

Other Viewpoints

KanCare may short disabled Kansans

It's good to know that state legislators still are trying to address the concerns that families and advocates of developmentally disabled Kansans have about a new managed care system that is part of the governor's plan to reform Medicaid.

These advocates have accepted the idea of putting medical services for the developmentally disabled under the proposed KanCare managed care system, but they don't believe the plan can appropriately handle other long-term care needs of this population. Although other advocacy groups are worried about the speed with which the KanCare system is set to be implemented, the developmental disability community, including Cottonwood Inc., has special concerns about the impact the system will have on long-term, sometimes around-the-clock, care arrangements that have been carefully tailored to meet individual needs.

Other states that have tried to implement plans similar to the one envisioned for Kansas have experienced various problems, including delays in treatment and provider reimbursements. Although a bipartisan group of legislators has sought to slow the implementation of KanCare, state officials are moving ahead with plans to turn management of the state's Medicaid program over to three managed care companies on Jan. 1.

To help address concerns about the shift, a bill has been introduced that would establish a legislative oversight committee for KanCare. Last week, Rep. Jim Ward, D-Wichita, also tried to amend that bill to add a provision that would remove people with developmental disabilities from KanCare and allow them to continue to be served by their current networks. Although both Republican and Democratic legislators spoke in favor of Ward's amendment, the entire bill was referred back to committee at the end of March before the Kansas House could vote on it.

However, some legislators see broad support for keeping people with developmental disabilities out of the KanCare plan and say they will pursue those efforts when the Legislature returns April 25.

Legislators are right to try to make sure the concerns of the developmental disability community are addressed. Even if the state moves ahead with its ambitious timetable for implementing KanCare, it may make sense to work out some of the kinks in the system before trying to apply it to this vulnerable population.

— The Lawrence Journal-World, via the Associated Press

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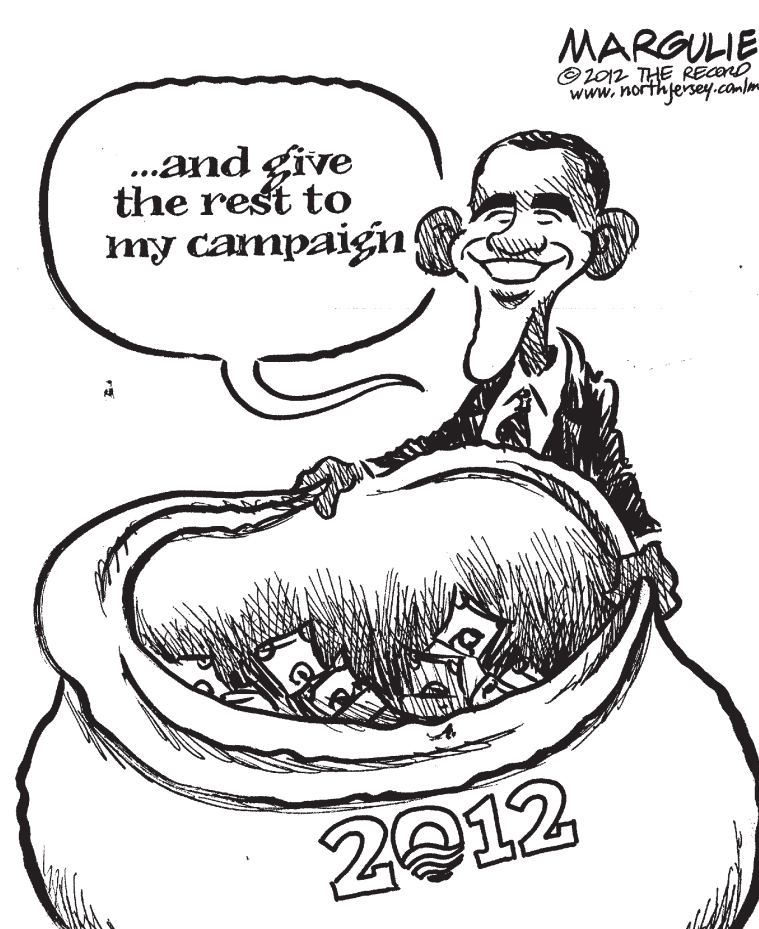
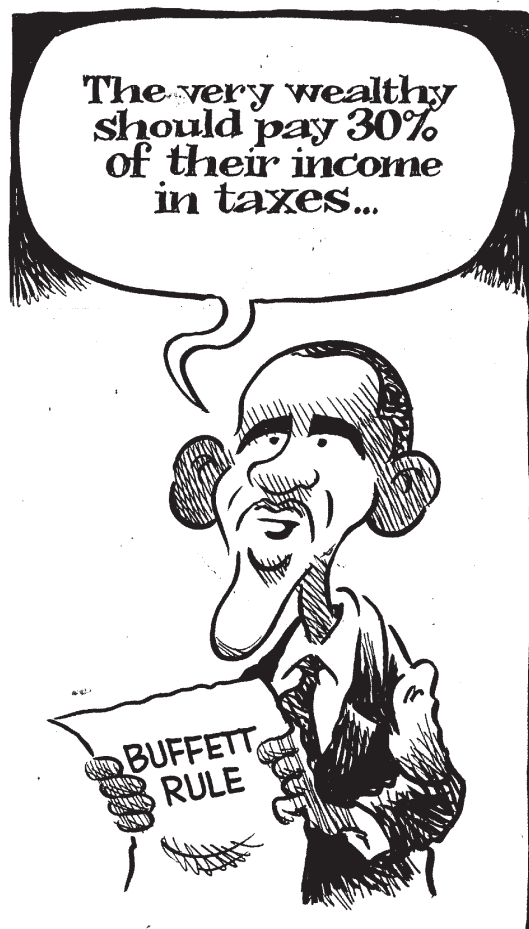
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Thomas County needs jail too

Well, it's Friday the 13th, and just my luck, I've run out of other local columns.

Actually that really is luck, because it gives me an opportunity to write about something that's been on my mind for a while — the Thomas County Jail.

First, a few not-quite random facts.

- Last year, Colby saw the grand opening of a badly-needed new fire station (roughly \$2.5 million) and a heavily-lobbied for aquatic park (roughly \$5 million). These were financed through bonds and are being paid off with a local sales tax.

- On Feb. 13, Sheriff Rod Taylor made a presentation to the Thomas County Commissioners on the need for a new jail, citing problems ranging from overcrowding to security concerns to safety to outdated plumbing. The estimated cost named at that time was \$4.2 million, as reported in the Feb. 16 *Colby Free Press*. The question was raised at that time whether the county's citizens would support construction of a new jail.

- On Feb. 15, thousands of miles away, a fire in a Honduran prison killed more than 350 prisoners trapped in their cells.

Now before you jump down my throat about comparing apples and oranges, let me point out that I've taken two months, more or less, to consider all sides of the question.

I know that Colby isn't Honduras. Our local jailers are not likely to let prisoners burn to death while they run around looking for the keys.

I know that a good swimming pool is important to the community for all sorts of reasons. While I grew up in a time and place where



Marian Ballard

• Collection Connections

swim teams were unheard of, I applaud the turnout they have here. The aquatic center is a great asset to the community.

The fire station is another great asset, even more important than the aquatic center. In fact, if there had been a forced choice between the two, the fire station would probably have won hands-down. After all, not everyone swims, but everyone needs good fire protection. In a dry area like the Great Plains, fire protection becomes an even more obvious need to all.

Other improvements to the community could go into my list of course, like planting trees along Range (I love trees) and the walking trail (possibly even more useful than the pool). I'm sure you get the idea, though. The citizens of Colby and Thomas County are willing to spend money to improve the quality of life for the entire community. We have good schools and good medical facilities, with constant efforts to upgrade them.

What does that have to do with a jail?

Good law enforcement is a critical aspect of the quality of life in a community. From what I've seen and heard, we have good law enforcement — a hard-working group doing its job with limited resources.

Good jail facilities are a factor in good law

enforcement. The jail does not only house those who are convicted of a crime. It also houses those who are arrested and are waiting to face charges — those who are presumed innocent until proven guilty.

Most members of the community do not anticipate ever seeing the inside of a jail cell. Some will fall short of their own expectations — no one plans on jail. No one plans on seeing their child in jail, or their cousin, yet the reality may be different.

The reality though, is that most who wind up behind bars are those who have fallen through the cracks in other ways, too. They probably are not related to swim club members or volunteer firefighters. They probably do not have any of those great fund raisers working for them, lobbying to get better facilities.

Jails are not supposed to be luxury accommodations. They are, however, supposed to be sanitary and safe for both prisoners and staff. They are supposed to be large enough to provide adequate accommodations to everyone housed in them. They are supposed to preserve basic human dignity.

It's simple, really. I'm glad we have a nice swimming pool, though I may never use it. I don't expect to use the jail, either, but I do expect my community to provide adequate facilities. Let's back up our law enforcement officers.

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.

Who is the energy hog?

China surpassed the United States in carbon dioxide emissions in 2009. Some U.S. observers paint China as an energy hog. But China has well over four times the U.S. population, so the average Chinese citizen uses barely one-fourth the energy one American uses.

We should worry if the Chinese continue to increase energy consumption to the U.S. per-capita levels. But that will not happen. The Chinese way of life is far more resource-conscious. Coming from their history and culture, they do not squander precious resources. The average Chinese adult saves 40 cents of every dollar they earn, and you can't save that much if you waste money on energy.

Stay in a China hotel and you will put your room key card into a slot inside the doorway that triggers the room's electricity. When you leave and take your room key card, the electricity to the room goes off. The same applies to the many school rooms, offices and other enclosures across the country — they are only heated, cooled or lighted while people are in them.

China's dramatic economic expansion since 1980 has pulled 500 million of its citizens out of poverty — a middle class approximately twice the size of the U.S. middle class. That means that for most products China produces, it buys nine out of 10 of its products itself.

It has been a decade since the new middle class Chinese family has aspired to the "four necessities:" television, refrigerator, washing machine and air conditioning. Yet there is a resistance to extending this affluence to high-energy appliances.

In our university apartment in west-central



John Richard Schrock

• Education Frontlines

China, we have a washing machine that skimps on water, but no energy-wasting clothes drier. Clothes dry quite well hung in the air. We wash dishes in a sink; not as convenient as a dishwasher, but that would be another energy hog. You could get your clothes ironed; but for the most part, every day is casual Friday: a little wrinkled but comfortable.

As China moves from a developing to a highly-developed country, there is no way to avoid an increase in per capita use of energy. This is especially visible in their rapid adoption of automobiles. But there is still massive use of bicycles, electric bikes, public buses and trains. And while some cars are powerful, for the most part their trucks are underpowered. Their cars sip, not guzzle gas.

China cannot build power plants fast enough. Last summer, when the country's power plants were running flat out, demand was 18 percent greater than capacity. The country raised electricity fees for all users except personal households. China also worked on grid efficiency, the only way to avoid rolling brownouts. And China has over two dozen more nuclear power plants on the drawing board or in construction.

China's electricity dilemma would be even

greater had it not mandated a switch from incandescent to fluorescent and light-emitting diode light bulbs years ago. Overnight, the Chinese made the change and it helped preserve energy for other necessities. U.S. politicians cry out light-bulb "rights." China recognizes a responsibility for electrical equity.

When I return to the U.S., I know that I am going to be frustrated with the energy squandered around me. Americans have become so accustomed to spending a significant portion of our income using convenient but unnecessary appliances and air conditioning our homes when we are away, etc. How can I teach about efficiency without sounding like a Depression-Era grandmother who goes around turning off lights when we leave a room?

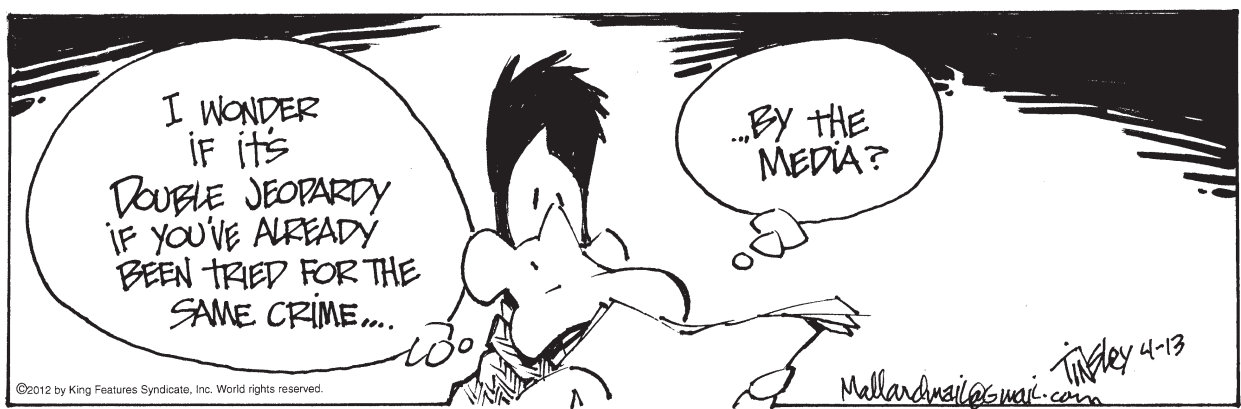
China is working to pull another 500 million rural citizens out of poverty. Lu Xuedu, the deputy director of the Chinese Office of Global Environmental Affairs, has stated: "You cannot tell people who are struggling to earn enough to eat that they need to reduce their emissions."

Meanwhile, our U.S. usage of gasoline and electricity is down, because our middle class is shrinking and poor people cannot afford to use as much energy. Nevertheless, when it comes to being energy hogs on a person-by-person basis, U.S.A. is still Number One!

John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



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