

Opinion



A Kansas Viewpoint

It starts at home

From The Garden City Telegram

Kansas' health care system has its share of problems.

As reported in a series of health-care stories that ended Saturday (Dec. 10), the state faces numerous ills: a troubling number of uninsured (300,000, including some 50,000 children); the soaring cost of Medicaid (the state's second biggest expenditure behind education); and a shortage of resources in rural areas, just to name a few.

While lawmakers and other policy-makers seek solutions, many return to one theme: Kansans must take better care of themselves.

Specifically, emphasis on preventive care, wellness programs and healthy choices are essential. As Congressman Jerry Moran, R-Hays, noted, better education and full reimbursement of preventive measures would help.

"I think the biggest bang for our buck in reducing the cost of health care is for people to live more healthy lives," Moran said.

To that end, the HealthyKansas initiative unveiled last year by Gov. Kathleen Sebelius includes a wellness effort targeting schoolchildren, adults in the workplace and elderly Kansans.

Health officials blame about one-third of deaths in Kansas on obesity, smoking and poor nutrition. Smoking-related ailments alone cost the state an estimated \$720 million a year.

... People are quick to use preventive maintenance on their cars — changing the oil, for example. Yet many don't give such consideration to their own bodies.

Lawmakers, health-care providers, insurance companies and prescription drug makers have plenty of work to do in fixing the health-care system.

As do the folks who use the system.

Personal responsibility on the part of all Kansans must be part of the cure.

About those letters . . .

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Comments to any opinions expressed on this page are encouraged. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. 5th St., Colby, Kan., 67701. Or e-mail jvannostrand@nwkansas.com or pdecker@nwkansas.com.

Where to write, call

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, 2443 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. 202/225-2715 or Fax 202/225-5124
State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building, 303 SW 10th St. Rm. 171-W, Topeka 66612. 785/296-7676 e mail: jmorrison@ink.org web: www.ink.org/public/legislators/jmorrison
State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol, 300 SW 10th St., Rm. 128-S., Topeka, Kan. 66612, 785/296-7399 ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

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155 W. Fifth (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963
Colby, Kan. 67701
freepress@nwkansas.com

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John Van Nostrand - Publisher
jvannostrand@nwkansas.com

NEWS

Patty Decker - Editor
pdecker@nwkansas.com

Tisha Cox - General Assignment
tcox@nwkansas.com

Jan Katz Ackerman, Area Reporter
ackermanjk@ruraltel.net

ADVERTISING

Crystal Rucker - Advertising Sales/Director
crystalr@nwkansas.com

Jasmine Crottinger - Advertising Sales
jasminec@nwkansas.com

Cindy Davis - Advertising Sales
c.davis@nwkansas.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Lea Bandy - Circulation Manager
lea@nwkansas.com

Jeanette Applegate - Bookkeeping & Ad Building
japplegate@nwkansas.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support@nwkansas.com

NOR'WEST PRESS

Jim Bowker - General Manager

Richard Westfahl, Lana Westfahl, Ron VanLoenen, Judy McKnight

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Remember what's important this time of year

What do I want for Christmas this year?
I could be materialistic, but what's the point?
I have enough stuff already.

Crass consumerism rules the season, along with avarice.

And as we all know, that isn't the true reason for the season.

The reason is to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ and all that comes with it.

Whether that involves going to church, spending time with family and friends, this time of year is marked with such celebrations no matter what most people believe.

Along with that, comes the buying of gifts.

Don't get me wrong, I like getting gifts as much as the next person, but as I have said before recently, I'm in it for more than the gifts this year.

The Christmas season this year means more than it has before.

And as the holidays approached, a certain thing crept into my awareness this year.

In preparation for the holiday season, there was "International Buy Nothing Day" on Friday, Nov. 25.

This was the first year I've heard of it, and it made sense, especially one month before Christmas.

Created by Vancouver artist Ted Dave, it was started to promote a ban against mass consumption (<http://www.teddave.com>), and has since grown into an international event.

It's not to advocate not getting people gifts in honor of the holiday season, but to protest the mass rush to buy, buy, buy. (They don't call us "consumers" for nothing.)

I limited it to three gifts each this year. Nothing huge, but a few well thought out items my



Tisha Cox

● Off The Beaten Path

family never would have picked for themselves??? The day isn't just an environmental issue.

We have enough stuff. Why is it when our needs are taken care of, well-met even, that we still think we have to acquire more?

I can't remember where I read it earlier this year, but more and more young people are starting to shift from the acquisition of things to instead using their money to seek out memorable experiences.

A trip either alone or with friends or family that will provide memories and stories that will last long after the short-lived pleasure of getting a new thing.

I can buy into that line of thinking. Time with family and friends is more important, and certainly more memorable.

I'm starting to feel the same way. There are still things I want every now and then. If I get them fine, if not, fine. That isn't what matters anymore, at least to me.

On top of the consumerism versus true Christmas spirit, there's another matter at hand.

The annual debate about what greeting to use, as well as protests against the commercializa-

tion of Christmas are both running rampant this year. Most people celebrate Christmas, even if they aren't Christian, and even people of other faiths recognize the Christmas season.

In that vein, there are other holy days celebrated around the same time.

Everyone knows about Hanukkah and Kwanzaa, which both begin Monday, Dec. 26.

Wiccans and pagans celebrate Yule and the winter solstice (Wednesday, this year).

To me, not only is it important to remember the true spirit of the holiday, but also to practice it.

Tolerance, respect, compassion and kindness should abound this time of year.

Since college, (and because of it), I've been hyperaware each year that not everyone celebrates Christmas, or even if they do, they celebrate it differently.

I have learned to respect and accept that fact, even revel in it.

It's that diversity that makes this such a wonderful time of year.

Think how boring it would be if everyone did celebrate it the same, or put up the same decorations in their yard.

I don't think the universe likes that kind of homogeneity.

Otherwise, there wouldn't be so many things to celebrate this time of year, eh?

So, in the words of my ancestors, I wish everyone the best this holiday season:

Nollaigh chridheil agus Bliadhna mhath ùr!

Tisha Cox is a general assignment reporter/photographer for the Free Press. Her column appears on Mondays. tcox@nwkansas.com.

Repeal the Patriot Act



Jay Kelley

● Speaking MyMind

It is time for the Patriot Act to go away.

Four years ago, in the wake of a brutal and regardless of the propaganda unprovoked attack, it was seen by many as a necessary measure to protect the country from attacks which may or may not have already been in the final planning stages.

They were probably right, by the way. While the lack of follow-up attacks are seen by many as proof of the needlessness of the act, most arguments along that line fall into the category of hindsight and anyone with any intelligence knows hindsight is never 20/20.

We find ourselves in a different situation today. Oh, the world is still a dangerous place. It was dangerous before 2001 as well, but most of us just ignored it. We can no longer do so, today, but that doesn't mean we need the Patriot Act.

In the wake of commissions, investigations and more armchair quarterbacking since the Jets won the Super Bowl, we have indeed discovered a few things about the failure to stop our attackers before they completed their mission.

One of the most important things we have come to understand is that it was more a failure of communication than a failure of the legal system which created the situation.

True, some of that failure may be laid on laws preventing such communication between different branches of the government, but at least as

much may be laid on excessive bureaucracy.

While we haven't cured it adding another cabinet post was akin to adding another jockey to a horse that isn't running fast enough the Patriot Act won't help the situation, either.

While I'm on the subject, there are some things we need to understand. Most of the act is part of law and will not sunset, or expire, Dec. 31. As I understand, it is the most objectionable parts of the act which were passed with the sunset provisions, but I suspect even those who passed the act don't understand all of the implications.

Second, the Senate did not kill the act; the minority simply invoked a filibuster and the majority was unable to come up with the 60 votes required for cloture to stop the filibuster.

Here is another place where the old-fashioned filibuster would be nice to have. If the minority Senators actually had to take the floor and talk

until Dec. 31 (there are a few who could probably do it alone) maybe there would be some incentive to actually discuss the provisions of the act among the populace.

As it is, the Senate just goes about its daily business and nothing happens until the last minute when pandemonium erupts. It doesn't even save embarrassment the stated reason for the rules change in the 1960s because it just makes the entire senate look like idiots.

The biggest fault with the Patriot Act is that it will not keep us safe. A larger number of more restrictive laws never kept any society safe. All such laws ever did is make a society less free. One can even make the case for such laws making us less safe because we are less vigilant.

We must not rely on a police state to keep us safe. To do so violates the very spirit of the Declaration of Independence. Our founders did not rebel against their king to give us safety; they rebelled to give us liberty.

Such measures are not necessary to win the war on terror, either. Make no mistake, we must win this fight and that includes Iraq. The Patriot Act, however, can only serve a people who have lost the will to fight for their own liberty.

If that is the case, we have already lost.

Jay Kelley is a local minister who speaks his mind from time to time. His e-mail is jkelly@stel.net.

Doonesbury

● Gary Trudeau

