

from our viewpoint...

Officials ignoring sleeping science

High government officials have ignored both science and common sense in their reaction to reports of air traffic controllers asleep at the radar when working overnight shifts alone at airports big and small.

Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood, who forced out the head of the Federal Aviation Administration's air traffic control section, says workers won't be allowed to sleep on his watch.

Controllers suspected of sleeping are being suspended left and right. But that won't solve the problem, rooted in the rotating shifts that controllers work.

And though he's a sorry excuse for a cabinet official, the former Illinois congressman is not alone. Many government agencies and private firms force workers through regular rotating shifts—days, nights and overnight—without a thought of what that does to their sleep cycle or their alertness.

Police officers, airline pilots, truck drivers, railroad operating crews, all work rotating or irregular shifts that destroy sleep cycles. It's not necessary, and as the air traffic controllers have shown us, it could be dangerous. But no one seems to understand.

Sleep scientists long have known that rotating shifts, in particular, give workers fits. Yet, because they otherwise have trouble filling night shifts, and to "be fair," they force all employees to share in the misery. That's barbaric, at best.

"Government officials haven't recognized that people routinely fall asleep at night when their doing shift work," Dr. Charles Czeisler, chief of sleep medicine at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, told the Associated Press. He called claims that air controllers falling asleep were isolated incidents "preposterous."

Rotating shifts ignore two facts: Some people like night work and would volunteer for it. And workers do better on a stable schedule, day or night. Employers could ask for volunteers, then assign junior workers to fill out each shift.

Railroads and some other union operations have done this for years, at least for jobs with a regular start time. While not everyone appreciates night shifts, some would rather have them than days. Forcing everyone to sleep poorly to be "fair" hardly seems right.

Workers with no regular schedule, such as airline pilots, line-haul train crews and over-the-road truckers have a different problem. While government rules have been tightened, they still are subject to call day and night, often with only eight to 10 hours "rest" between trips. Since that includes time to eat, see the family, do business and relax, as well as sleep, it's hardly restful.

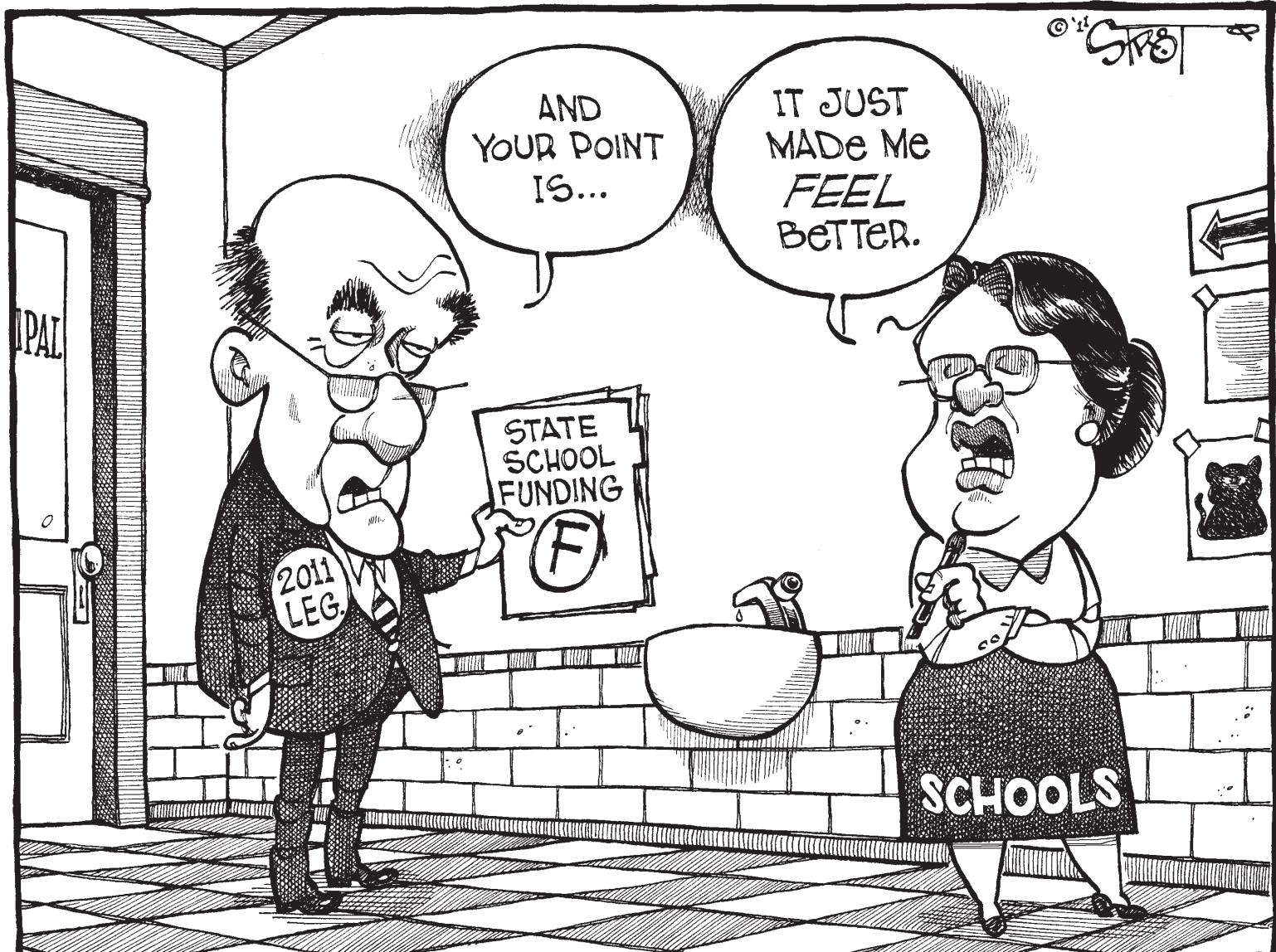
One solution for either situation is, yes, allowing workers to nap. Ray LaHood says no, but railroads now allow it. And the secretary is ignoring the best scientific and medical advice and thereby endangering the traveling public.

"There should be sanctioned on-shift napping," says Gregory Belenky, a sleep expert at Washington State University. "That's the way to handle night-shift work."

Since the Department of Transportation regulates so many sleep-deprived occupations, we should expect a more enlightened viewpoint, but apparently, sounding tough is more important to officials than solving the problem.

And this problem should be solved, for the good of us all. Just the thought of being "served" by sleep deprived cops, trainmen, pilots and industrial workers is frightening.

Wake up, Ray, and get with the program. — Steve Haynes



A thank you to sheriff's deputy

To the Editor:
I want to publicly thank Sherman County Deputy Travis Belden.

I went into horrible panic mode Friday afternoon when I went to let our dogs back into the house. Something caught my eye to the left, and, as I looked, there were our two horses, Apache and Savannah, across on the other side of Rd 67, eating the winter wheat.

Of course, Dennis was at work at Walmart. My heart started pounding a mile a minute. I immediately called Walmart and Dennis' cell phone. While waiting for him to get on the phone, I called Mangus'—no answer; called the Windell's—no answer. In panic mode, I dialed 911 to see if I could get help.

You have to understand Apache is so huge, he scares me to death. When I looked out again to keep an eye on the horses, they were gone. I ran outside to find out they were back on our property, eating from the stack of hay by the



from our readers

to the editor

corral.

Dennis had told me to go fill a bucket of oats and the horses would follow me. I did that. As I took the bucket out to the corral, Apache saw me and started to come after me. I put the bucket into the corral and raced back into the garage thinking he would go for the oats. But no, he came after me. I finally coaxed the two of them back to the hay. I figured if I could at least keep them by the corral until Dennis got here, it would be okay.

In the meantime, Travis from the Sheriff's Department drove up. He said he knew how to handle horses. He went up to Apache

slowly, made friends, took hold of his bridle and walked him back inside the corral to the oat bucket. Fortunately, Savannah followed him and Travis was able to close the gate and lock it.

Travis stayed for a few minutes, then retrieved the oat bucket, I'm sure knowing the horses shouldn't have that much oats. He then told me to watch them, because they could get colic from eating the green wheat.

I wanted you to know how Travis came to the rescue. He mentioned he grew up on the western slope on a ranch so knew all about horses, cattle, etc. Thank God for his knowledge.

Anyway, I'd just like to say a public thank you to him for retrieving our horses and getting them safely back inside the corral and "locking" the fence.

Phyllis Hadley
Kanorado

Robin finds worm feast on chairs

The robin could have shared the bounty, I think. Maybe he didn't want to.

But I guess I'd better start at the beginning, Saturday when it was so nice out. We wanted to grill a steak and sit out on the back deck. We needed the cushions for the deck chairs and a couple of straight chairs to put our feet up on.

Cynthia went to get the cushions out of the basement. I went looking for the plastic patio chairs, stored in the garage for the winter.

I have to say, I'd been wondering what had happened to all the webworms that hatched in the bird seed Cynthia bought last fall. A lot of them went into the bird feeder along with the seed, but after a certain point in the winter, they just seemed to disappear.

When I got the patio chairs out, I understood. Of the eight chairs stored in a stack, the legs of seven were covered with worms webbed tight to the plastic, ready to pupate and graduate to adult form, I suppose.

There was no doubt these were the worms from the bird seed, white, squirming, with six legs at the front. I grabbed a couple of chairs and hosed them off for us, and forgot about the rest.

Next morning, Cynthia was up early. She'd unstacked all the chairs and set them out to



steve haynes

along the sappa

clean. I looked out in the yard, and saw she had help.

A lone robin was picking all the worms he could get off one chair. It was a feast, a banquet, and he was hard at it. I called Cynthia to the door and showed her.

"If he has any friends," she smiled brightly, "maybe we won't have too much cleaning to do."

We saw the robin a couple more times, but no friends. We surmised he was saving all the goodies for himself, though it was a big task for such a small bird. Still, he was working away at it. By mid-afternoon, he was having to jump up and peck off worms much above his height.

Later, Cynthia went out with the hose and sprayed off the rest of the bugs. We stacked the chairs for storage until summer, when we'd need more than a couple on the deck.

Late that afternoon, Cynthia called me to

the back door.

"Look," she said, pointing to a robin in the grass. "He's back. He was looking all around for the chairs. He can't figure out where they went."

And sure enough, that robin looked puzzled.

We tried to tell him he'd need help to finish the job on time. We tried to warn him.

I felt a little guilty that we'd flushed the rest of his bounty, but he had his chance. We couldn't just leave those chairs out there all spring, could we?

That evening, Cynthia emptied one of the sacks of bug-infested bird seed she'd bought this winter. No bugs. Apparently they all hatched at the store.

And she'd bought two bags on sale, too. An Extension article said bugs in the seed were a good source of protein for wintering birds.

Apparently, though, you have to feed them before the big hatch. We could have harvested a bunch off the chairs, had washing them not been so much quicker.

Better luck next time, Mr. Robin. Bring your friends.

One way to travel with lots of hats

What do you say to a woman wearing three hats?

Mostly, you just smile and try to act like it's normal.

Of course, some people just have to ask.

I had several ready answers:

"I'm starting a new style."

"They don't fit in my carry-on."

"What hats?"

"Oh, everyone tells me I wear lots of



cynthia haynes

open season

hats, so I do."

We were headed for vacation in Mexico, and I had not one but three large sun hats on my head.

The top one was a nice face-shading sun hat with a cute little purple stuffed gecko stuffed into the band. The next one was Steve's fishing hat. The last was an older, not-so-nice looking sun hat that I could use if I got out on the water and didn't want to lose my good hat in the wind.

None of them packed well, and Steve refuses to wear his hat unless he gets to go fishing.

He never did get to wear his hat, and my old hat didn't get much use either. Fishing was just too expensive, and we aren't much into the other water sports.

My other sun hat got a good workout, however. I wore it all over the place - to the beach, to town, on walks and around the resort.

However, it got its lizard detached on the first trip to town.

Two children came down the street and the little girl looked up and said:

"Ohhh, Ahhh!"

Then she grinned and made can-I-have-it motions at my lizard.

Sure, why not. I don't need a purple stuffed toy stuck in my hat that badly.

So the girl and the gecko headed off down the street and I continued in the other direction with my lizardless hat and smiling husband.

I looked around for another gecko to decorate my sombrero, but couldn't come up with anything.

So, when we returned to the U.S., I went through customs and immigration on the way home wearing the three hats sans purple lizard.

The officials took one look and stamped my passport and waved us through.

Who in their right mind would smuggle anything while wearing three hats?

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