

Opinion

Letters



Mail options noted

To the Colby Free Press:

We thought Kansas residents should be aware of some recent changes in the United States Senate affecting communications with our offices.

As you may know that on Feb. 2, ricin — a potent poison — was found in the mail room of U.S. Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist's office. As part of the police investigation into this matter, our offices were closed for several days and all mail stopped.

Police also collected mail that recently had been received in our offices.

If you mailed a letter to our Washington offices after Jan. 10, please assume that we have not received it, and may not in the near future until the ricin investigation is completed.

Currently, the Senate is not distributing new mail, and we do not know when mail distribution in Washington will resume.

Despite the inconvenience, we hope we will still hear from you. The best options are to contact us by phone (in Washington or any of our state offices), by fax or by e-mail.

To contact Sen. Roberts' office, call (202) 224-4774, fax (202) 224-3514, e-mail http://roberts.senate.gov/e-mail_pat.html.

To contact Brownback call (202) 224-6521, fax (202) 228-1265, e-mail <http://brownback.senate.gov/CMEmailMe.htm>.

You may also contact them on their Web sites: <http://roberts.senate.gov> and <http://brownback.senate.gov>.

We always like to hear from you and encourage you to contact us.

U.S. Senators Pat Roberts and Sam Brownback
Washington D.C.
(Letter #14)

About those letters . . .

The *Free Press* encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, if at all possible, and should include a telephone number and an address. Most importantly, all letters must include a signature. Unsigned letters cannot be published. We reserve the right to edit for clarity and length, and, likewise, reserve the right to reject letters deemed to be of no public interest or considered offensive or libelous.

Addresses of elected officials:

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202/224-4774

U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202/224-6521

U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 1519 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. 202/225-2715

State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building Rm. 171-W, Topeka 66612. 785/296-7676 e mail: jmorrison@ink.org web:<http://www.ink.org/public/legislators/jmorrison>

State Sen. Stan Clark, State Capitol Building Rm. 449-N, Topeka 66612. 785/296-7399 e mail: sclark@ink.org

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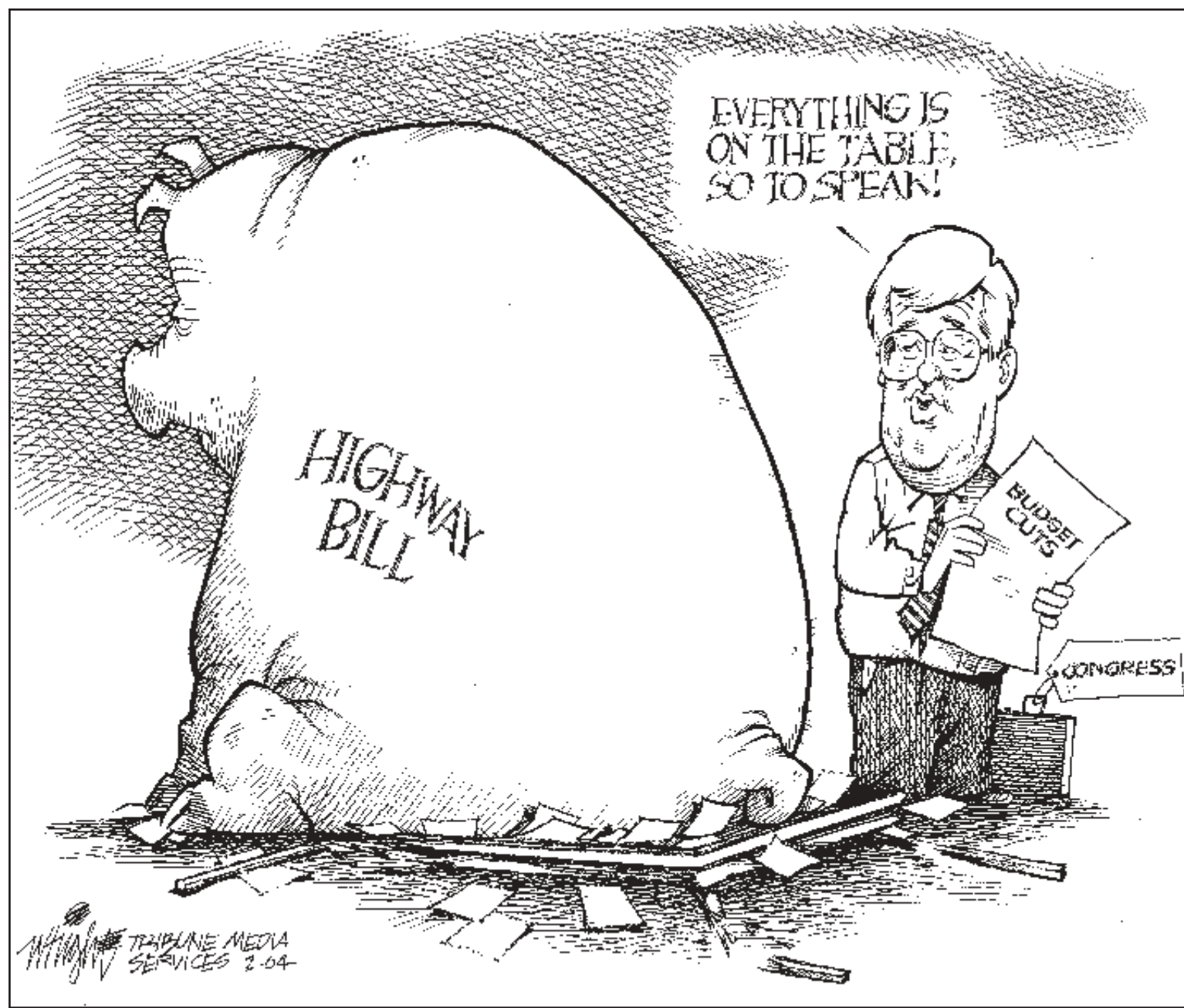
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Lend him your ear

YOU will want to circle March 11 on your calendar. That's the date for the next Dr. Max Pickerill Lecture Series at Colby Community College. We may be small (as a college) but we pack one powerful punch, thanks to the lecture series, founded some years ago to bring to northwest Kansas personalities of varying tastes.

Coming to town for the March 11 lecture (at 7 p.m. — free admission), is Robert F. Kennedy Jr. — yep, a Kennedy from what most of us describe as the "Kennedy Clan." Among those were the late President John F. Kennedy, assassinated in 1963, and the late Sen. Robert F. Kennedy — the March 11 speaker's father — who served as attorney general and was a Democratic presidential candidate, gunned down while on the campaign trail in California.

Kennedy Jr. is an advocate in the arena of environmental issues. He's not a headline grabbing Kennedy, but he certainly will make you think — perhaps differently than you now do — about the environment. The word *environment* for many of us is a word we hear about, but probably give less thought to than perhaps we should. After all, we seem far removed from the swirling environmental conversations and debates becoming more and more pronounced, thanks, in large part, to Mr. Kennedy's travels and talks, much like we will hear when he takes the stage in the Frahm Theatre in the Cultural Arts Center.

More background on Kennedy will be provided *Free Press* readers in the next couple of days.

Kennedy joins the list of other notables who have graced our community and area through the Dr. Max Pickerill Lecture Series, named in honor of one of the college's truly outstanding professors.

Count this lecture series among the advantages of living in northwest Kansas. It brings in quite a few people from around the territory to join those of us right here in Colby and throughout Thomas County to hear the speakers, and though we may, or many not agree with their positions, we depart the Frahm Theatre a little better educated. And that's the purpose of a college anyway, to educate. And this lecture series does just



Tom Dreiling

• My Turn

that. Please plan to attend. And did I mention there's no admission charge?

And hats off to Tom Moorhouse, lecture series chair, and his committee for engaging another outstanding personality.

WELL, he's back on U.S. soil. He landed at Dallas/Ft. Worth at mid-morning Tuesday. Air Force son Lance is taking a leave from his assignment to S. Korea to spend a little time with wife Tobie and children Alyssa and Caleb at Sheppard AFB, Wichita Falls, Texas. They'll also be traveling up this way to see me — dad, dad-in-law and grandpa — as well as Lance's Grandma Sally (Eberle) and Aunt Judy and Uncle Paul (Wintz). I'm sure they'll venture over to Goodland to touch base with friends. Lance was born, raised and educated in Goodland and that's his hometown. He also attend Colby Community College and Fort Hays State University before opting out for a military career. He will also be connecting with his brother Todd and wife Darci of Centennial, Colo. and sister Denise and husband Darren and niece and cousin Samantha Renee, also of Centennial. I'm sure the time will go by fast, and on his 34th birthday, March 31, he will be back on Korean Airlines for the 13-hour flight back to Osan to serve out the remainder of his assignment, returning back to the states in mid-August and report for duty at Spokane, Wash. in early September.

MORE oxymorons:

- √Sanitary landfill
- √Alone together
- √Small crowd

- √New classic
- √Sweet sorrow
- √Synthetic natural gas
- √Passive aggression
- √Taped live
- √Clearly misunderstood
- √Peace force
- √Extinct life
- √Temporary tax increase
- √Twelve-ounce pound cake
- √Exact estimate
- √Political honesty

INSTEAD of a smile his friends were put off when a man sent ten different puns to friends, in the hope that at least one would make them laugh. Unfortunately, no pun in ten did.

THE following information should help you decide on your plans for this coming Sunday. The orchestra is a northwest Kansas product. If you haven't attended a concert, here's your chance. And Sunday's theme should excite.

Pride of the Prairie Orchestra

presents

"Broadway's Gallery"

Sunday, 3:30 p.m. CST

Colby High School Auditorium

Juliann Groom — Conductor

Tickets available at the door or with

"Friends of the Orchestra" membership

Soloists:

Tremon Kizer (trombone) — Goodland

Band Director

Stacey Williams (trumpet) — Colby Middle

School Band Director

Elizabeth Waterman (violin) — Colby High

School student

Jackie Hess (harp) — Burlington Middle

School student

HAVE a good evening!

Dreiling is publisher of the *Free Press*. His column appears Wednesdays and Fridays. td@nwkansas.com.

Don't sweat Social Security

You may have heard that our Social Security system is headed for trouble when the generation known as the baby boom begins to retire. You heard wrong.

In fact, the first baby boomers will begin to draw Social Security benefits just four years from now. Maybe then this ridiculous urban legend will finally be put to rest.

You don't have to take my word for it. Anyone with a computer and a modem can go to www.ssa.gov and read the Social Security trustees' report. It shows that the program can pay all promised benefits through 2042, without any changes at all. That's nearly four decades away. Most of the baby boomers will be dead by then.

If you're the type who likes to worry about unlikely events that may occur in the far-off, science-fiction future, you're still going to have to find something else to worry about. The Social Security trustees plan for 75 years, and even for this immensely long period of time, the much-hyped gap in financing is quite small relative to our economy. In fact, it is less than three-quarters of 1 percent of our national income.

To put this in perspective, consider that the average wage will be about 45 percent higher — after adjusting for inflation — in 2042 than it is today. Will we be willing to pay a little more for our most popular federal program, in order to finance the retirement of people who are living longer? I would guess yes, because our population has been aging for decades and Americans

Mark Weisbrot

• Guest Commentary

have always been willing to come up with the money. The additional funding would be less than our payroll tax increases in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, or 1980s.

But in any case, this will be decided by future generations. In the meantime, there's no cause for concern. The Social Security trustees are not trying to paint an overly optimistic scenario. The numbers above are assuming less than 2 percent annual economic growth, the slowest in our history.

And four of the six trustees that signed off on these projections were appointed by President George W. Bush. The Bush administration has tried to paint as dismal a picture as possible of Social Security, in an effort to partially privatize the program.

A number of verbal and accounting tricks have been used to convince millions of Americans that Social Security needs "reform." One is to lump the program together with Medicare, which has costs that are projected to rise expo-

sively. But Social Security is a separate program from Medicare, financed by different taxes.

And even Medicare's problems are not due to the government program itself. Nor are they primarily a result of demographic changes, such as the baby boomers' retirement. Medicare's cost increases are driven by the cost of health care in the private sector, which is rising once again at an unsustainable rate.

In fact, the United States now spends 15 percent of its income on health care — almost twice as much as the average for other high-income countries. This is a serious problem that will have to be fixed in the not-too-distant future. But it has little to do with demographics, and nothing to do with Social Security.

There are other disturbing economic trends: Beside rising health care costs and an increasing share of that burden being shifted to employees, most Americans are facing increasing job and retirement insecurity.

Over the last 30 years we have also suffered the most massive redistribution of income in American history, in which most of the labor force barely shared at all in the gains from economic growth.

There are plenty of economic problems to worry about, but Social Security is not one of them.

Mark Weisbrot is co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research (www.cepr.net).