pinion



Free Press Viewpoint

Health-care bill makes few happy

So now a health-care bill, perhaps the biggest single change in U.S. society in the last half century, seems inevitable with the end of Sen. Ben Nelson's holdout.

The Nebraska senator's concern was mostly over the possibility that federal money would be spent for abortions, something that's traditionally been part of federal law. The McCook native held out, wringing out millions for his vital vote.

When Democratic leaders found a way to please him Saturday after hours of tough negotiations, and brought his vote into the fold, they were assured for the time of the 60 senators needed to end debate on the bill, 58 Democrats and the two (former Democrat) independents.

That left just the 40 Republicans standing in the medicalcenter doorway, as it were, one vote shy of being able to block Senate passage.

Even the powerful American Medical Association, once a bastion of conservative opposition to socialized medicine, gave in and backed the bill. The president bought off Big Pharma with promises on continued profits.

President Barack Obama still won't get his Christmas wish, a health-reform bill all tied up in a bow by the new year. Both Senate and House leaders said it was too late to hash out differences between the \$1 trillion House version and the \$871 billion Senate plan – especially with two holidays in the mix.

That means the Democrats will have a lot of work, a lot of negotiations, left before they can claim victory. It seems almost certain now that they will get a bill, however, and even more certain that it will please no one.

Republicans will claim health care will bust the budget, though the president says his plan will save taxpayers something like \$132 billion over a decade. We'll see.

Liberals will not be happy, despite passage of a bill they've hungered after since the 1950s. Compromise led to cutting out any hint of a "public option," a government-run health plan akin to the "single payer" plan so feared by conservatives.

Abortion backers will try, and fail, to change restrictions in the compromise. They will think, rightly so, perhaps, that they have been sold down the river.

Democrats will claim again that the GOP is "the party of no," and it's true that the Republicans have been too busy fighting this bill to propose much in the way of an alternative.

The party has been on the defensive, with its numbers so reduced that it has had little say in shaping health policy. The only good thing about that is the GOP can wash its hands of the bill and blame the Democrats for any and all problems.

Winners and losers aside, what will happen to our healthcare system?

It worked pretty well until government got involved in the Great Society era of the 1960s. Our bet is government cannot, by its nature, make it work any better, reduce costs or produce a system that works for everyone. Shortages are likely as doctors lose incentives and see their pay cut.

But only time will tell whether the bill saves the govern-



Juggage adventures achieve new heights

They used to do it for free. Now they charge you \$15 to \$20 a bag.

Once upon a time, just a few months ago, airlines allowed two checked bags and a couple of carry-ons. Now most of them charge you for every bag you check, so you end up looking like a pack animal as you try to cram everything you need for a two-week trip into a single carry-on plus a "personal item" such as a computer case or purse.

You wouldn't believe the size of the purses some women carry onto planes these days. Mine weighed in at 26 pounds on the trip down to Georgia earlier in the month.

We figured that since we were staying with our daughters — four days with one and four days with the other - and they both have washers and dryers, we could get away with taking a carry-on each plus our "personal items." My "personal item" was the aforementioned "purse," which contained my real purse, a laptop computer, three books, two magazines, Christmas card envelopes, my Christmas card address book, Steve's train radio and a spare pair of sunglasses.

Steve had his computer case, which contained his laptop and assorted accessories. His case weighed almost as much as mine.

This worked out fine until we bought a few items, the girls gave us Christmas gifts to take home and – I'm pretty sure – our carry-ons shrunk.



There wasn't enough room to take everything, so I borrowed a bag from oldest daughter and Steve paid the \$15 checked bag fee.

All was well leaving Augusta, but in Atlanta they changed our gate about one hour before take off. The new gate was in a different terminal. We made it just fine but apparently, no one told the baggage handlers. The checked bags apparently went to the C terminal while the plane went to A.

In Kansas City, we waited in vain for the borrowed bag to show. It didn't, so while Steve went off to get the truck out of long-term parking, I queued up to report the lost bag.

They were sorry. If we liked, they'd have it sent by a local delivery company, which went all the way to Manhattan. Nope, just send it by whatever national carrier you can get, I said.

Meanwhile, Steve was having a few problems of his own. The truck had a dead battery. By the time he got a jump and I had gotten a supply of my favorite Kansas City barbecue sauce at a shop in the terminal, another plane c.haynes @ nwkansas.com

had come in from Atlanta. Taking a chance, I rushed back to the baggage claim and there it was: My bag full of Christmas presents, odds and ends and some dirty laundry was going around in circles.

The Full Nelson

Steve got a new battery and I have my gift from youngest daughter, a Snuggie. You know, those blanket-like things they advertise all the time on television and in magazines. They're supposed to make you all warm and cozy while sitting in your chair.

What they don't show is these things are really just fuzzy hospital gowns. They are like a cross between a blanket and a backwards robe with no ties in back. The front has a high collar and long sleeves but the darn things gape open in the rear.

Next time you see one of those commercials, note that the people are always sitting down. They're never up fiddling with the television, getting themselves a snack or drink of water or hitting the restroom.

In a Snuggie, you snug. You don't move. For enjoying a movie or a good book, they're great. Just hope you don't need to get up and go do anything in a room with a ceiling fan. It could get a little breezy back there.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor'West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at

ment billions or costs trillions. Whether health care improves or costs continue to soar.

Much of the Democrats' recent gain will hinge on the success – or failure – of this bill. There will be much pressure from the liberal wing to change it before it even takes effect. And the party's future will depend on what happens then.

- Steve Haynes

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Parties really do stand for something

What qualities would you like to see more of in politicians? Do we need a little more veracity and a little less mendacity?

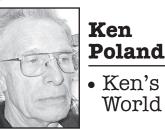
It seems that a majority of people think a politician is automatically inclined to be mendacious – dishonest. However, our political affiliation helps us determine, beyond any shadow of doubt, the truthfulness of any particular agenda or opinion. We are biased by a preconceived notion that our political party is more trustworthy than the other.

We know our own party - sometimes - prevaricates a little, but never as egregiously as the other party. Seldom do we research the facts instead of accepting political gospel according to the outspoken representatives of our party, or listening to the paid lobbyist representing the self-interested welfare of his clients.

I believe most people registered as independents are trying to avoid responsibility and the need of justifying their position. By doing this they don't have to commit, and thus perceive themselves as not responsible when things go wrong. It allows them to blend in with the most popular trend, especially after the fact.

The Independent usually blends in with the majority around the coffee table. But, a person identified as a member of the major party that is not in the majority at the table is often ostracized and challenged with no mercy.

Where do independents come from? They are afraid of being labeled as wishy-washy. If they don't agree with a particular major party position, they cannot be called traitors to the party. Some claim there is no real difference in the goals of either major party. For example: They all are interested in lining their own pockets or gaining unlimited power. Hmmmm — let's not ever think that all of us are not a little inclined to judge policies on how they will affect our own finances or position or influence. And, of course, our independent



candidate is above all this and guaranteed to be altruistic and above reproach. We wish!

I'm a little hard on the Independents, aren't I? Well, further down the list of my favorite "patriotic" citizens are those who divorce themselves from the political or civic arena. If you don't think there is a significant number of those, look at voter turnout for elections.

These people willingly jump into the stream without a paddle. Fate will determine where they dock. They grab for any branch or hope for any breeze that will help them avoid the rapids, rocks and sand bars. Sometimes they are successful, but in the end, they achieve at the expense of others or because of the orderly society provided by those willing to give of their time and expertise.

If we aren't to defend the system of social order, we are destined to regress to the ancient patriarchal system or the barbaric middle ages. In those periods, survival of the fittest determined your status.

Independent or third-party candidates are seldom successful. The few who have ever succeeded did so because the two major parties were fractured in their ranks.

Both major parties deal with progressives and moderates in their ranks. The successful third party candidate plays that to their advantage, and sometimes wins. But even if elected, their chance of success is hampered by the fact that the legislative branches are dominated by the major parties.

I am a lifetime Democrat! That has not prevented me from voting for particular Republican candidates. It doesn't mean I accept without question all policies adopted by Democratic administrations.

I didn't approve of Kennedy's attempted invasion of Cuba in the early 1960s. I didn't support Johnson's handling of the Vietnam situation, I didn't, and still don't like the North American Free Trade Area agreement that was adopted under Clinton's administration. I'm not 100 percent sure the recent upsurge in Afghanistan is in the interest of all parties.

I'll admit, I don't have answers for the situation over there! I just wish we hadn't gotten involved in trying to change their political situation. The culture of the area is not conducive to outside manipulation. In fact, I can't think of any positives of the last administration's eight years of governance and foreign policy.

I did and still do support the Eisenhower Interstate road system. I supported Nixon's opening of diplomatic relations with China. I can't automatically discount all initiatives under Republican influences. Neither can I automatically approve of all Democratic initiatives.

I am a Democrat because I agree philosophically with the overall program of that party. If you don't think there is a distinctive difference in the parties' philosophy, you have not been diligent in research to justify your affiliation.

If you can't debate the issues and differences, then you need to pay more attention in class, class being everyday activities of work, home life and play.

How do political strategies affect those everyday activities? How do they affect your relationships with those around you?

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Mallard Fillmore

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