

from our viewpoint...

Government regs biggest enemy today

Don't think for a minute the federal government is your friend. It's the single greatest enemy of liberty and economic vitality in our country today. But only because we asked it in.

It's not the income tax we're worried about, though that can be oppressive enough this time of year.

Nor is it the Homeland Security Department, dangerous as that might be in the wrong hands.

It's not that the government is bad or evil. It's neither.

It's not that the government is incompetent. It does some things quite well; look at our military. Look at our National Parks. Look at the Weather Service and a hundred other useful functions the federal government performs, day in, day out.

The problem with the government, really, is us.

We expect it to do way too much. We expect it to solve every problem in the world, now, not yesterday.

And the government, good as it is, can't do that.

But don't tell Congress. They don't want to hear. No, Congress is busy passing laws, taking positions, posturing, lookin' good.

That's how you get re-elected. Lookin' good.

Here's how it works.

Somebody sees a problem. Say insurance companies are selling people's medical information to each other, and somebody thinks it's a good idea to force them to let people move their insurance from one job to another.

Somebody says, "Pass a Law."

And the machinery of Congress is set in motion. It's a complicated process, and you don't want to watch. Eventually, after much wrangling between the lobbies and the parties, the law is passed.

The law requires the government, the bureaucracy, as it were, to draw up regulations. This is where it gets sticky.

In Washington, they judge regulations by weight. They are thick, complicated — and expensive. No one ever asks if they are practical. Then, and this is seven years after the law is passed, the regulations come into force. They are legion.

They cover every detail of the medical system, from how insurance companies and employers have to handle people's health information to whether a nursing home can put a patient's name on the door of his room. Fines reach \$20,000 per occurrence.

And there is much wailing and gnashing of teeth.

But the law is the law, ya' know?

That's pretty much the story of the new law we've all been learning about, called the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, or HIPA, for ah, short.

It's reached into every medical and corporate office in the nation. It's caused no end of consternation. It means if you call a hospital to see if your neighbor is there, they probably won't tell you. It means you have to signs dozens of forms you'll never read or understand or care about. Estimates are that implementing the regulations will cost \$15 billion to \$20 billion, maybe more.

This started out as somebody's good idea. It came out of the office of former Sen. Nancy Kassebaum, a good Kansas Republican. Nobody intended it to cause this much trouble. No one thought much of it taking another chunk out of our way of life.

But like most big sets of federal regulations before it, in banking, business, labor and so many other parts of our life, it did.

So, the next time your congressman or senator tells you they're trying, in Washington, to "do something about the cost of health care," smile and nod your head.

They are. — *Steve Haynes*

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I saw a war story that brought me to tears

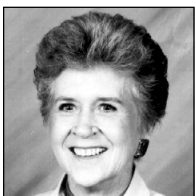
I don't know about you, but I don't watch very much of the war news.

I am totally aware that people are fighting and dying in too many parts of our world; I certainly don't need a constant reminder in my living room.

However, the other day I caught a news clip that will stay with me for a long time.

American soldiers in full battle gear were warily advancing into an Iraqi town, steadily getting closer and closer to a mosque. The townspeople were protesting, not wanting them to get to the holy place for some reason. The soldiers kept going, but soon were facing an angry mob. A confrontation seemed inevitable.

All at once, the young officer leading the Americans wisely told his men to kneel down, which they did even though they still held their guns at the ready. Then the officer turned his own gun upside down and walked across in front of his men, while keeping a wary eye on



**lorna
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• commentary

the townspeople. All at once, he gave what I judge to be the most unique order a military officer ever gave. He said, "Everybody, smile!"

It wasn't long before the Iraqi people all sat down. And the two sides faced each other with entirely different attitudes. Fear subsided, suspicion decreased, and a confrontation was averted.

As I watched this news story, tears came to my eyes. I imagined the family from which that young officer must have come. Facing a situation probably new to him, dealing with people he didn't understand, he drew on a short

Thanks for making history program a success

To the Editor:

The High Plains Museum would like to extend a special thanks to the Century Family Club and the Sherman County Historical Society" for helping sponsor the living history story performance at the library on April 5th.

The program was a huge success drawing an usually large crowd. It is hoped our organizations can continue to partner in the future to bring other performances and speakers to our community.

Linda Holton, Museum Director



**from our
readers**

• to the editor

April board of directors meeting of the Kansas Crop Improvement Association. "Be it resolved that the KCIA supports the belief that Kansas seed producers should have equal opportunity to market public variety seed internationally."

Are Kansas farmers again being forced to use their tax and check off dollars to subsidize their own competition? Sounds like it to me.

My name is Bruce Wilkens. As a seven-year member of the Kansas Wheat Commission, I have worked alongside fellow board members to diligently invest the 1-cent per bushel check off funds for promotion and creation of new varieties to benefit the Kansas wheat producer.

More that 75 percent of all wheat planted in the state of Kansas are public varieties originated by research and development at Kansas State University. The Kansas farmer, through the commission, has invested millions of dollars to improve the yield potential, disease resistance, and milling qualities of these public varieties.

The high costs of land, taxes, and input cost of chemicals, labor, fertilizer, and equipment prevents the Kansas producer from being the lowest-cost producer as compared to their competitors in developing countries. One of the few remaining advantages we have is access to wheat seed with superior quality and value for the export market.

In 1999, the KCIA participated in the sale of about 73,000 bushels of certified Jagger seed to Tajikistan. The wheat commission was not consulted as to the impact or potential consequences of this sale.

In January, I received a letter stating that group was again in negotiation with the U.S.

life's training that involved common sense combined with discipline.

He assessed the explosive situation and decided a show of friendship might be all that was needed. I wish I knew that young man's name; I'd like to congratulate his parents.

These are the kinds of stories that give me hope. In our media, we hear too much of all the crime and disrespect of our society. Yet we have thousands of young people in our "all-volunteer" military, brought up in average American homes, put into fearful situations and yet have the courage and good sense to assess a situation and make a call which leads to peace and better understanding.

Of all the war coverage I've seen or heard discussed, this story has touched me the most. (Yet my heart is also warned knowing that some average Iraqi people also have exhibited good sense and disgust at inhumane actions and helped rescue American POWs.)

Department of Agriculture to originate another shipment of bulk Kansas certified Jagger seed to Tajikistan.

At the March meeting of commission, I made a motion to adopt the following resolution, "The commission has not supported and does not condone the sale of any public varieties of bulk seed to any foreign country." The resolution passed.

The issue, of course, is that by selling a variety that is financed and developed by the Kansas producer to a potential competitor and exporter, we are giving away an enormous edge we have in a superior product for the domestic or export market. Therefore, not only will Tajikistan farmers have additional lower production costs, but the Kansas producer is paying for the development of their seed stock as well.

There could be the assumption that a country such as Tajikistan is unlikely to be a competitive exporter of wheat. A similar comment was probably made about the Black Sea countries of Ukraine and Kazakstan, which are now direct competitors of the Kansas producer.

A wheat research and production entity that is funded by private, at-risk money, has the right to sell to any domestic or world market. But I would argue that the Kansas producer has a vested right in the public wheat breeding program at Kansas State.

I have asked the staff of the commission to investigate if similar practices are being promoted by neighboring states who grow substantial amounts of K-State developed varieties.

Obviously, all members do not condone these clandestine wheat seed sales. I would suggest that before purchasing seed, the Kansas farmer should ask if his supplier supports this activity, or the best interest of the Kansas farmer.

Bruce Wilkens, past chairman
Kansas Wheat Commission

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