



SHARON SHIRLEY/Sacred Heart School

Children in Sacred Heart School's pre-kindergarten class stopped by the Lon Sower's farm in Gern recently. Rick and Jake, the Scottish Highlander oxen, gave the children a memorable ride, said Sharon Shirley, teacher. Left to right are: Nataly Oliver, Kory Finley, Jakob Tubbs, Isaac Rosales, Principal Dave Evert, Sowers, Seth Hutfles, Grace Sorenson and Luke Hutfles.

# Bird flu: Don't count on the feds

WASHINGTON (AP) — States, cities and businesses should not expect to be rescued by the federal government if a flu pandemic strikes, warns a draft of the latest national response plan, one already under fire from critics who say federal preparations are moving too slowly.

On Wednesday, the Bush administration will update the \$7.1 billion pandemic preparations it proposed last fall, an incremental step that basically outlines exactly which government agency is responsible for some 300 tasks.

"This would really be a road map," White House spokesman Scott McClellan said Tuesday. "It will cover both the government and nongovernment actions that are being taken to plan and prepare for any potential pandemic."

A draft of the document, obtained Monday by The Associated Press, provides little new information on government preparations.

The messy medical reality is that people can spread flu a full day before they show symptoms, meaning even shutting U.S. borders against outbreaks abroad offers no reassurance that a super-strain isn't already incubating here.

The government is preparing for a worst-case scenario of up to 2 million deaths in the United States.

Once a pandemic begins, expect massive disruptions with as much as 40 percent of the work force off the job for a few weeks at a time, even if the government slowed the spread by limiting international flights, quarantining exposed travelers and otherwise restricting movement around the country, the document says.

"Local communities will have to address the medical and nonmedical impacts of the pandemic with available resources," the draft warns, because federal officials won't be able to offer the kind of aid expected after hurricanes or other one-time, one-location natural disasters.

A flu pandemic instead would roll through the country, causing six to eight weeks of active infection per community.

The report aims to energize the private sector, noting that 85 percent of the systems that are vital to society, such as food production, medicine and financial services, are privately run. Those businesses must ensure that power stays on and food is shipped even if 40 percent of their workers are absent because they're ill, caring for sick relatives or other pandemic upheaval.

The report doesn't actually put anyone in charge of checking whether vital businesses are heed-

ing these warnings.

Few are, suggests a survey that found 66 percent of mid- to large-sized companies have made no preparations, said former Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson, whose new Deloitte Center for Health Solutions conducted the survey.

Businesses and local governments need specific instructions, he said.

"Everybody is asking, 'Well, we want to do something. How do we do it?'" said Thompson, who heard those questions Tuesday while addressing pandemic preparations at a Michigan law-enforcement conference. "We've got to be much more specific."

The incremental plan was drawing complaints Tuesday that despite months of dire talk about the threat of a pandemic, the Bush administration hasn't accomplished enough.

"Other nations have been implementing their plans for years, but we're reading ours for the first time now. These needless delays have put Americans at risk," complained Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass.

# Neighbor not flattered by imitations

DEAR ABBY: I met my neighbor "Summer" about 18 months ago when we bought homes in the same development. She was nice; we became very chummy. We'd visit each other's homes for dinner, cookouts, or just to talk and hang out. Summer and her boyfriend and my husband and I had great times together.



**Abigail Van Buren**

• Dear Abby

Abby, Summer is becoming a fatal attraction! She came over one day while I was decorating my son's room and admired the bedroom furniture. Then she ran out and bought the same bed for her son. That was just the beginning: She has since copied my dining room set, my dog, my hairstyle, paint in the kids' room, wood floors and — get this — my living room set in the identical color. I recently bought a car. So did she, same make and model.

I no longer speak with Summer as often as I used to, and I think she's sensing something is wrong. My husband says it's hilarious, but my kids and I don't. If I mention that I want something in casual conversation, before you know it, she's breaking her neck to get it. My kids say I should mention something big and expensive that I "want" and let her run out and get it.

My co-workers tell me I should take it as a compliment, but I can't. When you buy a home, you add your own special touches, and it should reflect who you are — not your neighbor. Please help me. I enjoyed Summer's company at one

point, and now I no longer want her in my home. I haven't spoken to her about this, but how can I without blowing my top?

— FUMING IN NEW JERSEY  
**DEAR FUMING:** You have described a person who is unimaginative and insecure about making her own choices. The poor woman needs help, not banishment. By all means talk to her — but when you do, offer to help her to make some design and fashion statements that are her own. That way, you could enjoy each other's company and you will not be encroached upon. Before blasting her, please give it a try. It would be a kindness to someone who is obviously less creative than you.

DEAR ABBY: Your reply to "Bald in Baltimore," the man who's considering getting rid of his wig, left me feeling you were advising someone with an "affliction" that isn't normally publicized. (I have false teeth, so should I also have a "coming-out party"? Pun intended.)

My 40-something-year-old son lost most of his hair by the time he was 22 — thanks to genes from my side of the family. When he was in his 30s, he and a couple of friends shaved their heads on a dare, and he has kept it that way ever since. It's a popular and fashionable look. "Bald in Baltimore" should retire the wig and join the bandwagon with a shaved head.

— NANCY IN SPRING, TEXAS

**DEAR NANCY:** If my comment about the "coming-out party" offended you, it was not meant to. I was being literal. Many other readers agreed with me that the hairpiece was unnecessary. Read on for a sample:

DEAR ABBY: Your idea of a coming-out (or off) party is a great one. He must have a sense of humor about all this. Have a laugh and be done with it. I hope he knows that what makes a man appealing isn't a head of hair but his attitude, outlook, and the way he treats others. When he loses the wig he will gain his freedom.

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Woofter Construction, Jims Electric, CB Heating and Air Conditioning, Strait Associates Architecture, Sunflower Bank, USDA, Those who purchased tax credits through the Department of Commerce and the Community Services Program

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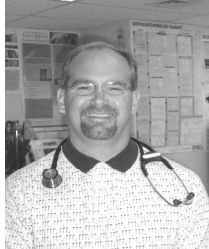
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