



Other Viewpoints

Signing pledges pre-empts thinking

Public servants and politicians should refrain from signing special-interest pledges to do this or not to do that. Yet many in Kansas take these vows with pride, unashamedly tying their own hands and pre-empting their own discretion.

Promising to serve the mission of an interest group makes its unelected henchman happy, assuring support for future campaigns. But it also suggests the pledge takers won't – or can't – think for themselves.

The signers may protest that they simply are standing with others for a righteous common cause. In fact, they are lining up behind people and organizations with agendas that may not reflect reality or serve their constituents.

The issue of pledges has come up in the debt-ceiling debate and the GOP presidential campaign....

All but 13 Republicans in Congress are willing hostages to Americans for Tax Reform president Grover Norquist and his Tax Protection Pledge, which obligates them to oppose any and all tax increases.

The Kansans who've taken Norquist's pledges include Moran and Sen. Pat Roberts; Huelskamp and Reps. Mike Pompeo and Lynn Jenkins; five state senators; and 19 state representatives. Gov. Sam Brownback also has taken the pledge in the past.

Norquist underscored the meaning of his pledges recently in a vivid hypothetical on Comedy Central, when Stephen Colbert asked what he would advise if terrorists kidnapped the nation's grandmothers, slathered them with honey and threatened to kill them with fire ants unless the marginal tax rate was increased on the richest 2 percent of Americans. "I think we console ourselves with the fact that we have pictures and memories," Norquist deadpanned, before allowing a smile.

Moran, Jenkins and Roberts also have taken the Club for Growth's pledge to work to repeal the 2010 health care reform act. And Brownback, Roberts, Moran, Pompeo, Huelskamp, Jenkins, six state senators and 15 state representatives took Americans for Prosperity's "No Climate Tax Pledge," vowing to "oppose legislation relating to climate change that includes a net increase in federal revenue."

In Iowa, GOP presidential hopefuls are being asked by the Family Leader group to pledge not only to oppose same-sex marriage and serve a dozen other socially conservative goals but to be faithful to their spouses. Then there is the Pro-Life Presidential Leadership Pledge pushed by the Susan B. Anthony List.

The past decade, with a terrorist attack and two punishing recessions, should have demonstrated the need for elected officials to reserve judgment.

It should suffice to take the oath of office and regularly say – and mean – the Pledge of Allegiance.

– *The Wichita Eagle, via The Associated Press*

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It's the journey, not the destination

*Well, if they freed me from this prison,
If that railroad train was mine,
I bet I'd move out over a little,
Farther down the line....*

*And I'd let that lonesome whistle,
Blow my Blues away.*

– "Folsom Prison Blues," Johnny Cash

Some people ride to Sturgis every year. We hear the cry of that lonesome whistle. It's *The Denver Post's* train to Cheyenne Frontier Days.

How do you explain that call to the uninitiated?

First of all, it's a genuine steam engine, the last big one in service today that's never been retired. Union Pacific 844, a war baby born to move troops and heavy limiteds, survived into the 1960s in snow-melting service in Council Bluffs, Iowa.

Then someone at headquarters in Omaha decided she'd be ideal for pulling excursions and special trains. The big engine's been at it ever since, thrilling many thousands with her steamboat whistle and flashing drivers.

Then there's the train, a genuine 1950s streamliner, 22 gleaming matched yellow, red and grey cars, looking every bit as good as they did when built back in the 1950s. The train features seven sparkling dome cars, a dance car, snacks and beverages at your first-class-size seat.

There's simply nothing like it in the world.

The train has been running every summer for 20 years now, revived by *Post* publisher Dean Singleton in 1991 to mark the paper's centennial. It's become a Denver tradition, and tickets sell out within a few days.

The original train to Frontier Days was designed by *Post* founder Frederick Bonfils to woo advertisers and politicians of the late Victorian Era. Only men were invited as guests; the only females aboard were leggy young



Steve Haynes

• Along the Sappa

women who gave out cigars and cigarettes. You couldn't buy a ticket; you had to be invited. And if you weren't, then likely you weren't much in Colorado's power structure.

Today, you pay your money and get your tickets. Profits go to *The Post's* foundation. Most riders go year after year, the waiting list is long. It's not so much the rodeo; it's the atmosphere and the ride. Some go for the whole afternoon; others go shopping.

The train draws governors, senators, congressmen and billionaires. The rear three cars are reserved for invited VIPs, but most riders are just people who like trains, rodeos or both. We've been going for most of the last 20 years, missing only a few trips where we had something else to do, didn't get tickets or – one year – just missed the train.

It's a long day, if not a long trip. The train leaves Denver promptly at 7 a.m. The air-conditioned cars are crisp in the post-dawn coolness, and that feels pretty good after the weather on the plains the last couple of weeks.

The big steamer, backed by a historic diesel from the 1960s, eases out of town and heads north, parallel to the sparkling, snow-capped Front Range. The train rolls along "past houses, farms and fields" as the riders digest a continental breakfast, cinnamon rolls, fruit, yogurt and granola.

Along the route, hundreds line up at every crossing, park and field. Whole families wave to the big engine and the people on the train. Somehow, the word spreads.

On parallel U.S. 85, a couple dozen cars pace the train, slowing for the towns, taking

pictures, speeding up in the country. The engineer lets the 844 gallop on at 60 mph, the maximum speed here, though she was built to run 100 and more.

Little, if any, film will die today, but thousands of photos and hours and hours of video will be framed. A pilot buzzes the train in a World War II era Stearman biplane. In Denver and again in Cheyenne, people gather up front to photograph the engine.

There's a big parade, and I'm amazed at Wyoming efficiency: instead of the traditional guys with brooms, a fleet of three street sweepers rolls up the end, scooping the horse manure and washing the pavement in one pass.

Busses take people to the rodeo grounds for a catered lunch before the show. Frontier Days, which claims to be the first rodeo, is like a county fair, a carnival, an Indian show and a stock exhibition all rolled into one, plenty of vendors and everything from hats to jewelry to trinkets and junk.

As the train pulls out for Denver at 5:30, everyone is tired from a day in the sun. They sit quietly, munching on box lunches and enjoying the cool air. But Cynthia wants to go to the dance car, where a country-rock band holds forth. How could I imagine this would lead to a conversation with the son and grandson of a veteran editor I'd worked with at the old *Kansas City Times* more than 40 years ago?

But such is the cachet of the *Post* train; you meet people.

As we're rollin' home in the gathering dusk, the range turns golden, then purple, in the sunset. The train stops; someone has reported a pickup parked too near the tracks up ahead. We have to wait for police to shoo the offender away, so we'll be a little late.

No one seems to mind.

Steve Haynes is president of Nor'West Newspapers. When he has the time, he'd rather be reading a good book or casting a fly.

America's obligated to next generation

With \$14.3 trillion worth of debt, annual deficits in the trillions, long-term obligations that threaten to bankrupt our nation, and continued threats of downgrade by credit institutions, America has a choice.

We can continue to allow reckless and unsustainable borrowing and spending, or we can enact measures that will force Washington to get its habits under control. Only the latter ensures prosperity, freedom, and survival of the American Dream.

If we are to get America on a path to fiscal responsibility, then the time to act is now. Time and time again, the President and Senate leadership talk about getting a large enough debt limit increase to get them through the next election.

Mr. President and Senator Reid – this is not about your next election, this is about the next generation. After all, it is our children and grandchildren who will have to pay off this massive debt. We owe future generations more than just an IOU.

Think about America in terms of a consumer like you or me. When someone has trouble managing their money and faces serious debt, the solution is not to give them another credit card and hope that the problems will fix themselves. No, the solution is to help them figure



U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp

• Capitol Notes

out the best way to spend the money they do have and establish a plan to help them save and invest for the future.

"Cut, Cap, Balance" was just the solution to help Washington solve her spending problems now and discipline her in the future. This began as a pledge – which I signed – earlier this summer, and has turned into legislation that was introduced and voted on in the House last week. This legislation would have given the President the debt limit he requests, but only if three conditions were met: spending is reduced this year, future spending is capped, and a Balanced Budget Amendment is passed.

I was proud to sponsor this legislation in the House, as I believe it would have disciplined Washington, especially the Balanced Budget Amendment. In a press conference on Friday, President Obama said that he would not support the Balanced Budget Amendment be-

cause Washington simply needs to do its job. Unfortunately, President Obama and decades of Washington leaders have proven they can't manage our nation's finances responsibly.

In addition to the Balanced Budget Amendment, this legislation contained immediate spending reductions for this upcoming fiscal year – to the tune of more than \$100 billion – and caps on future spending tied to the overall size of the economy. "Cut, Cap, Balance" would have made it so the government is not the source of one quarter of every dollar spent, but rather less than 20 cents. This is a balanced level of spending and one that maintains a private sector-based economy – rather than the failed socialist model.

The Senate failed to pass Cut, Cap, Balance, and so the deal will not go before the president. This legislation was not just about changing how much Washington spends, but rather the way it spends and borrows.

America's future – and that of our children and grandchildren – is riding on the decisions that will be made about our finances. Let's hope this debt ceiling debate helps put America on the path to recovery.

Tim Huelskamp is the congressman from Kansas' 1st District, serving his first term.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

