

from our viewpoint...

## People don't like health regulations

A couple of things are pretty obvious.

After listening to taxpayers and citizens at public meetings, people don't much like the new government regulations under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, popularly known as "HIPAA."

The other is, having their regulations in place, the federal bureaucrats have no intention of letting go. The so-called privacy lobby in Washington is far too strong to let that happen. And neither group much cares what we think out here.

After listening to voters in town after town on his 69-county "Listening Tour" of the 1st Congressional District, Rep. Jerry Moran said he is ready to try to do something about the law. The question is, what?

The HIPAA regulations, which have cost the medical and insurance industries billions, sprang from two lines in a 1996 law, known then as the Kennedy-Kassebaum Bill after our own former U.S. Senator. That section authorized the secretary of Health and Human Services to write regulations covering patient privacy rights.

The law was passed in 1996, and Rep. Moran likes to note that he was sworn in too late to vote on it. The privacy regulations did not go into effect for another seven years.

At first, the alarm came mostly from groups worried about open access to public records, but lately, the average citizen has started to figure out that the new rules are a pain.

Supposedly, patients have the right to decide how their own information is used. However, most hospitals have stopped offering people the option of being included in a public directory or of having their name released to newspapers, radio stations, ministers and the like.

Some hospital administrators say they can't do that; others say their lawyers have advised them not to get involved. Stiff fines, up to \$10,000 per occurrence, have many scared.

Federal officials say there are exceptions for information to go to ministers and the press, for example, but most hospitals seem to be unaware of those. Hospitals can offer people a chance to be in a directory or have their name in a published list of patients so their friends will know where they are, but it's not happening.

Hospitals and nursing homes are supposed to work with people and tell them whether they have, say, your mother, but many don't know or don't care. They are scared of breaking the law.

And ordinary people, citizens, voters, are unhappy.

But what to do about it? That's Rep. Moran's problem.

There's little chance the rules will be repealed. The people who put them there stand in the way. The bureaucrats actually think they have done something wonderful.

Richard M. Campanelli, director of the Office of Civil Rights at Health and Human Service, spoke this month to members of the National Newspaper Association. He defended the regulations, saying they gave people power over their own records.

To the extent that's not happening, he said, it's mostly because people don't understand the new rules. How the average person could understand, is a question he avoids.

The rules may have been written to correct some real problems, but like most federal regulations, they do far more. They push government control into every corner of the health industry.

In an era when health care costs are soaring, why is the government doing this?

To help us, of course.

We may not like it, but the people in Washington plainly do not care. They think they know best.


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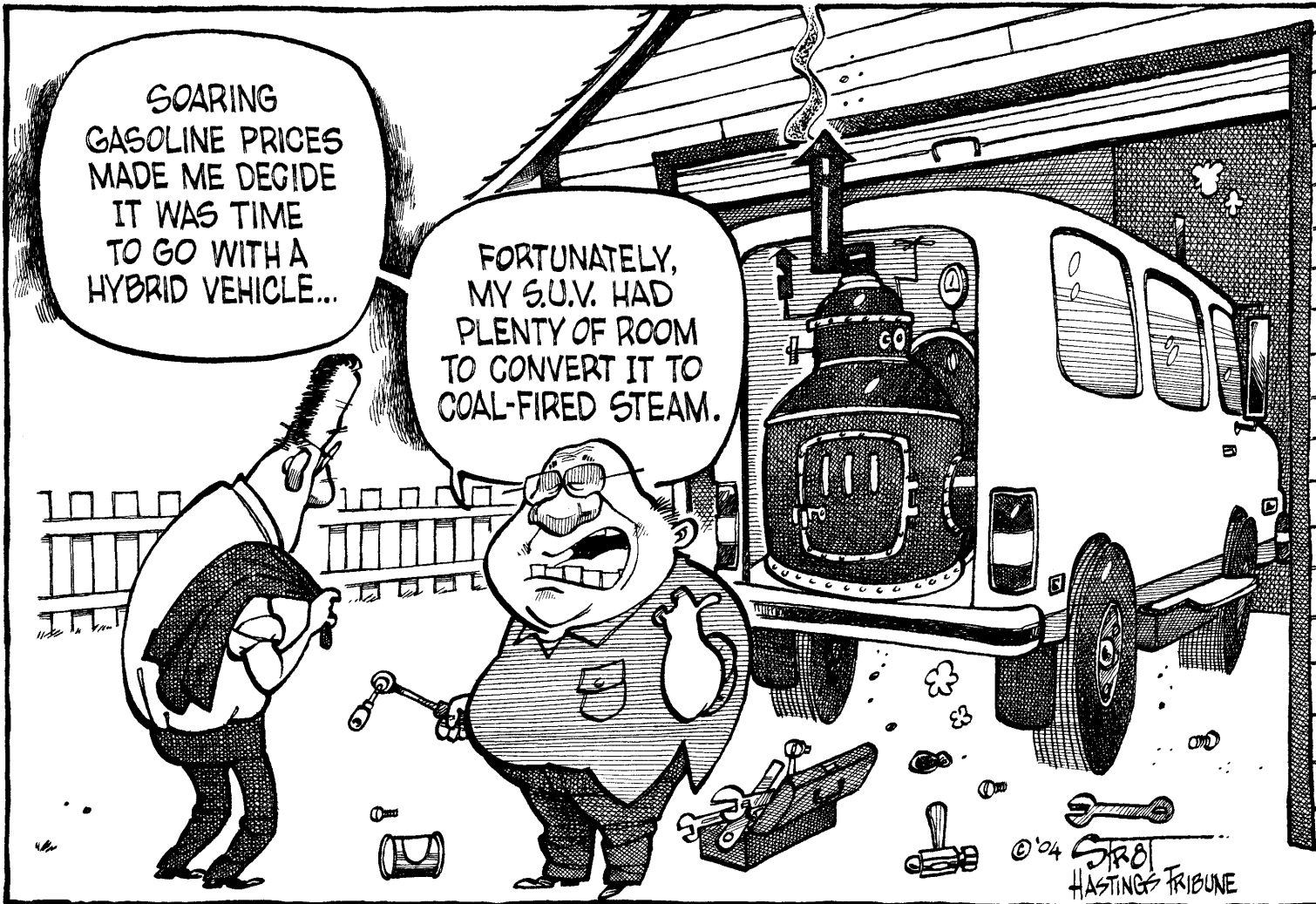
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## Radio Days fun, not picturesque

It seems that Rotary Radio Days gets harder every year.

I really enjoy the annual fund-raiser, but it's harder to find new poses for the pictures I take for the paper.

Let's face it. This is radio, not television. You have two people sitting side by side on tall stools, talking into microphones. Then there is another guy sitting in front of them behind a board of knobs and dials with earphones on his head. He nods and tells the people in front of the microphones when to talk and when to shut up.

It's not exactly a panoramic picture, but it's always a lot of fun.

Every year for the past four years — even through a change in ownership — KFNF Radio has allowed the Oberlin Rotary Club to take over the station for a day. The club sells ads, and on a Sunday near St. Patrick's Day, amateur deejays descend on the station.

The first year, we paid the station a nominal share of the take. It certainly wasn't enough to compensate them for the whole day. Since Dave and Connie Stout took over, we have paid nothing.



**cynthia haynes**

• open season

Each year, Dave comes down to the station with a sack lunch and spends hour after hour coaching Rotarians through the intricacies of the weather, reading ads, naming songs and telling what the club is all about. Dave is a Rotarian himself, even though he doesn't belong to the Oberlin club. Still most of us invest an hour. He hands over his whole Sunday.

The first year we did this, Alan Marietta was president of the club and I was vice president. The idea came from Russell, which did a radio day. They wanted to raise money for Alan's mother, Odetta Marietta, who was then district governor for western Kansas, to attend the international convention, which was held in Singapore or some such place.

Oberlin picked up the idea and ran with it. It has become the club's leading fund raiser, net-

ting between \$2,000 and \$3,500 a year, which goes for scholarships at home and abroad.

The first year, my job was writing radio copy. Someone figured if I could write newspaper copy, I could write radio ads. I had to do about 30 ads. By No. 25, though, the flower shop ad started to sound a little like the one I had done for No. 6, the feed yard. Oh, well, they both deal in fertilizer.

After the first year, though, writing the ads became easier. Many of the customers used their old ads, or after hearing my mangled versions, wrote their own.

The first year I was asked to deejay, I was petrified. I feel about microphones about the same way I feel about needles — keep 'em away from me.

But Dave put me at ease and showed me the ropes. Now I only feel mild trepidation when I take my seat on the high stool.

But, there is still the problem of those pictures. As the years go by, selling, writing and delivering the copy gets easier, but the pictures get harder.

Well, I'll keep looking for new poses and hopefully, the Stouts will keep inviting us back. It really is a great fund raiser — and a great time.

## ‘They just don’t get it!’

“Those Republicans just don't get it!” — Democrat talking.

“Those Democrats just don't get it!” — Republican talking.

There are times I don't think either one knows which end of the ruler has the smallest number.

This could well be my family. You see, originally, we were a family of Democrats. Dad dabbled in local politics — but isn't all politics local? City commissioner of Hays, mayor, Ellis County clerk, precinct committeeman, died-in-the-wool Roosevelt Democrat. Mom, not nearly as active, was comfortable in the Democrat tradition. Ironically, she died the day before election in 1972 and was a supporter of South Dakota Sen. George McGovern. I wasn't for the guy, but I marked my ballot for him in deference to my mother.

Oldest sibling Norbert was Ellis County attorney early on. First District chair, state party chair, chairman of the Bob Docking for governor campaign, delegate to several national conventions and was the person most responsible for the appearance of President John F. Kennedy in Hays in 1959 as Kennedy was testing the presidential waters. He lived politics. Now, in his aging years, he sometimes fondly recalls those experiences. Unfortunately, health doesn't allow him to be engaged to any degree in the art — he always thought of politics as an art — but he watches and listens now from the sidelines.

He, of all the siblings, carried on the traditional approach to politics as preached by our father.

Brother Don served on the Hays School Board, and brother Dean was involved in politics in Texas for some years and had served on that state's Board of Education and did his



**Tom Dreiling**

• My Turn

thing for the betterment of his political choice in that state.

The rest of us did our thing in our way.

We were united as a family of Democrats in years gone by, but as the years moved on, members of the clan began shedding the political clothing we were dressed in. We are now a house divided — five Democrats and three Republicans — and I think one of those five is a “wavering” Democrat.

You can be sure that in this, a presidential election year, each in his or her own way is talking up his or her choice for the White House. Personally, I like the split. There's nothing more boring than everyone being for the same person, cause, position. Now true family debates are the rule.

I have no idea what politics my nieces and nephews are. There are so many of them — and mean MANY — that if they wanted, they could break away from what they now are and form their own party and have a pretty substantial base of support.

I often wonder, however, how my parents would view their children if they were still around. I have a hunch that they would be pleased because they taught us to travel the road best suited for our very own journey, and to make a difference.

They would have no regrets.

**THERE** are a lot of folks who can't understand how we came to have an oil shortage here in America. Well, there's a very simple answer. Nobody bothered to check the oil. We just didn't know we were getting low. The reason for that is purely geographical. All our oil is in Alaska, Texas, California, New Mexico and Oklahoma. All our dipsticks are in Washington.

**YOU** people with computers — and that's a lot of you — are familiar with the flood of e-mails that push all kinds of products and services. The one that caught my eye this morning had this typed in the subject line: “Viagra — direct to your doorstep.” I wondered if Viagra was perhaps replacing the ice melt I use to clear my doorstep of the slippery coating Mother Nature sometimes applies.

**A DISTRAUGHT** senior citizen phoned her doctor's office. “Is it true,” she wanted to know, “that the medication you prescribed has to be taken for the rest of my life?”

“Yes, I'm afraid so,” the doctor told her.

There was a moment of silence before the senior lady replied, “I'm wondering, then, just how serious is my condition. This prescription is marked ‘NO REFILLS’.”

**THE** church bulletin notes, “The peacemaking meeting scheduled for today has been canceled due to a conflict.” And also that, “The cost for attending the *Fasting and Prayer* conference includes meals.” And finally, “At the evening service tonight, the sermon topic will be *What is Hell?* Come early and listen to our choir practice.”

*Dreiling is publisher of the Colby Free Press.*

### garfield

