in 1973, President Nixon appointed Gerald Ford as vice president. Nixon resigned the following year, which left Ford as president, and Ford's appointed vice president, Nelson Rockefeller, as second in line.

• The term "First Lady" was first used in 1877 in reference to Lucy Ware Webb Hayes. Most First Ladies, including Jackie Kennedy, are said to have hated the label.

• Presidents Adams, Jefferson, and Monroe all died on the 4th of July; Coolidge was born on that day.

Prairie Land Electric Cooperative, Inc. is seeking to hire a person in this capacity — HVAC Technician. Must be well versed in all aspects of Heating/Air Conditioning installation, service and repair. Must also have working knowledge of electricity and plumbing.

This is a full-time position with excellent benefits, including BC-BS medical insurance. Contact the office at 1101 West Highway 36 for a job application form and return it with a resume and credentials of certification by March 16, 2004 to the attention of:

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PO Box 360
Norton, KS 67654
(785) 877-3323

PRAIRIE LAND
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The Country Advocate is the 800-pound Gorilla of Northwest Kansas. The Advocate, with its circulation now 16,000 strong, is delivered to homes from Oberlin to Cheyenne Wells and Burlington out in Colorado, and from St. Francis down to rural Hoxie and Oakley. The Advocate goes nearly everywhere in this area, sells just about everything. Face it, nobody argues with an 800-pound Gorilla.

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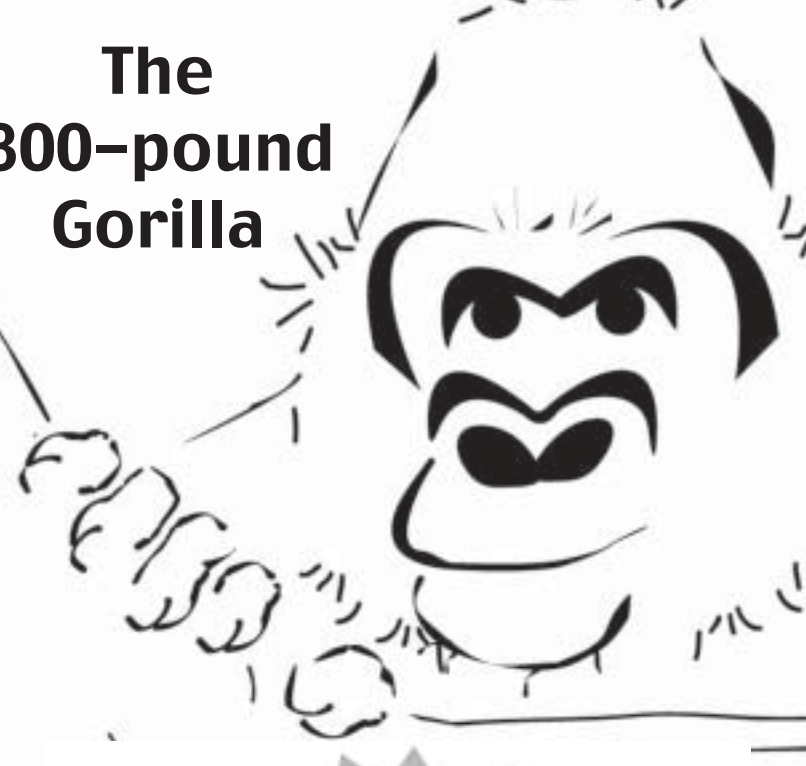
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