



Other Viewpoints

Scammers strike on Medicare front

Few things get the crooks and scam artists as excited as a big pile of government money, which makes Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid tempting targets for those who put a lot of effort into taking other people's money rather than earning their own.

Reading about the latest pitches and scams would be interesting if the problem wasn't so widespread – and all too frequently successful.

In recent years, the Internet has gained favor as the tool of choice for those who would rather steal than work because there's enough personal information floating around in cyberspace to make identity theft rather easy.

But the bad guys must do their market research, too, because they will use the telephone to target members of an age group that isn't as comfortable using a computer as are their children and grandchildren.

Of course, many senior citizens, or soon-to-be senior citizens, have become as conversant with technology as anyone else. Some of their peers, however, aren't so comfortable with the latest technology, which forces the scam artists to occasionally dial a telephone number...

News about one of the latest scams comes to us from the Kansas Department of Aging. It appears Medicare beneficiaries are scheduled to renew their choices soon in Medicare Part D prescription drug plans. Some of those beneficiaries are being solicited via the telephone by people who inform the beneficiaries they are being offered free diabetic supplies and ask for their Medicare number to start the process.

The callers then bill Medicare for diabetic supplies and sometimes even sell the Medicare number to others who bill for different services.

The Department of Aging advises Medicare recipients that the program doesn't endorse products and wouldn't call and ask for a number it already has.

Recently, a reader told us she had received a call from someone claiming that the government was issuing new Medicare cards to senior citizens. The caller asked for the woman's Medicare number, bank and checking account number. The caller hung up when the woman asked for a telephone number.

Not to forget the Internet, many Topekans recently received e-mails from someone claiming to be a rather well-known resident of the city. According to the email solicitation, the woman was stranded overseas and needed some money to make the return trip.

That last example didn't involve government money or senior citizens, but it does show how easy it is to use the Internet in hopes of bilking unwary souls.

In the Medicare scams, the callers weren't after the beneficiaries' money directly – although they likely would have used any personal information they received to initiate another ploy – but were seeking access to government funding for the program.

That doesn't make the crime any less reprehensible. That money was provided by taxpayers for a specific purpose.

We all must be vigilant about protecting our money and that we send to different levels of government from leeches looking to fatten themselves.

– *The Topeka Capital-Journal, via the Associated Press*

We encourage comments on opinions expressed on this page. Mail them to the *Colby Free Press*, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701, or e-mail colby.editor@nwkansans.com.

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11,000 feet still feels great

So I'm standing atop a ridge at 11,000 feet. The day is beautiful, temperature above freezing, some clouds, and a storm moving in, but the sun is shining on the peaks of the San Juan range ahead of me and on the Sangre de Cristos a hundred miles to the east.

It looks like winter. It feels a little like winter, and I'm standing on a pair of skis, but I know it's late fall, no more. But if the snow keeps on like it has so far, there could be a lot of it in the mountains this year. Maybe out on the plains, too.

Wolf Creek Ski Area opened about Oct. 8, a record. Opening by Halloween used to be a big deal. Thanksgiving is normal, but some years, Christmas is a stretch.

In October, I was too busy with Indian Summer and fishing to want to go skiing. By November, though, it sounded pretty good. Not that I'm much of a skier; I hadn't been on the slopes in two or three years.

Like a lot of Kansans, I did not grow up with skiing. We lived in the Flint Hills, and skiing was not a thing in our family. We had friends who went with church groups or with family, but we saved our mountain vacations for summer.

Dad liked to fish.

When Cynthia and I moved to Colorado in 1980, settling only 40 miles from Wolf Creek, I decided maybe I should learn to ski. I wouldn't



Steve Haynes

• Along the Sappa

say I ever became an expert, but I got by. And that led to many happy days on the slopes with the kids and with friends.

I even took the instructor's classes one year, though they didn't offer me a job. My form wasn't good enough, I'm sure. The kids latched on to winter jobs teaching kids to ski or babysitting. Being a ski instructor meant the oldest one never had to worry about finding a part-time job in college – or for several years after.

But I don't live near a ski area anymore. It takes planning and time off to go skiing, plus money, and I don't always have those. I sure can't just hop in the car and drive up for a half day like we used to.

But the other day, I was in the area, I had the time – and nature had given us the snow. Cynthia said she'd drive with me and hold down a table at the lodge, sipping hot chocolate and writing columns. Having someone to share the drive pushed me over the edge, so to speak.

Off we went, on the warmest day of the week, too.

There's something about ski areas. They're almost all beautiful places, set high in some mountain range or in a snow-covered valley. The best, places like Vail, Santa Fe Mountain, and yes, Wolf Creek, offer incomparable views. And then, you get to ski.

And skiing is like nothing else, once you learn to guide your skis and get your balance. You can glide over the snow all day, or if you're good enough, challenge yourself with bumps and turns, near-vertical slopes and triple-black-diamond hazards. That's not for me.

When I was in practice, I could keep up with the average adult. I spent years waiting for the kids to catch up to me, and more years watching them whiz by, only to have to wait for Dad.

This year, I was just glad to find I could still turn. I spent the day cruising along the groomed slopes, didn't fall and seldom looked really foolish. I had fun. I call that a success.

I should go back, however, work beckons. So does reality. But it was good while it lasted.

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.

Farmers need freedom to do their job

Breaking federal law by allowing your child to work on the family farm? If the Department of Labor's latest proposal takes effect, such will be the outcome. Being fined nearly six figures for allowing your teenage son to sell rabbits to the local pet store? A Missouri family learned about that existing U.S. Department of Agriculture regulation the hard way. One could only hope these stories of proposed or actual overregulation were fiction.

Unfortunately, they are as real as can be. These stories would be laughable if the consequences were not so serious. Like several other regulations that hold back the profitability of agriculture, rules like these – even rumored ones – have the intended or unintended consequence of hampering the continuity of the family farm. When regulation is used to discourage or prevent young people from learning the science and art of agriculture, Washington threatens the existence and future of rural America.

When we heard that the farm bill was going to be taken up by the Super Committee, I introduced legislation to stop the overregulation that is killing the family farm. Under normal circumstances, it would have been ideal to consider this when the Agriculture Commit-



U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp

• Capitol Notes

tee – on which I serve – took up the next farm bill. Entitled the "Freeing Agriculture to Reap More" (FARM) Act, it would address about a dozen regulations that Kansans have told me are undermining and destroying the continuity and profitability of agriculture.

In addition to reversing the two previously mentioned regulations that affect future farmers and ranchers, the act also deals with regulations that hurt or may hurt those who are in business today. Among other things, the act will prevent regulation of farm dust; prohibit the redefinition of 'navigable waters;' prevent the Environmental Protection Agency from imposing livestock emissions taxes; allow farmers to operate tractors without a commercial driver's license; and deny funding for the White House Rural Council.

Ideally, this legislation would serve as a

"regulatory title" for the farm bill. Given the economic impact of regulation, it merits its own title amid others like trade, research, conservation, or farm credit. When it looks like direct payments are going away, the least Congress can do is alleviate the crushing regulation that costs our farmers and ranchers money that they could otherwise use to create jobs.

Now that the Super Committee has (unsurprisingly) failed to come up with \$1.2 trillion of recommended cuts – as it was charged to do as a condition of the debt limit increase – the Agriculture Committee will be able to come up with its own farm bill. When the debate happens, I hope my colleagues will give due consideration to this act. It may be an uphill battle given that I am only one of about a dozen farmers in the House, but nevertheless I will push hard for a regulatory title like the act in the farm bill. No more families should fall victim to the "bureaucratic and regulatory wisdom" that Washington frequently and unnecessarily imposes on American agriculture.

Congressman Tim Huelskamp of Fowler represents the First District of Kansas. He serves on the Veterans' Affairs, Budget, and Agriculture Committees.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

