

# commentary

from other pens...

## Prescription drug plan noble, but a bad idea

**The Manhattan Mercury on prescription drug costs:**

Legislative Democrats' intent is noble enough, but a proposal to spend all the money in the Senior Pharmacy Assistance Program in three years is a bad idea.

Not that the idea doesn't have some attraction. Instead of reimbursing up to \$1,200 a year in medication costs to about 1,000 low-income elderly Kansans as is done now, the program would be able to help as many as 30,000 senior citizens ...

The proposal calls for spending more than \$18 million a year for prescription drug assistance and more than \$3 million to help low-income elderly pay especially high prescription bills ...

Democrats hope the federal government will step in after three years when the fund is depleted, and if that doesn't happen, the state would have to find a way to continue the program.

Suffice it to say that some legislators are vastly more optimistic about federal assistance than is justified.

What is justified, however, is the Democrats' defense of this program and efforts to protect it from Republicans who see it as part of a larger solution to the state's budget crisis ...

Republicans ought to leave the fund alone and formally acknowledge that this money is properly set aside for senior citizens, and Democrats ought to make sure this money goes as far as possible. The elderly of this state will be better served by safeguarding money earmarked for senior programs than by spending it all at once and counting on a federal bailout.

**The Ottawa Herald on crematorium law:**

Funerals can be difficult, emotional ordeals for families faced with the loss of a loved one. That pain has, no doubt grown exponentially for some Georgia families who now know that their loved ones weren't cremated after all.

Investigators in Nobel, Ga., discovered a nonfunctioning crematorium with more than 200 bodies, so far, disposed of on the grounds of the site. The Tri-State Crematory was unlicensed and, obviously, uninspected.

Fortunately, legislation passed last year in Kansas means the same thing can't happen here.

Last year, Kansas legislators passed a law that required the state's 17 crematoriums to be inspected. The regulations, which are still being finalized, require crematorium operators to create and maintain permanent detailed records of all cremations, submit to an annual inspection and keep their equipment and facilities in working condition in order to have their license renewed annually. ...

Licenses are required for crematoriums in 23 states, but few require annual inspections. Kansas will be one of only three states that require the more stringent annual inspection component. ...

We're encouraged to see Kansas becoming one of the leaders in establishing stringent standards and accountability for crematoriums even before a crisis forced them to do so.

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## Games over



joan ryan

• commentary

The shutters to the outside have been thrown open. I am not ready. I'm squinting from the light, cranky and resentful.

For 17 days, I wrapped the Olympics around me like a down comforter, sinking into the delightful shock of a teen-ager nailing his ski jump and the smile of a young man hurtling to victory in the skeleton with a photo of his grandfather in his helmet and the tearful "I love you" mouthed to his wife by a stunned speed-skater who will have a gold medal to show his co-workers at Home Depot.

But now, today, back to our previously scheduled programming.

Reporter Daniel Pearl is dead, his throat slashed on videotape. A teen-ager in New Jersey is charged with killing six people in a two-day spree. Osama bin Laden might be alive on the Afghan border. A 7-year-old disappears from her home in San Diego.

The death toll of Israelis and Palestinians keeps rising.

The Olympics weren't supposed to captivate us this year. The Games would seem silly and frivolous while workers were still carting scrap metal from Ground Zero and forensic scientists were still trying to match body parts to names.

How could we pay attention to biathlon and snowboarding and ice dancing (especially ice dancing!) when American soldiers were sweeping for mines on country roads in Afghanistan? What could be more irrelevant during war and recession than the outcome of the men's 500-meter race in short-track skating? How could some young

athlete's comeback from injuries touch the hearts of a nation wrung dry from real tragedy?

Something unexpected happened. We slipped into the Olympics as if it were the one quiet room in a turbulent house. Maybe it's human nature during uncertain times to seek out frivolity and amusement, pluck and luck, upliftment and escape. I tuned in every night, looking for the next installment in the Apolo Anton Ohno story, for the slide across the finish line, the disqualification of his South Korean rival, Ohno's own disqualification in the next race.

I watched the snowboarders, the bobsledders, the ski jumpers, the lugers, the skiers, the curlers, the skaters. Their stories unfolded like simple morality plays about hard work and the will to win. They knew exactly whom they were battling. They knew their goals. They knew when and whether they had won or lost. No faceless, elusive enemies. No murky objectives. No cloudy ideals. No slippery rhetoric.

It makes some sense now why we over-reacted just a tad to the figure-skating controversy. We in the media and the public didn't bother to wait for at least a semblance of an investigation before de-

claring all of figure skating a sewer and demanding gold medals for the aggrieved Canadian pair. The scandal, let's admit it, was fun. We could argue and get all sweaty over a battle that would not leave anyone dead or orphaned or homeless.

Suddenly, with our breathless discussion over figure skating, we were back to the pre-Sept. 11 days, when we could spend barrels of ink and rolls of videotape debating the number of days the president spent on vacation.

I pick up the newspapers I only have been skimming for the past two weeks. A mother stabs her son to death at her ex-husband's home. The Enron deceit continues to grow into some disfigured creature that every day sprouts new tentacles and scales. Our soldiers kill 16 Afghan villagers who are mistaken for al-Qaeda members. A father kills himself and five children with poison fumes from a charcoal grill in the living room. Another father shoots himself and his three children outside the Texas home of his estranged wife.

I am not ready. I'm hoping for just one more story about how 16-year-old skater Sarah Hughes lived a normal life while training for the Olympics. Or how bobsledder Vonetta Flowers redirected her dreams after failing to make the U.S. track and field team. No. Nothing. But there was this: The Giants have high hopes for Jason Christiansen and Todd Worrell in middle relief.

Only six more weeks until Opening Day.  
Joan Ryan is a columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle. Send comments to her e-mail at [joanryan@sfgate.com](mailto:joanryan@sfgate.com).

## Apple to apples



red green

• north of forty

One thing that life has taught me is that there are no absolutes. Pretty much everything is subjective and based on comparison. Like buying apples in the grocery store, your choices are based on the selection. A mediocre apple looks pretty good in a bin full of bad ones.

This is an important lesson to apply to other facets of your existence. At work, for example, you should do everything you can to keep incompetent people from being fired. They make you look like a real winner. Same thing in your marriage. Have a few total losers as friends. Make sure your wife knows about every stupid thing they do. You'll look like a genius. It's also a good way to check on how far you've let your own standards slip. It's OK to have friends with tolerable faults in order to make you look better, but if it gets to the point where you have to associate with unemployable degenerate boozers just for you to survive comparison, well, maybe it's time to raise your own bar a little.

### SHOPPING FOR TROUBLE

I don't think women understand why it's so difficult for us to shop for clothes with them there. The biggest problem is that we think we've kept our weight gain and fitness loss a secret. That makes us hesitant to do anything that would blow our cover. Like looking at the rack of 42 waist pants when everything else in our cupboard is a 34. So we don't do that. We pick out a pair of 34s and head for the cash register. Then comes one of the most dreaded questions any husband can hear — "Aren't you going to try those on?" No. There's no point. We know these pants are going to be a major struggle to get on, and the change rooms are too small for us to do the physical contortions re-

quired to fasten a 34 waistband around a 42 waist. So, instead, we have an argument and ultimately buy the pants without trying them on, and then we hang them in the closet beside all the other never-worn clothes we bought without trying on. None of this would have happened if wives would let husbands shop for clothes on their own. Or if husbands would shop for clothes on their own.

### URBAN COWBOYS

As our cities have developed, they've kind of sprawled out over all the adjacent countryside. And the way they market the suburbs, you may think you're actually still living in the city even though you're a long way from downtown. Here are a few signs that will show you that you are in fact living in the country:

- You get your mail out of a small tin can at the end of the driveway.
- Sometimes, in the summer, the air doesn't smell very good.
- You have an egg man. And he's your neighbor.
- When you wash your hands, you can hear a pump start up.
- Your kids are the last ones to get off the school bus.
- What you eat eventually affects the height of your lawn.

### DON'T WALK LIKE A MAN

My wife has a hard time getting me to take walks. It may be good for my health, and it may relieve stress, and it may eventually lead me to meet my neighbors, but there is something about walking that's contrary to the evolution of the male species. Every time one of us takes a walk, it's a slap in the face to our forefathers who invented the internal combustion engine. My dad used to say, "Third-class riding is better than first-class walking," and he had the car to prove it. And this is nothing new. Even when you see one of those old Bible movies, the king is always riding on a camel or a hammock or something. Peasants walk. Kings ride. Sure, I'd like to go for walks and lower my cholesterol, but I guess it's just not in my blood.

QUOTE OF THE DAY: "Whatever doesn't kill you makes you harder to insure." - Red Green  
Red Green is the star of "The Red Green Show," a television series seen in the U.S. on PBS and in Canada on the CBC Network, and the author of "The Red Green Book" and "Red Green Talks Cars: A Love Story."

### berry's world



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