

from our viewpoint...

Town can be proud of combined effort

The decision by the Department of Veterans Affairs to locate an outreach clinic in Burlington rather than Goodland was disappointing, to be sure, but it's not the end of the world.

First of all, Goodland should be proud of the effort everyone here put forth. It has not been wasted.

For the over 4,000 veterans in this area, the long-awaited decision means that health care will be closer to their homes, even if they have to wait until October for the clinic to open.

Getting a clinic for this area is a victory, one that took over five years to accomplish after the Veterans Affairs people were shown the huge hole in their coverage out on the High Plains of eastern Colorado, northwestern Kansas and southwestern Nebraska.

We know the clinic will be used by veterans from wars gone by, plus those serving in Iraq and Afghanistan today. While the number of dead is not as great as we saw in Vietnam, veterans face pressures from being in combat most of us will never understand. Those who serving today need to know that when they come back, medical services will be available.

When talk began about getting a veterans clinic in Goodland, the first requirement was to show the department there was a real need. In a cooperative effort, the hospital staff, economic development office and American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars put together a map of the surrounding area and gathered information to convince the agency the need was real.

It was not hard to convince Congressman Jerry Moran, and he helped put on a public forum that brought about 400 people to Goodland to let then regional director, Dr. Lawrence Biro, know how important an outreach clinic was to this area.

Biro promised that once the new Veterans hospital in Denver was running, he would see about a clinic for the eastern edge of the Denver region.

That day finally came in December, and the hospital staff, Rep. Moran and area veterans spearheaded the effort to convince officials Goodland should be the site for the clinic.

When an inspection team visited in early April, the comments they made gave many a feeling Goodland could be the top choice. Most felt it was at least a 50-50 shot contest with Burlington.

Rep. Moran had said from the beginning the decision would come down to politics, and he had talked to Dr. Biro as often as possible to keep Goodland at the top of the list.

Did it make a difference that Dr. Biro suddenly was not in Denver to be part of the final decision? We will never know, but Congresswoman Marilyn Musgrave, a Fort Morgan Republican, was as active in pushing locations in Colorado as Moran was for Goodland. Politics being a part of the decision was a given from the beginning, but we really felt the Goodland hospital had the best plan and quickest way to open such a clinic.

What would be really great, and probably save the American taxpayers millions of dollars, would be to allow American veterans to be issued a medical card that could be used at their local hospital and doctor's office. The problem, of course, is that would put thousands of Veterans Affairs people out of work.

Until that day comes, we will be grateful that our veterans will be able to drive about 35 miles rather than 200 for their basic health care. — Tom Betz



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The Waltons and Thursday night

Thursday night was grocery shopping night and the best night of the week.

Right after dinner, my father (the Big Guy) and I would board the 1972 Plymouth Fury III station wagon and head to the Del Farm. It was located in a small plaza one mile from our suburban home.

Like all grocery stores then, the Del Farm was a utilitarian place. There were no lobster tanks or gourmet food displays. The daily specials were written in black magic marker on torn sheets of white paper and taped to the front windows.

Inside, everything was painted white and illuminated by the bare florescent bulbs that hung above.

I got to push the cart and helped the Big Guy find the dozens of items on my mother's shopping list. They watched their spending carefully, as my father was the sole breadwinner, but he'd usually give in a little.

On a good night, he'd buy a box of Del Farm's fresh-baked oatmeal and chocolate chip cookies and a bag of Snyders of Berlin potato chips and onion dip (my mother's favorite).

One Thursday a month, we'd stop at the beer distributor afterwards for a case of Pabst Blue Ribbon and twelve 64 oz. bottles of Regent soda pop. The small store was packed with boxes of beer. The store's owner gave me a pretzel rod, then the subject shifted to sports, new



tom purcell

• commentary

car models and other things that dads and beer distributor owners liked to talk about.

Sometimes, after that, the Big Guy and I would make a run to the drug store or drive to the butcher's in another plaza to get a Sunday pot roast. On the way home, we'd stop in at the "little store" — the privately owned convenience store in our neighborhood — to load up on lunch meat and cheese.

When we finally pulled the loaded-down station wagon into the garage, everyone in the house was alerted and the massive unloading process began. We usually got everything packed away by 8 p.m., just in time to head to the family room to watch "The Waltons."

The ritual was the same every week: We'd bring down a bowl of ice and then open some bottles of Regent soda pop, the orange being our favorite. (Grape was the next most popular, followed by cherry, then cola, then root beer.) I was usually the first one to open the Snyders of Berlin chips. And as I tore open the heavy foil bag, my senses were overcome by the smell of freshly fried chips. I'd load them into a few bowls and set them on the tables.

And there sat my sisters and my parents, watching "The Waltons," eating the finest chips ever made, sipping our soda and feeling safe and secure. It was Thursday, after all, and the weekend was soon to come. The house was loaded to the hilt with food, which was always a fine feeling. My mother and father were together and with us and all was right with the world.

I didn't know then how lucky I was to know such security. I didn't know that my happiness was a result of two people who put their children's needs so far before their own that we didn't know they had needs.

What a tremendous impediment we must have been to their comfort.

But I know it now. And I know how important my father was to my happiness and security. Unlike too many fathers today — unlike the bumbling idiots portrayed on television — the Big Guy was a man. He was demanding of us, but that is what we craved. He wasn't much good at telling us he loved us, but he was a master at showing us through repeated actions.

I'm no expert on parenting or fatherhood, but at 44, I know this: When I open a bag of Snyder of Berlin potato chips, I am filled again with the security and happiness that I felt so long ago because my mother and father were together and putting my needs first.

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Wheat growers support direct payment

To the Editor:

Discussion has recently popped up about changing the structure of the Farm Bill, even eliminating the direct payments. Wheat growers have only received the direct payment over the term of the last Farm Bill, and I would like to lay out why wheat growers are actually supporting an increased direct payment.

First, the decoupled direct contract payment is the least market-distorting program in the farm-policy arsenal. Because the direct payment avoids market distortion as much as possible, it is also the most World Trade Organization-friendly program in farm policy. As a commodity that exports almost half its domes-



from our readers

• to the editor

tically produced product, being trade-friendly is important for wheat.

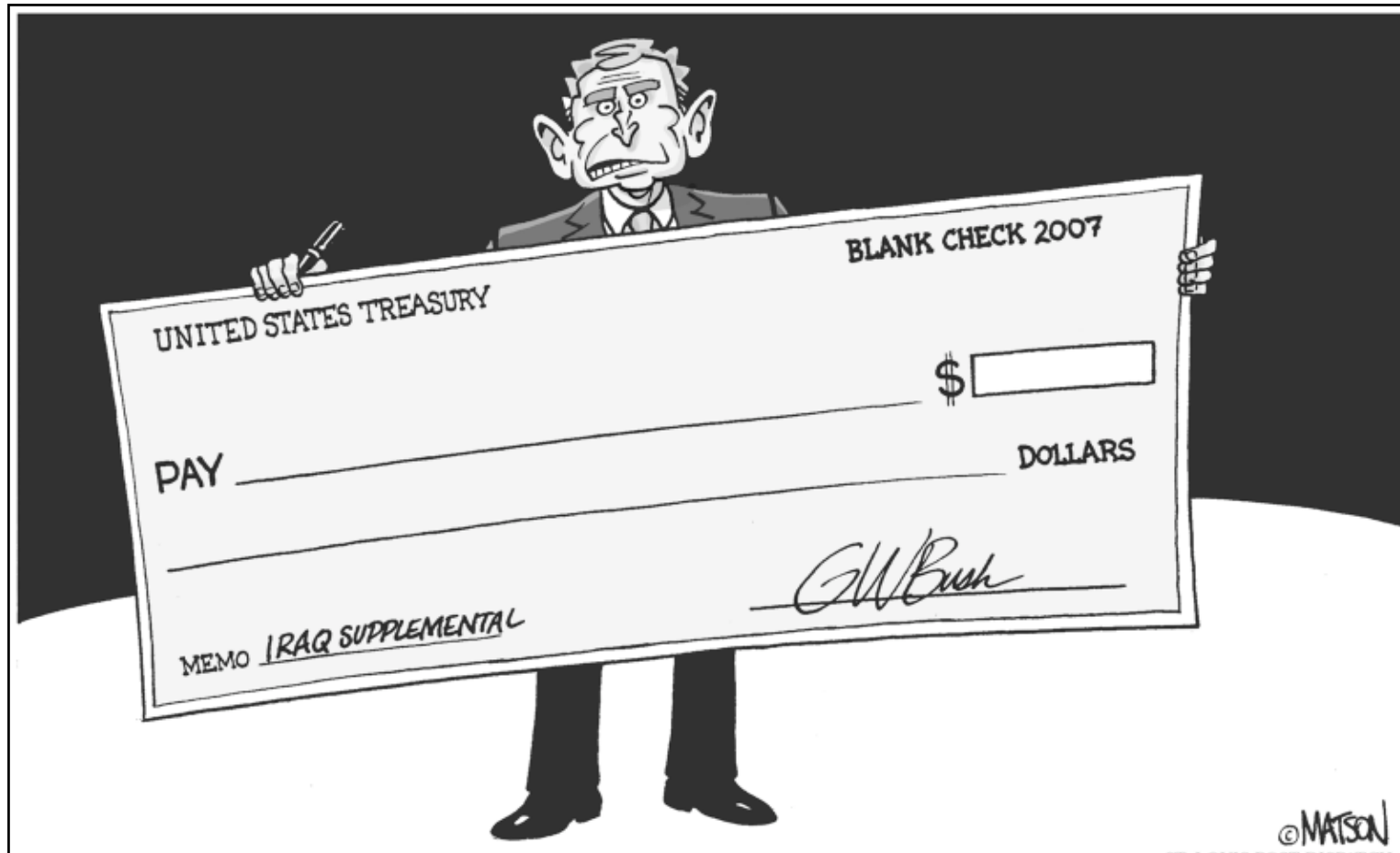
Most important to wheat growers over the past five years, direct payments are the only program that assures a safety net in times of droughts or other complete crop losses. Other than crop insurance, this is all that can carry a grower into the next year if Mother Nature

deals an uncontrollable fatal blow.

While wheat growers continue to support the three-legged safety net, the direct payment has been the most beneficial program for us, and we see the merits it has. Now is the time to raise the rate of the Farm Bill's most predictable program, to be equitable among all crops.

Please join me by contacting your members of congress and telling them why this program is so important to you.

Herb Mattson, director Kansas Association of Wheat Growers Colby



"I'VE SIGNED THE LEGISLATION, NOW IT'S UP TO CONGRESS TO WRITE IT!"

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