

Other Viewpoints

Battle against Medicaid fraud shows real progress

A few years back, Kansas was easy pickings for Medicaid fraud.

As recently as 2006, the state ranked 34th in the country for recovering money claimed illegally by providers in the government-subsidized health care program for low-income citizens. Lately, for every federal grant dollar spent on the state's Medicaid fraud unit, Kansas recovered \$1.36.

After being appointed in January 2008, new Kansas Attorney General Steve Six did a very difficult thing for a Kansan. He looked east. Missouri, he saw, did a much better job of catching Medicaid crooks.

Six has been chasing Missouri ever since. When his office released its 2010 annual report this month, it became clear that has paid great dividends for our state. In 2009, Kansas ranked third among all states for recovering money lost to fraud, with about \$19 recovered for each federal grant dollar received.

So far in 2010, Kansas has recovered almost \$22 million. That's as much had been recovered between 1996 and 2008.

Despite this progress, the chase is still on. Missouri in 2009 was second in the state rankings and collects about \$36 for each federal dollar used, according to Department of Health and Human Services inspector general.

In Kansas, the Medicaid fraud unit has taken down unscrupulous providers, including one who was collecting information about patients' family members and deceptively filing Medicaid claims for them. The most common violation is companies overcharging for drugs.

A strong emphasis on cracking down on Medicaid fraud by President Barack Obama's administration and some recently passed Kansas laws make it likely the state can continue to improve.

Six is in a race against Republican Derek Schmidt to retain his job, to which he was appointed after the last occupant left in disgrace. Regardless of the outcome, the focus on recovering misspent Medicaid funds must continue.

— Kansas City Star, 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: jmorriso@ink.org web: www.morrisonfamily.com
- State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer**, State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St., Room 225-E., Topeka, Kan. 66612, (785) 296-7399 ralph.ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

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155 W. Fifth St. (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963
Colby, Kan. 67701 fax (785) 462-7749

Send news to: colby.editor@nwkansan.com

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Steve Haynes - Publisher
s.haynes@nwkansan.com

NEWS

Kevin Bottrell - News Editor
kbottrell@nwkansan.com

Andy Heintz - Sports Reporter
aheintz@nwkansan.com

Marian Ballard - Copy Editor
mballard@nwkansan.com

Vera Sloan and Rachel Bomba - Society Editors
colby.society@nwkansan.com

ADVERTISING

Heather Woofter - Advertising Representative
hwoofter@nwkansan.com

Andrea Bowers - Advertising Representative
abowers@nwkansan.com

Kathryn Ballard - Advertising Representative
kballard@nwkansan.com

Kyle Hunter - Graphic Design
khunter@nwkansan.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Robin Tubbs - Office Manager
rtubbs@nwkansan.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support@nwkansan.com

NOR'WEST PRESS

Richard Westfahl - General Manager

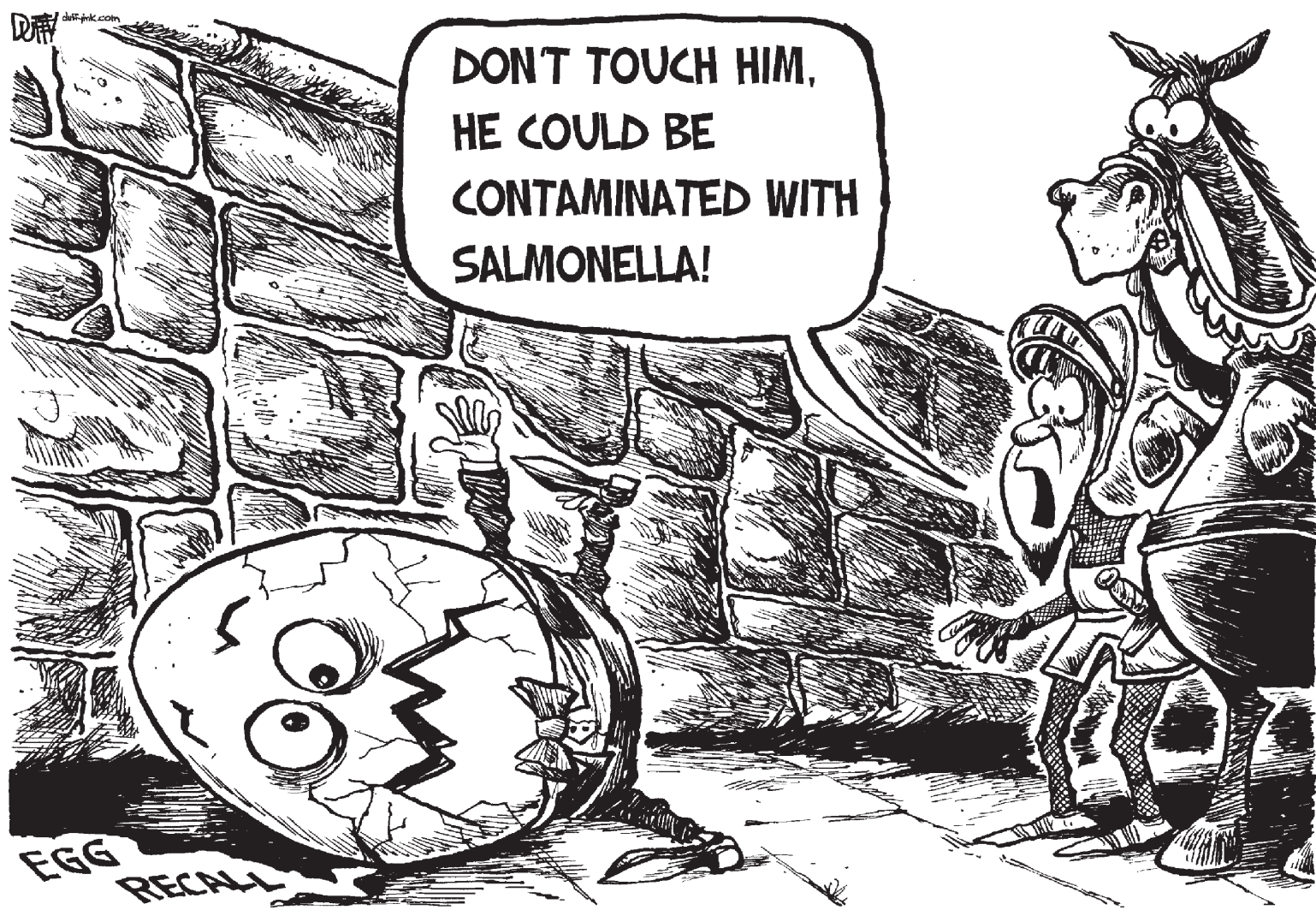
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Happy 90th to the 19th (amendment)

The 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution had a birthday last week – its 90th.

That would be, if you're a bit fuzzy on the U.S. Constitution, the amendment that granted women the right to vote, otherwise known as women's suffrage.

Suffrage – the word – comes from a term for a brief prayer. To me, this means that women were granted to right to be heard.

It was a long time coming.

Franchise, another word that comes up in discussions of who is allowed to vote, comes from a word for free. The freedom to speak, to have your voice be heard.

Those freedoms have, over the years, been more ephemeral than you might expect. In fact, voting – or even the more general matter of citizens having a voice in government – has been a matter of struggle for as long as governments have existed.

It's not too hard to figure out why.

Without government, the person with the biggest muscles – or the biggest club or the most intimidating glare – is going to be the one in charge. That is the person with the power.

Government, at its most basic level, spreads that power around. It offers protection to the little guy, the craftsman or scholar or child. The little guy doesn't have brute strength, but has other things that the strong guy needs or wants. They trade protection for food, shelter,



Marian Ballard

• Collection Connections

beauty and a future generation.

The tricky part comes when Big Brute, who has been appointed Chief Dragon Killer, decides he is the one who takes all the risks and therefore should also be Chief Menu Planner, Chief Poet, etc. Big Brute doesn't want some power; he wants it all.

That's the way people are; they don't know when to stop. So society has devised various ways to keep a check on the Big Brutes in government. We've limited powers. We've withheld money. And we've worked at getting the right to vote out there to as many people as possible. At first in this country, the vote was for all citizens, except, of course, for non-whites and women.

In 1848, Gerrit Smith, a cousin of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, made women's suffrage a plank in the Liberty Party platform. That seems to count as the first formal, public movement toward suffrage for women, though there were other events and influences going back another

century. From that point, though, it took another 70 years to become law.

The followup, the Equal Rights Amendment, never did pass, though it has undoubtedly had an impact on women's lives, both at home and in the marketplace. Pay scales are better, women in leadership are more prominent, and the law's response to abuse of women is much more positive than it was even 30 years ago.

I wonder if women under 30 even notice? We still have Big Brute out there, offering protection with one hand while grabbing for more power with the other. We still have our worries and concerns.

We still feel powerless in the face of the hardships of life, whether personal, financial or physical.

But girls, we also have a voice. We have the right and responsibility to be heard in the halls of government, or even to be a member of government. We can be a voice for the littlest citizens, those who cannot yet vote, and do not know that power needs to be spread around, or it corrupts and destroys.

Happy 90th birthday to the 19th Amendment. May it be just the beginning.

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.

Environment watched over by farmers

Are extremists in the environmental movement really concerned about the welfare of our animals, the quality of our water and conserving our planet, or are they trying to change the world to fit their own image?

Listening to their agendas and following their actions, there is little doubt these extremists are hell-bent on eliminating animals from production agriculture. Referendums like those in California, Ohio, Missouri and other states by well-funded animal rightists are taking direct aim at the rights of farmers and ranchers who raise, care for and sell farm animals.

You can bet the farm on it – environmental extremists from these groups have played a role whenever new water quality standards are proposed.

Last fall, the federal Environmental Protection Agency announced it was beginning a comprehensive evaluation of the pesticide atrazine to determine its effect on humans. At the end of this process, the agency will decide whether to revise its current risk assessment of the pesticide and whether new restrictions are necessary to protect public health.

Atrazine is the most important herbicide in soil-saving growing practices such as no-till and conservation tillage. Farmers use atrazine to control weeds on about two-thirds of this country's corn and sorghum acreage.

EPA is also looking at controlling dust on the farm and herbicide and insecticide spraying drift. Dust is part of farming, it always will be, and careful spraying of crops is essential to continue producing yields necessary to feed this country and the world's people.

With wise and prudent stewardship, Mother Earth can sustain man and create a desirable living environment with wholesome, abundant food for all.

Anyone with a conscience is interested in making sure our soil, water and air remain in



John Schlageck

• Insights Kansas Farm Bureau

the best condition possible. We all must eat, drink and breathe. It only makes sense to conserve our resources and preserve the environment in which we live.

Not only do some of these zealots want to tell us how to use the land, they want to take it, too. They would like to see the federal government buy land, then allow us to use it.

Our government has always managed land in a trust relationship for all the people of our country. Not all of the federal land is in the best condition. Plenty of questions remain unanswered concerning wildfires burning hundreds of thousands of acres in the hot, dry West.

For several years now, a movement has been afoot to take government-controlled land back into private ownership. This same trend seems to be happening in other places around the globe, including the former Soviet Union.

There is no way government can take better care of the land than individual owners. Individuals with a vested interest in property will always care for it better than people who have no ownership.

Landowners object to people who wave the environmental flag, then call on the federal government to take tracts of land for their use without payment. To ask for land without payment is no better than thievery.

These groups should have to pay in the marketplace like everyone else. Once they are required to buy their land, they will have to find ways to offset the costs that come with

ownership.

Without a doubt, most people in this country are tired of government taking care of them. We, as Americans, should take back our government from the politicians and bureaucrats. But in order to do so, we must participate in the process – if we aren't already doing so.

The struggle to maintain our freedoms and safeguard our property continues. We must persevere.

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.



Write us

The Colby Free Press encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of general interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

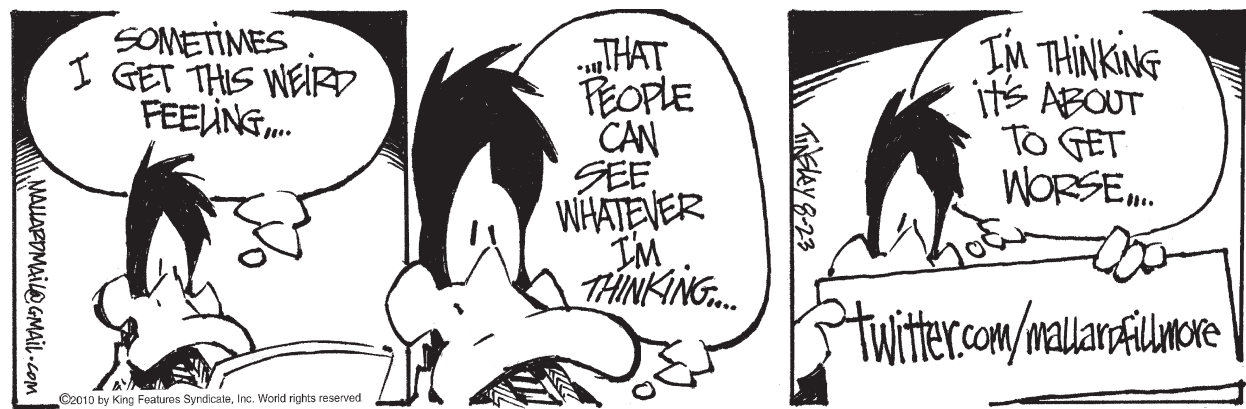
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Letters will not be censored, but will be read and edited for form and style, clarity, length and legality. We will not publish attacks on private individuals or businesses not pertaining to a public issue.

Before an election, letters (other than responses by a candidate) will not be published after the Thursday before the polls open.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



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