



Free Press Viewpoint

Nobody else gets raises either, seniors

The wailing has barely begun. No cost-of-living increase for Social Security for the second year in a row! That's never happened, and it may leave senior voters in a snit next month, especially after they've been hyped by all kinds of people who'll tell them they "deserve" the raise, known as a COLA.

Huh? "When people aren't getting the COLAs, they certainly feel like they're falling farther and farther behind, particularly in this economy," David Certner, legislative policy director for the American Association of Retired Persons, told the Associated Press. "People rely on Social Security as a major portion of their income, and quite frankly, they have counted on the COLA over the years."

Counted on the COLA. The cost-of-living escalator has been in the Social Security rules since Congress passed it in the 1970s. In that era, inflation was a real problem. Social Security retirees were being left behind by a hot-running economy.

So enter the cost of living adjustment, which gave seniors a "raise" every year, year after year - until last year, that is. After the uproar arose, Democrats proposed a \$250 supplemental payment to make up for the increase seniors didn't deserve. It was blocked by Democratic defectors, but that will only make the uproar this year worse.

Since almost two-thirds of retirees depend mostly on their Social Security for income, this is no minor matter.

But out in the real world, few are getting raises this year. The real world is hard. Most people think they are just lucky to have a job.

Can they afford to pay more to finance a raise for retirees? Can the country afford to borrow more to finance a cost of living increase that's clearly not warranted by the figures?

The Democrats must think the answer is "yes." They've already introduced a bill to grant \$250 payments again this year. Those who haven't had a raise or who're unemployed might differ.

But the truth is, prices aren't going up. Seniors may have plenty of expenses, but no one has shown that they face any more inflation than the rest of us.

One thing for sure, the Social Security recipients won't be the ones paying for any increase. They paid taxes in their time, for sure, but they're past that now.

And given the facts, it'd be just plain wrong to tax everyone else to increase payments this year. Popular with one group of voters, for sure, but still wrong.

- Steve Haynes

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Where 'hawk time' and 'owl time' meet

Steve and I live in different time zones. I don't mean that he lives on Mountain Time while I'm on Central. It's more like he's an owl and I'm a hawk.

Have you ever seen changing of the guard on power poles at dawn and dusk?

Each evening, the hawks quit their posts and the owls take over. It's sort of like the night shift coming on as the day shift goes home for the evening.

We always enjoy this peek into the avian world when walking in the park on nice evenings. We almost never see it in the morning. Steve doesn't do mornings, and while I get up a lot earlier than he does, I don't do early morning walks.

Now, I like to get up in the morning, not the middle of the night like some of my friends.

I feel that 8 a.m. is a great time to get up. I can handle 7 a.m. or even 6:30 if needed, however, earlier than that is getting into middle-of-the-night stuff as far as I'm concerned.

I have two friends who regularly get up at 4:30 to 5 a.m. In fact, my grandmother used



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

to get up at 5 a.m. and go out and work in her flowers. But then my grandmother lived in Arkansas in a non-air-conditioned house. Going out early in the morning allowed her to get her yard work done when it was cool and then take a nice nap in the heat of the day.

I'm all for the nap. I'm just not for the 5 a.m.

The only time Steve has seen 5 a.m. is when he's not been to bed the night before. His ideal time to get up is somewhere between 10 and 11 a.m.

He's a real night owl, but then, he worked for a morning newspaper for 10 years. He went to work at 4 p.m. and got off at midnight.

When I hit the hay at 11 p.m. he's just getting his second wind. He's ready to watch television, listen to the radio, read, work on his computer, go for a walk - or go dancing.

It's sometime a strain for us to get things done. We end up not seeing each other in the morning and having supper at 9:30 p.m. As soon as the dishes get done and the dog gets walked, I go to bed, and he goes to work on those things I got done in the morning - like reading the paper, writing, editing, answering mail and doing odd jobs around the house.

It works for us most of the time. When it doesn't, one of us loses sleep and gets very cranky. That makes the other one make sure that on the weekend, he gets to sleep in and I get to go to bed early.

And we both take a nap. Some things are popular in any time zone.

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 c.haynes@nwkans.com

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To the Editor:

Some conservative economists are actively discussing Social Security. They want to reduce the Social Security cost of living adjustment up to a full percentage point below the Consumer Price Index inflation rate. Do you know why?

This is the reason given by the Center for Economic and Police Research: "the deficits in the federal budget," adding that the finances of the "Social Security program have been at most a secondary consideration."

So refiguring your annual cost of living adjustment at a reduced rate is yet another way to solve the federal debt crisis on the backs of retired Americans. but it's even worse than that, because the Center also says, "... the oldest retirees will see the largest cuts in benefits under this formula. Oldest retirees also tend to have the lowest incomes and the highest poverty rates. They are also disproportionately women."

I'll confess that for years, I've felt like a fool when the adjustment I received did not really cover the rise in my cost of living. I took the adjustment, of course, and accepted the lie as if it were the truth.

These are the facts too powerful to ignore:

- Even before the adjustment was frozen to zero, millions of retirees had already seen their entire Social Security adjustment eaten up to pay for Medicare out-of-pocket costs.
- For Medicare Parts A,B and D beneficiaries, an average of 40 percent of their Social Security check is consumed by premiums and deductibles and other out-of-pocket costs.
- The Social Security cost-of-living adjustment has not kept pace with the soaring costs of fuel, health care and other basic needs it was intended to cover.
- With more than two-thirds of senior beneficiaries relying on Social Security for over half their income, the annual adjustment is vital to millions faced with shrunken home and 401(k) values plus soaring health care and living costs.

And perhaps the most powerful fact of all: annual automatic adjustments were legislated in 1975 to prevent all of the above - to protect the buying power of Social Security benefi-



Free Press Letter Drop

• Our readers sound off

ciaries.

This is what we urgently need:

- Change how the adjustment is calculated by establishing an Elderly Consumer Price Index for individuals 62 years and older.
- Ensure that seniors receive a fair adjustment next year and every year, or at least some form of relief, such as a proposed (but so far failed) one-time \$250 payment to offset the zero adjustment.

Edna A. Hatcher, Colby

Violence reports only tip of iceberg

To the Editor:

Every day, we hear countless reports about violence against women and children. These headline-making stories represent only the tip of the iceberg.

And Kansas is no exception to this violence. What we see happening in Kansas parallels what is happening nationally. Behind every headline, there are infinite untold stories that affect the public health and safety of all citizens.

One in 10 adult women in Kansas report domestic violence victimization, which can include isolation, emotional, verbal, sexual and physical abuse, as well as financial abuse and control. Sexual and domestic violence enters our workplaces, our churches and our schools. It destroys families and devastates communities. Survivors fill our emergency rooms and safe shelters, and the cost of doing nothing is high.

The Kansas Bureau of Investigation reports that 35 adults and 14 children lost their lives

as a result of domestic violence in 2009. Unfortunately, the 2010 statistics are just as staggering, with preliminary numbers reflecting 20 adults and six children through the month of August.

All Kansans can do something to make a difference today - simply knowing the Kansas Crisis Hotline number, (888) END-ABUSE or (888) 363-2287, ensures that everyone will be ready when someone they know needs their help.

In addition, consider donating time or resources to your local sexual or domestic violence advocacy organization, teach the children and teens in your life how to recognize the signs of an unhealthy relationship and contact your state legislators and ask them to maintain the budget for life-saving services for victims and their children across the state.

During the month of October, all Kansans are invited to join advocates and allies across the state as we remember those who have lost their lives, as we offer support for those who have survived, and as we encourage all community leaders to assess what they can do to create safer communities for all Kansans. Go to kcsdv.org to find advocacy organizations and events near you.

Melissa DeDonder, Topeka communications coordinator Kansas Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence

Where to write, call

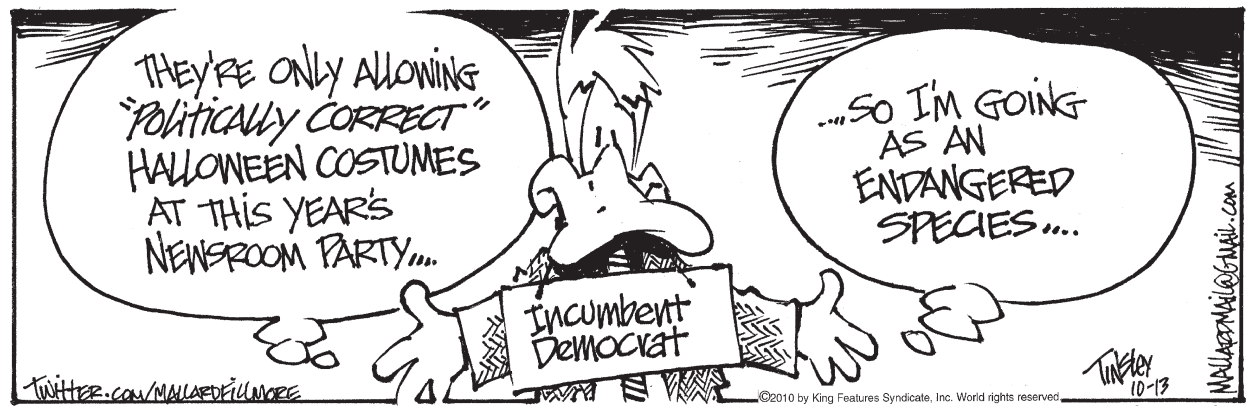
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