



## Free Press Viewpoint

### Health care ride just gearing up

So now we await the U.S. Senate debate to see how healthy its health-care reform bill really is.

After hours and hours of debate last Saturday, the Senate finally voted 60-39 to move the bill onto the floor for full debate sometime after the Thanksgiving break.

We were a bit puzzled. They were debating to see if the health care reform bill was worthy of debate. If a television viewer wasn't on top of last Saturday's debate, he or she would have thought the Senate was in a full-fledged debate on the bill.

While this might sound puzzling, remember we're dealing with the Senate, which, if they eventually approve their bill, will have to square off with the House of Representatives, which passed their version a week or two ago by a slim margin (220-215). That clash of the minds could provide a real knock down, drag out.

And if the Senate does not pass its bill, then what?

Then the word "limbo" enters the picture. A health care reform bill is on the House table, but there would be no challenge from the body of 100 to move the process forward. The only thing left for the House to do is stick its bill into its collective hip pocket and revive it as opportunities might allow. But don't bet on anything.

The Senate will need 51 votes for final passage of a bill; it took 60 to get it to that point. One would assume that the 60 who voted to debate the measure could provide the margin necessary to gain approval for the bill's passage. Not so.

Some of the senators included in the 60 votes of last Saturday are not necessarily for the bill overall. They felt obligated to have the measure debated by the full Senate. They just might vote against the bill when it comes times.

The suspense grows. With midterm elections next year, the pending actions in the great halls of Congress at this time loom very big, and could be costly for some House members and to the one-third Senate members facing re-election.

Hang on, folks! The ride is just now getting started.

— Tom Dreiling (tda1@st-tel.net)

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**U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran**, 2202 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715 or Fax (202) 225-5124

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### Card-shuffling a lost art?

I taught my granddaughters to shuffle cards on Thanksgiving Day. We had to top off our turkey and pie with a game of Crazy 8s.

It was a reminder of how things change. A simple deck of 52 cards has gone from being a tool of the devil in the Victorian era, to being the occasion of elaborate social gatherings for my parents and grandparents, to being almost an anachronism today.

That deck of cards joins a venerable list of other retired games: marbles and stickball and red rover.

In their place come computer games. Most card games these days have one or several computer versions. Many board games have computer counterparts. There are advantages.

It's really hard to drop a virtual deck of cards on the floor and lose one. This advantage shows up equally well with such readily available computer games as Scrabble. How many Monopoly games on the shelf in a back bedroom somewhere are missing the deed for Park Place, or have lost their money to junior banking entrepreneurs?

Then there are jigsaw puzzles. I really appreciate puzzles with pieces that can't be scattered by a cat (or two) landing in the middle of the pile. This is a two-sided coin, however. Those virtual puzzles are stuck on the screen.



**Marian Ballard**

#### • Collection Connections

You can't pick up a piece and turn it every direction until it fits. You can't put away all but the red pieces, or the sky pieces.

The worst part, though, is that you can't share the fun. Two people in front of a screen just doesn't work well. A jigsaw puzzle works best as a shared enterprise. My father, for example, always did best with the sky. My mother was handy with textures like hair or leaves.

Every computer game becomes a solitary pursuit, even those played online with others online. With a real deck of cards, or a real board with actual moving pieces, you also get face-to-face with real people. You can cheat — and catch the other guy cheating. You can change the rules.

I used to play canasta with my cousin Tommy and 10 decks of cards. We had a blast, and those Thanksgiving Day games years ago went on for hours sometimes. I might be able to play

canasta on the computer, but it would never let me use 10 decks, or rewrite the rules to fit. Nor would it let me trash the room with "52-card pickup" when I got disgusted with my mean cousin who just had to be cheating.

There are other card games that work well with wild variations in the rules to accommodate 15 players, or other such variations. Yet they lose some of the flavor — a lot of the flavor — in a one-on-one contest with a monitor and a mouse. It might be different if they could program a computer to cheat...

No, that would never work. The reality is, we need face-to-face interaction, personal contact that forms bonds connecting us beyond the boundaries of win or lose, beyond the limits of who gets the last piece of pumpkin pie.

About those Crazy 8's? We played three games, the last going through about 10 reshuffles of the discard pile. I lost. But I really won by spending some good old-fashioned quality time with family. And I'll bet those girls will remember that game 25 years from now, when they think about the "good old days."

Marian Ballard has collected careers as counselor, librarian, pastor, and now copy editor for the Colby Free Press. She collects ideas, which are more portable than other stuff.

### Here's 10 ways to save school money

Ten ways to save education money:

**1** Slow high-tech upgrades. There is no evidence that replacing a whiteboard with a \$20,000 "smartboard" in each classroom improves students' education. It impresses parents but drains money equal to half a teacher's salary. Any administrator can tell you that the every-five-year turnover of computer technology and tech systems is draining massive resources.

**2** Restrict virtual education. A 2009 U.S. Department of Education analysis found no rigorous studies of K-12 virtual education. Veteran teachers know effective online education is limited to a few students mature enough to study on their own. Virtual education courses take higher teacher-to-student ratios and depend on high-cost equipment and turnover.

**3** Rescind all of the recent master's programs offering initial licenses in teaching. Training a teacher is a bachelors-level task. Teachers need more depth of study — a bonafide master's — in their content field to gain the higher pay level. Kansans will begin paying millions extra per year for teachers given masters credit for teacher training — paying premium for regular. Similar out-of-state degrees should not be recognized at master's pay grade either.

**4** Curtail concurrent enrollment, where high school students as young as sophomores take courses for college credit. This is designed to give the rare "Doogie Howser" a head start, but every parent thinks they have one. Only high school seniors attending on-campus college work should receive college credit. Cheap courses in the end erode the value of real degrees.

**5** Coordinate higher education. Tech schools should be offering technical training, not general education courses. The minimal requirements for community college outreach instructors should be enforced. If the Kansas Board of Regents cannot "coordinate" this, then it is time for the Legislature to move tech



**John Richard Schrock**

#### • Education Frontlines

schools and community colleges back under the state Board of Education.

**6** Pay for ACT college-entrance tests for all high school students. One ACT can replace more costly state-designed school assessments, continuously redesigned by test companies and taking up substantial classroom time.

**7** Raise the Qualified Admissions ACT requirement to a "hard 20." No student with a 14 will ever successfully complete a bona fide bachelors program. But for the one out of 10 who have a score of 18 that may succeed, Kansas is underwriting nine others who cannot. We can no longer afford it. This change in Qualified Admissions needs to be effective immediately, and apply to all public colleges.

**8** Slap a moratorium on all assessments (except the ACT) at all levels. As the farm saying goes: the more time you spend weighing, the less time you have for feeding. Schools from prekindergarten through graduate school are putting huge resources, both money and time, into testing. Doing good and proving you are doing good are "zero-sum;" when we have to cut, we need to preserve the "doing good." And there is much money and faculty time to be saved by dropping most accrediting bodies that today do little to certify quality.

**9** School consolidation needs to move faster than the current voluntary but haphazard rate. There is substantial money (and better use of limited high-quality teachers) to be saved in a well-planned statewide consolidation. The savings will not accrue until after three to five years, but this Great Recession is with us for

many years.

**10** Repeat No Child Left Behind and close the U.S. Department of Education. Everyone pays federal taxes, so no state dares pull out of No Child Left Behind. To do so, we would have to forfeit "our fair share" of the tax revenues we paid, about \$175 million in Kansas or 15 percent of our education budget.

The "Race to the Top" \$4 billion will go to just a few states that follow federal ideas of education reform — that is a pure re-allocation of everyone's tax dollars to a few. Education is different in rural Kansas than in urban centers or the coasts. Education policy should rest where the tax dollars are spent, so that education mandates do not run away from those who must pay for them.

John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.

### Write us

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### Mallard Fillmore

#### • Bruce Tinsley

