

Other Viewpoints

Mental health system hurting

State budget cuts have pushed the public mental health system to a breaking point.

Mental health grants have been cut by \$20 million since state fiscal year 2008, a reduction of 65 percent. In addition, the mental health system has taken a 10 percent cut in the Medicaid reimbursement rate. That cut is crippling, since mental health centers depend on that money in the same way that hospitals depend on Medicare.

In Emporia, vacant mental health positions are not being filled, programs and services are being reduced or eliminated, and the waiting list has grown to over 100 in just a few weeks.

The regional state hospital is overfilled and is more costly (an average of \$428 per day) than community-based care, which averages \$22 per day. The governor, in his State of the State address, proposed solutions to the state budget deficit, including an increase in the tax and tobacco taxes. We concur with him. We urge all citizens to contact their legislators, and ask them to support the governor's budget.

Since community mental health centers are a vital part of the public safety net, especially for people in crisis, it may be literally a matter of life or death whether or not your mental health center is funded at a functional level.

— *The Emporia Gazette, via The Associated Press*

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, 2202 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715 or Fax (202) 225-5124

State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St. Room 274-W, Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785) 296-7676 e-mail: jmorrison@ink.org web: www.morrisonfamily.com

State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol Building, 300 SW10th St., Room 225-E., Topeka, Kan. 66612, (785) 296-7399 ralph.ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

Write us

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We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise. Nor do we run form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area. Thank-yous from this area should be submitted to the Want Ad desk.

Letters will not be censored, but will be read and edited for form and style, clarity, length and legality. We will not publish attacks on private individuals or businesses not pertaining to a public issue.

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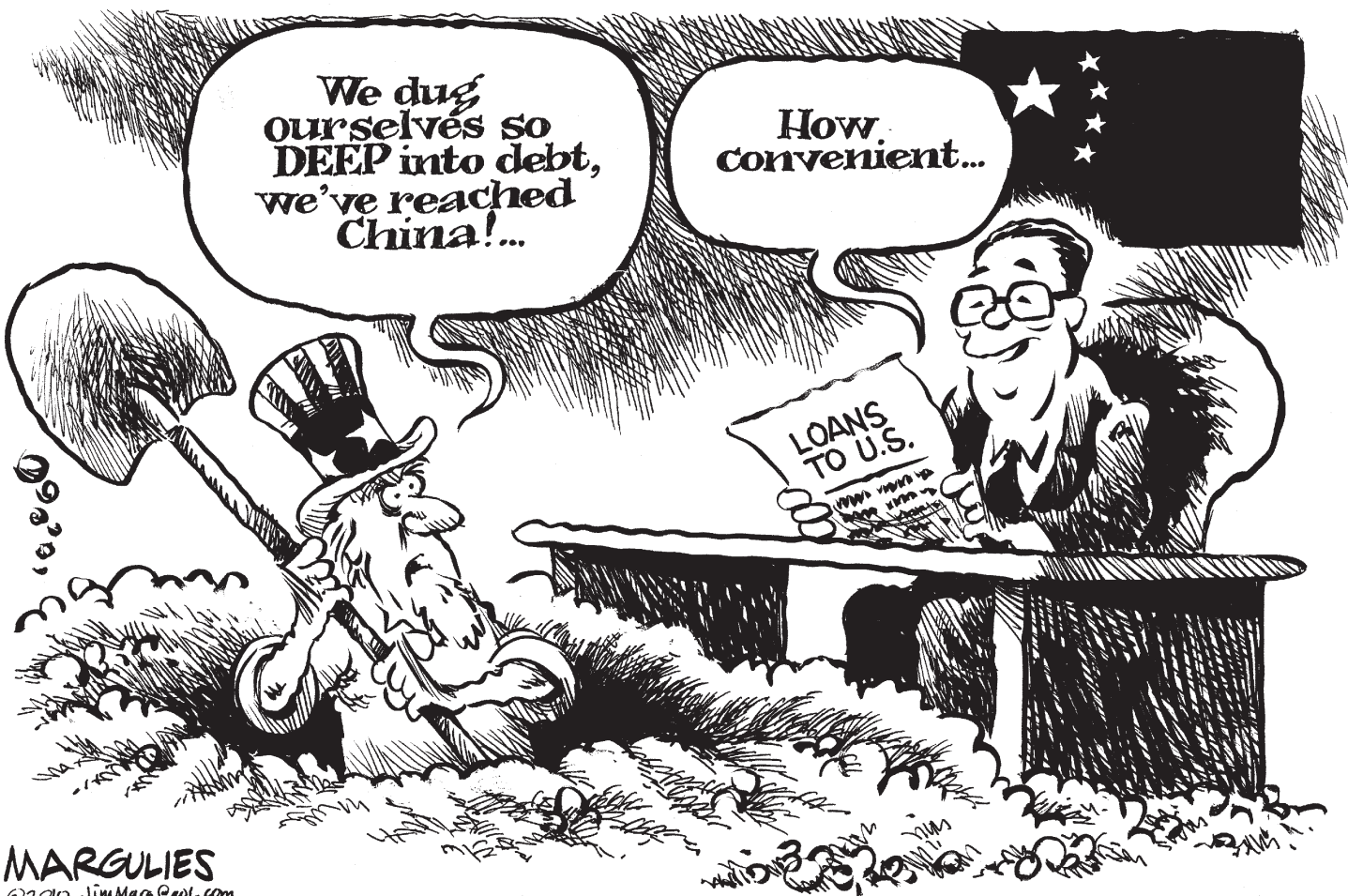
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'Oldest Worker' real or fiction?

Man, oh man, there is hope for me yet! (If I can last that long.)

One of my coworkers brought it to my attention that "Experience Works" is taking nominations for America's Outstanding Oldest Worker.

Outstanding? Never. Oldest, probably. The kicker is — the applicant must be 100 (or older), currently employed and working at least 20 hours a week for pay. Twenty hours! For crying out loud, I thought that at age 100 you got to sleep 20 hours a day — which actually would leave 4 hours a day for 5 days a week. Yep! There's my 20 hours.

I'm really sure I'd fit some of the categories, like experience. Especially experience. (That's really kind of a ridiculous category. Who at 100 wouldn't have experience, for Pete's sake?)



Vera Sloan

• After Thoughts

It might be a stretch, by the time I get to that age, to find someone willing to prop me up for four hours a day — but that part about "for pay" really intrigues me. Hmmm, I wonder what minimum wage will be 20-some years from now.

Sure would be tough to compete with someone like last year's winner, though. That guy said he was an active practicing member of the

Texas Bar Association. He said he specializes in real estate and probate law. He said he still works 40 hours a week. He said he was once the mayor of Weatherford. And, he'd better be telling the truth, 'cause he said he's a former member of the FBI. And by the way — he's not 100, he's 101. He must be disgustingly talented.

I've already decided I won't apply. I'll just wait around to see if it's another Texan. I would thoroughly hate being upstaged!

Anyone out there brave enough to apply (or nominate a friend or relative) can call (866) 397-9757 before Monday, March 15.

Vera Sloan thinks life should be fun, and enjoys all the parts of it she sees as Society Editor.

Winter crop an uphill battle for some

In some regions of Kansas, the winter wheat crops look great. After four to six weeks covered with a heavy, protective blanket of snow, it's emerging with a dark green color.

While the wheat is still small in north-central and western Kansas, potential — like the crop — is growing. However, in far southwest Kansas, things don't look so good.

Bill Luebbers, who farms in Wichita County, says the wheat there looks terrible.

"The color is brown," Luebbers says. "Our crop is frozen back."

When subzero temperatures marched into the state in January, he said, the crop was bare. Having received less than four inches of snow all winter, the wheat was exposed to the elements. There probably will be some winter kill.

Luebbers says the ground is splitting apart and pulling some of the roots apart with it.

"We'll have an uphill battle with our wheat crop in this part of western Kansas," the Wichita County farmer says. "When the ground pulls apart like this, it destroys the roots as they



John Schlageck

• Insights

Kansas Farm Bureau

spread across the ground. As that happens, the wheat has nothing to do but die."

Other wheat may not be brown, but it's a sickly looking light green. It has little growth and will be susceptible to wind damage.

Luebbers points out that late February and March are notorious for strong winds that sweep across the High Plains at 30, 40, 50 and even 60 mph.

"You know, out here in our part of the world, the winds usually blow sideways," Luebbers says. "We need moisture, and we need it bad."

During this time of the year in southwest Kansas, wheat farmers would like to see a nice

foot of wet snow — the kind that lies level on the ground and the moisture soaks deep into the soil.

Luebbers says he and his neighbors will take any kind of moisture they can get in February and March, however. Still, one thing this crop has in its favor is the fact that the growing season is still early.

Wheat can hold on for a long time. Growers often remark winter wheat has nine lives. The crop in far southwest Kansas is going to need all of them to survive this year.

Luebbers has his fingers crossed. He remains optimistic this region may still receive the snow he's dreaming of.

And should the additional moisture arrive soon, with it will come the promise of an abundant crop in June.

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm near Seguin, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

Smoking ban an issue of public health

To the Editor:

Multiple polls have been conducted across the state, and in each one, at least 70 percent of the state of Kansas supports a statewide smoking ban. As it stands now, cities have passed their own bans, which has resulted in a patchwork quilt of laws. The Kansas Senate has recognized the will of the people and has advanced a statewide "clean indoor air" bill. The House is now poised to make sure that doesn't happen.

Smoking is a public-health issue, plain and simple. We don't allow seat-belt laws to vary from county to county. There isn't a different speed limit on the Interstate based on local determination. Drunk-driving blood alcohol levels aren't determined locally. Smoke-free indoor air should be no different.

Every Kansan deserves the protected right to a clean-air indoor environment. Imagine if asbestos was allowed in dwellings because someone didn't feel it was the right of the government to make them take it out.

If the will of the people is for a statewide clean-air bill, then the House should not be even considering not passing this. Yet, there remains doubt that it is going to get done.



Free Press Letter Drop

• Our readers sound off

I know it takes time to make your voice be heard, but it is amazingly easy to do:

Go to your phone or computer right now. Place a call or e-mail to the following people in Topeka. You will not talk personally to the legislator. It will be the office staff who takes the call. Identify yourself and tell the staff member that you would like the representative to support the Kansas Clean Indoor Air Act, HB 2221. The e-mail is also just that simple.

Chair of the Health and Human Services Committee: Brenda Landwehr, brenda.landwehr@house.ks.gov, (785) 296-7683.

Speaker of the House: Mike O'Neal, mike.oneal@house.ks.gov, (785) 296-2302.

District 120 Representative: John Faber, john.faber@house.ks.gov, (785) 296-7500.

District 121 Representative: Jim Morrison, jim.morrison@house.ks.gov, (785) 332-7676.

Do this today, as the House may work on this bill in the next few weeks. Encourage others to join you in making our wishes known.

The Senate has done its job in heeding the voice of the people. Now the House needs to represent us as well. We need a breath of fresh air from Kansas into Topeka!

Dr. Mary Beth Miller, St. Francis

Teens restore faith

To the Editor:

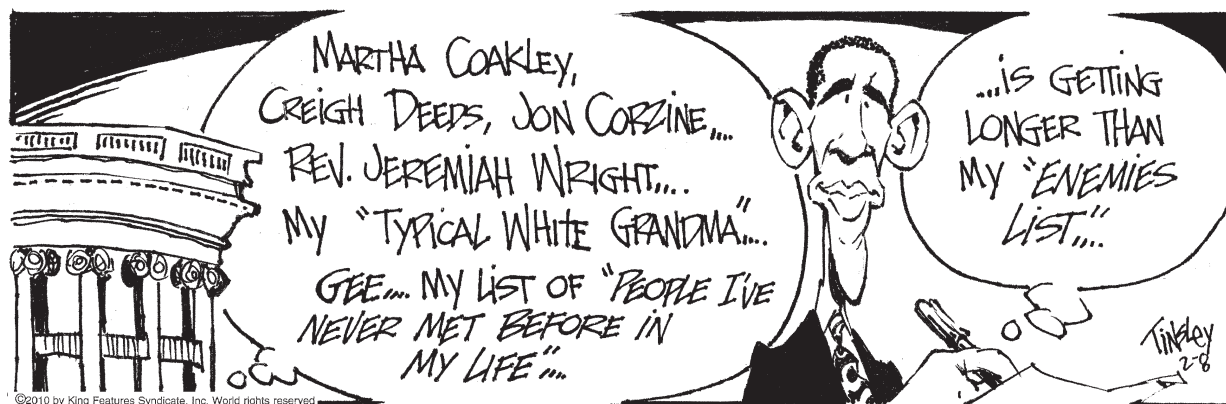
After a day of subbing at Colby High School, I was in the congested exit traffic. My tailgate flew open as I was between vehicles waiting to leave.

My dilemma was immediately resolved by two young men in the pickup behind me. The passenger jumped out of that vehicle and rushed up to close my tailgate, once again confirming my faith in young folks. Parents and teachers of these and other teens like them have every right to be proud.

Sharon Jumper, Colby

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



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