

from our viewpoint...

Good news travels fast, bad news travels faster

Everywhere you turned in the past week, there were shocking news events, from the power outage in the northeast to the 139 candidates registered in the California governor's recall race and new fears about a serial sniper in the Maryland area.

These events kept the news junkies hopping, and the commentators were having a field day.

In Sherman County the news has not been quite as dramatic, but most of it has been good.

The Northwest Kansas District Free Fair concluded another excellent run and the attendance was good at all the events and at the home-owned carnival. There is a whole of a lot of effort that goes into planning and coordinating this annual extravaganza. Congratulations to the fair board, 4-H extension council, the carnival board and the antique tractor pull groups.

There were about 100 people at the Sunflower Celebration on Friday to hear about updates in the sunflower industry and to see the research and test plots. There is good news in the NuSun human study results that Jeff Deeds and John Golden were talking about. The Penn State University study is proving the benefit of NuSun oil in humans like the previous animal studies.

The healthy effect of the reduction in cholesterol is good news for consumers and the impact on the sunflower industry could be good news for Sherman County and sunflower growers across the region.

Sunflower Water debuted Friday as a promotional effort by the Sherman County Economic Development Council, the Goodland Chamber of Commerce and the Sherman County Convention and Visitors Bureau.

The bottled water promotes Sherman County, and 20 cents for every bottle sold will be put in a Community Development Fund. Economic Development Director Carolyn Applegate gets credit for the water idea, and she was able to coordinate the effort with Scheopner's Water in Garden City to do the bottling.

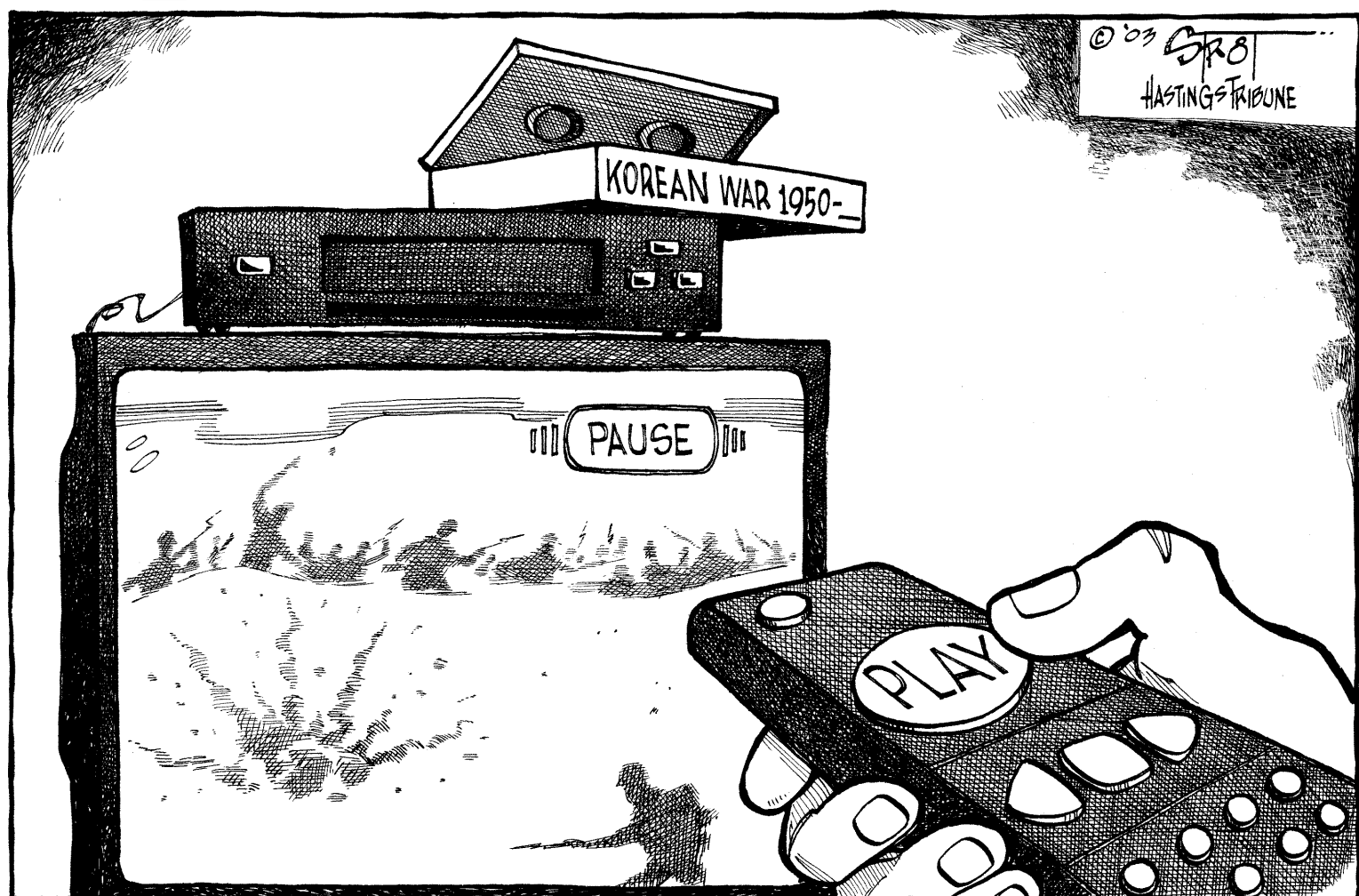
Don't expect to see Sunflower Water in all the stores in Goodland. The bottled water in the convenience stores is furnished by competing companies, but the Sunflower Water will be available soon in some independent vending machines. It is not a major fund raising project, but it is another means of getting the area some recognition.

The hospital has welcomed Dr. Travis Daise as he opens his new office this week. Dr. Daise is a homegrown doctor who has completed his medical education and has returned to open his practice. We wish him the best, and know that he will be a welcome addition to the medical community.

Economic activity is picking up a bit. Northwest Kansas Technical College held registration on Monday and classes are beginning for the fall term. The Goodland schools are getting ready for the start of class on Monday, and the athletic programs began practices in earnest this week.

This good news is what makes headlines in *The Goodland Star-News* these days. Of course, there are stories that may not be quite so happy, but at least we have the power to see what is happening in our community. We are not worrying about a recall election and we are not hiding in fear of the next bullet.

There are good reasons to live on the high plains. — Tom Betz



Commissioner pleased with court decision

By blocking the sale of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas to Indiana-based Anthem Insurance Companies on August 6, the Kansas Supreme Court settled a healthcare issue that has been debated for more than two years. Many people believe the decision is a victory for Kansas consumers. This decision also underscores the responsibility and authority of the elected office of Commissioner of Insurance to act on behalf of consumers and to ensure fairness in the regulation of the insurance industry.

I am especially pleased the Kansas Supreme Court has clarified the power of the Commissioner of Insurance regarding insurance company mergers and acquisitions. This decision clearly outlines my authority to make decisions in the best interest of Kansas consumers.

The following is a timeline of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas, Inc. and Anthem Insurance Cos., Inc. v. Praeger, Case No. 89,075:

In May 2001, Anthem agreed to buy Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas for \$190 million. Kansas law, K.S.A. 40-4001 et seq., and the Kansas Insurance Holding Companies Act, K.S.A. 40-3301 et seq., requires that the Com-



lynn jenkins

• state treasurer

missioner of Insurance approve the purchase. In October 2001, Anthem filed the official application seeking approval of its acquisition of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas.

The Commissioner considered the application over a period of several months. The process involved public hearings, and the receipt of expert advice from attorneys, investment bankers, actuaries, tax specialists, certified public accountants, and health care and planned development specialists.

On Feb. 11, 2002, the Commissioner issued a 45-page final order containing 66 findings of fact and eight conclusions of law which addressed all issues of conversion and acquisition.

The Commissioner concluded that Anthem would severely deplete Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas surplus and would raise premium rates significantly more than Blue

Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas would without the acquisition.

The Commissioner disapproved the proposed sponsored demutualization. Anthem appealed to the Shawnee County District Court.

On June 7, 2002, the district court vacated the Commissioner's order disapproving the acquisition and sent the application back to the Commissioner for further proceedings.

The Commissioner appealed the district court decision to the Kansas Supreme Court.

June 6, 2003, the Kansas Supreme Court found for the Commissioner and upheld her denial of Anthem's request to purchase Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas. In doing so the Court found as follows:

The Commissioner of Insurance is vested by statute with the general supervision, control, and regulation of insurers and has the power to make all reasonable rules and regulations necessary to enforce the laws of the state relating to these matters. The Commissioner is not required to wait until the public is actually harmed. She can be proactive in preventing harm to the public.

Improving veterans' access to health care

Qualified Kansas veterans will soon be able to receive medication prescribed by private doctors through Veterans Affairs pharmacies.

Under the previous system, veterans were required to see a VA doctor in order to have prescriptions filled by VA pharmacies.

To be eligible for the new benefit, veterans must have enrolled in VA health care and requested their first primary care appointment with the VA by July 25. They must also have been waiting more than 30 days for their first appointment with a primary care doctor as of Sept. 22 — the day the first prescriptions will be filled. Veterans covered by the new proposal will receive information by mail from their nearest VA medical facility about filling prescriptions from non-VA doctors.

This program is an improvement in efficiency and will help reduce the waiting time for all veterans. About 200,000 American veterans will be eligible.

This new proposal is based on legislation that I sponsored to allow VA pharmacies to dispense medications to veterans for prescriptions written by private physicians. In March, the House Veterans Affairs Health Subcommittee, of which I am vice-chairman, held a hearing on the pharmaceutical services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

I have been working to raise the reimbursement rate for veterans traveling to healthcare facilities. Veterans are reimbursed at a rate of 11 cents per mile, while the rate for federal employees is 36 cents per mile. During the debate of the funding bill for the Department of Veterans Affairs, I offered an amendment that would require the VA secretary to reimburse veterans at the standard federal rate.

Each year, the VA is required to review the beneficiary travel rate. The agency has not increased travel reimbursement in 25 years,



jerry moran

• weekly report

because this money would come from the medical care account. My amendment was not accepted because I did not want to compromise veterans' medical care. A reasonable reimbursement for travel is integral to veterans' access to Veterans' health care, and I hope this effort results in VA finding the dollars to increase the mileage reimbursement rate.

Traveling throughout Kansas

Last week, Congress adjourned for the annual August work period. Each year, Congress takes the month of August to allow members the chance to spend time at home. I'm taking the opportunity to travel the state and meet with Kansans, in order to answer your questions, as well as gather your thoughts and concerns to take back to Washington when Congress returns after Labor Day.

I had the chance to meet with younger citizens of the 1st District at the Scott County Library in Scott City. I was able to visit with the students 7-7-12 taking part in the summer reading program, "Take Flight and Read." I also toured the library and discussed the expansion of the library and possible grant opportunities to assist in the effort.

In Scott City, I met with the directors and management at the branch office of Farm Credit of Southwest Kansas. While there, we discussed crop conditions and talked about farm and disaster programs available to Kansas farmers and ranchers. We also discussed credit issues concerning farmers, bankruptcy laws and crop insurance.

Touring the Wichita County Hospital

On Tuesday, I had the chance to meet with the administrator and trustees while touring the Wichita County Hospital in Leoti.

While touring the hospital, we discussed the needs and concerns of a Critical Access Hospital. They expressed their need for adequate Medicare reimbursements, reduction in paperwork and the challenges of attracting health care professionals to the area.

Sunflower Health Network

Health care was also the topic Wednesday evening, as I spoke at the Sunflower Health Network annual dinner in Salina. The network comprises 17 hospitals in northcentral Kansas.

We discussed the provisions in the recently passed Medicare reform bill that would increase reimbursements to Kansas hospitals, physicians, home health care, and ambulance services. I recently wrote the conference chairmen in support of maintaining the rural Medicare provisions in the final Medicare bill. These provisions are critical to the ability of our rural health care providers to continue to provide quality care to our rural communities.

In the Office

Although I was back in Kansas, a number of Kansans visited my Washington, office in order to get tours of the Capitol.

Dan Brunzell of Lindsborg, a volunteer with the Citizens Network Agribusiness Volunteer Program, visited my office after returning from Belarus. This program provides the expertise of U.S. farmers and agribusiness professionals to emerging private farmers around the world.

Contact me

It is an honor to serve you in Washington. Please let me know how I can be of service. You can email me at: jerry.moran@mail.house.gov or visit my web page at: www.house.gov/morank01/.

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