



Free Press Viewpoint

Not any old thing is a federal disaster

It started as just another Washington budget crisis: The Federal Emergency Management Agency, fondly known as FEMA, claimed that with hurricanes and floods, its disaster fund would drop below \$1 billion and it might not be able to help everyone.

Democratic senators called for billions more, then claimed Republicans were "playing politics" when they insisted on following budget rules and cutting something else. The Republicans noted that the House had already passed a FEMA appropriation with more money.

Then the agency "found" \$40 million which it said would tide it over until the new fiscal year began Oct. 1. Why it needed "billions" more when \$40 million would do, no one could say.

Now, the controversy has faded. Hurricane damage is getting repaired. The floods are receding; roads and bridges are being rebuilt.

And this would be a good time to ask just what we expect of the federal government during times of disaster. For more than a century, the government has been involved in flood control and disaster relief. That was an issue in the 1928 presidential campaign, for instance.

But in recent years, the flood of money to Emergency Management – indeed, to all Department of Homeland Security agencies – has been immense. And no one seems to have kept count of where it all went.

Every fire department in the country apparently needed a grant to buy equipment, most of which would have been paid for out of local budgets – or just put off – in previous years. It's not that new breathing apparatus, radios and turnout gear aren't a good thing, just that they're hardly a federal responsibility.

While that money seems to have dried up some, Emergency Management continues to pump out dollars. Time was when a "disaster" meant something big: a blizzard, a hurricane, a massive tornado, statewide flooding, something truly beyond the local budget.

Not anymore. A few inches of water over gravel roads seems to qualify today. One area county sent people out to take pictures when water flowed over one of its roads last year so it could "get some of the federal money."

Years ago, the commissioners would have dealt with the issue without state or federal help, even if they had to cut somewhere else.

Today, why, if there's federal money out there, might as well get some.

We think those days are coming to an end, and rightly so. The federal government doesn't have any money to spend, Congress is tied up trying to balance the budget and big cuts loom. It's a great time to look at all these federal programs and ask, "What must we really depend on Uncle Sam to do?"

We suggest the answer is, "To help in time of true need." States, cities and counties should handle their own bills the rest of the time and look to the feds only when they really need the help.

That should not be often. Besides, FEMA has a terrible reputation for messing up its efforts: bad trailers, big delays, poor response, unhelpful attitude. How can you depend on an agency that can't get it right?

– Steve Haynes

The Young Activist's Guide to Success.*



*SOME, IF NOT ALL, PRODUCTS SHOWN HERE MADE OVERSEAS.

KOERBA
MAYAWORLD-HERALD

October's the time to work for a cause

I hereby declare October to be – drum roll, please – "Month month."

People send me things. Organizations send me things. Government press agencies send me things. Some days, I feel like a colander. You know – dump stuff in, rinse it, take out the icky parts, dump it out again.

Among the things people send me are proclamations. These are frequent and highly ignorable. In fact, I've already got one for November, saying it's Banana Pudding Month. That, to me, is just weird because 1) of all the foods that come to mind for November, banana pudding ain't one of them; 2) I don't even particularly like banana pudding; and 3) I can't imagine why anyone would think something like pudding would deserve a month, even if it was double-chocolate with chocolate chips and hot fudge topping with a dollop of real whipped cream to complete the picture.

But back to October. It's kind of understandable, in a way. After all, if you want something recognized with its own month, you need to consider carefully which month to use.

December, May and September immediately come off the list – there's just too much else going on in those months. December has Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, New Year's Eve, shopping, concerts, the end of school semesters, graduations and graduates moving, along with bad or unpredictable weather and lots of people on the road or in the air for holiday travel.

May is almost as bad, with graduations, Mother's Day, school finals, graduates moving home or to new jobs, early summer vacations, Memorial Day – and let us not forget Cinco de Mayo, a good excuse to pig out on Mexican food. A lot of smart moms combine a Cinco de Mayo party with a graduation party, thereby



Marian Ballard

Collection Connections

making everybody happy with a minimum of fuss.

September is also not a good time to add much, what with school starting, football season, college kids getting settled, a major round of meeting of every group that has suspended meetings for the summer, from congressional committees to the Potluck of the Month Club. There are several designations in September, though, most having to do with safety or diseases.

That leaves nine months to choose from. But think about it. January is devoted to recovering from December. February is devoted to groundhogs, Valentines, presidents and Mardi Gras. March is such a gray gloomy month it's hard to get excited about anything but Easter on the way, April is full of bunnies and sunrise services and getting the fishing boat out of storage.

In the summer, no one is thinking much about grand causes. Instead it's mowing lawns and weeding gardens, the County Fair and the swimming pool and vacation and keeping the kids entertained until school starts again.

November, of course, is busy with Christmas shopping and Thanksgiving – and let us not forget banana pudding.

Which leaves October. If you have a cause you want recognized, October is the time to recognize it. While one calendar I looked at

recognizes 19 October holidays, only Halloween inspires a lot of activity. Columbus Day, in fact, is almost as much damned as praised, being called in some circles a recognition of 500 years of oppression of indigenous peoples, otherwise known as Native Americans or American Indians, depending on your generation and politics.

Anyway, it apparently seems like a good time for declaring a month in recognition of your cause. If you don't have your own cause, though, here's a list for you to choose from.

- Zombie Preparedness Month – a nationwide movement featuring the Centers for Disease Control and the Kansas Division of Emergency Management, among many other groups, with the idea that if you're ready for a zombie invasion, you're ready for anything.
- Sudden Infant Syndrome (SIDS) Awareness Month
- Physical Therapy Month
- Co-op Month
- Sunflower Organists Month
- Dental Hygiene Month
- PTA Membership Enrollment Month
- Breast Cancer Awareness Month
- Car Care Month
- Disability Employment Awareness Month

I'm sure there are more, but that's the list that's passed through my filter. Being filtered, I'm sure not all the names are precise. Please don't tell me if they're wrong; I'll only get more confused.

Anyway, Happy Month Month.

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.

Patient privacy at serious risk

The need to repeal the President's new health care law becomes more apparent every single day. The law was passed with such speed that it was impossible for the last Congress to even read it. As then-Speaker Pelosi said before she and her colleagues made this bill law, "We have to pass the bill so you can see what's in it." This is no way to govern, and now Americans will pay another price for that lack of leadership: privacy rights.

In mid-July, the Department of Health and Human Services issued a proposed rule to carry out the President's health care law that would require health insurance companies to submit information about every single patient to a national database. Data might include personally identifiable information as well as the types of treatment patients are given. Health and Human Services Secretary Sebelius says such data collection is necessary in order to evaluate "risk adjustment" – who has healthier patients, who has sicker patients, and how should federal dollars be distributed as a result?

In the proposed rule, the department offers one of three ways it could get its hands on the data. One, it could compel insurers to submit the data directly. Two, it could require them to provide it to the states (who then turn over calculations based on those data to the feds). Three, the department could tell insurance companies how to calculate the numbers it wants, and then force them to turn over these



U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp

Capitol Notes

scores. Regardless of which option is ultimately chosen by bureaucratic decree, patient privacy is at stake.

Despite any promises or assurances Health and Human Services may attempt to make about protecting your confidential information, there are too many examples of government information getting into the wrong hands. Consider the case when a Veterans' Affairs employee took a laptop home (against workplace protocol) only to have it stolen. On that laptop was information about 26.5 million veterans and their spouses. Imagine if that laptop had information about why you went to the doctor three times in the past month?

But, the biggest concern is the possible intentional exposure of your personal data for personal, economic, or political gain by an enterprising bureaucrat. A database containing information about every single patient claim in the U.S. is a tempting treasure trove of information – and one worth a lot of money.

As time passes, we are likely to find out more that we do not like about the President's health

care law. That is why the House has already passed several pieces of legislation to repeal the President's law in full or in part. However, it is highly probable that the repeal bill will never reach the President's desk.

So, until it is possible to repeal the legislation in full, the House must exercise its power of the purse. In bringing attention to this issue, I am leading the effort and will stop at nothing to defund any and all parts of this patient database, making it impossible for Health and Human Services to get its hands on your private and confidential medical records. I invite you to stay on top of this issue and learn how to make your voice heard at <http://huelskamp.house.gov/hhs>.

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

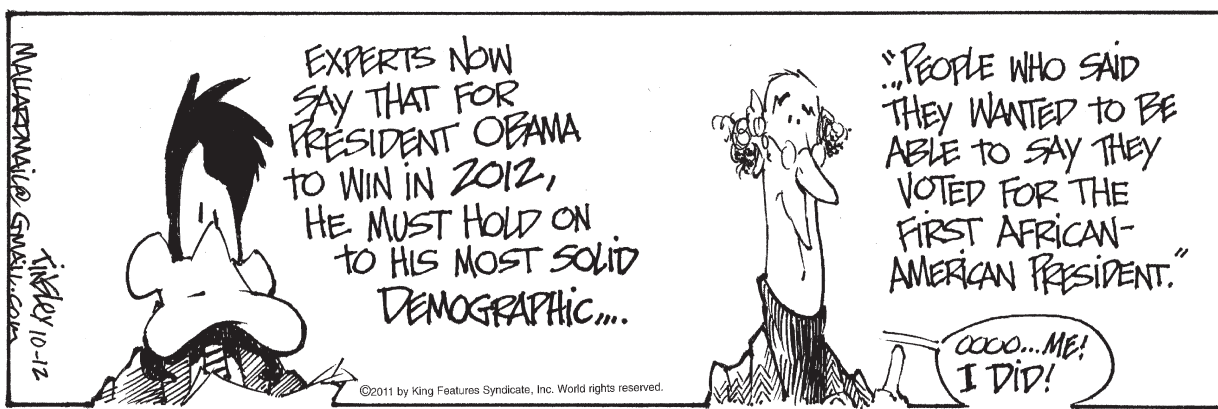
Where to write, call

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U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp, 126 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715 or Fax (202) 225-5124. Web site: huelskamp.house.gov

Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley



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