

from our viewpoint...

State, Republicans embroiled in court

More craziness from Topeka. The secretary of state has the Republican party embroiled in a court battle over whether to open its primary for any voter who asked for a Republican ballot. It's a dumb idea, and wholly unnecessary. In Kansas, voters can declare for a party — and vote in its primary — at the polls if they so choose. Later, they can change their registration at will. What more freedom do we need? But Secretary of State Ron Thornburg told both major parties they should make a decision on whether to have “open” primaries, where any voter can get a ballot regardless of party registration. Thornburg was responding to a federal Court of Appeals decision voiding an Oklahoma law that limited participation in primaries. The court said, basically, that parties, not the state, had the right to decide who could vote in a party primary. Why the secretary was so concerned is anybody's guess. The decision applied only in Oklahoma at this point, and no one had sued to change the situation in Kansas — yet.

Once Republican state Chairman Dennis Jones opted for an open primary, though, he — and the state — faced a lawsuit. Go figure. Other Republicans complained that an open primary was a bad idea, and that Jones was out of his authority making the decision anyway. They probably are right on both accounts. First of all, it seems to us like there is no need to change the way Kansas does things. Voters have the right to choose a primary under the existing system, so why change? Secondly, until a federal court orders Kansas to do something, why should the secretary of state jump the gun and stir things up? No reason that we can see. And thirdly, if states see fit to regulate their elections, why should a federal court interfere? The Oklahoma decision strikes us as another in a long string of meddling maneuvers of activists judges. There is nothing in the Constitution that says all things must be done the same way in every state. And there is nothing in our system that says the federal government must set standards and rules for each and every state action. The whole mess makes little sense, but that's about what you can expect these days from Topeka — or a federal court. — Steve Haynes

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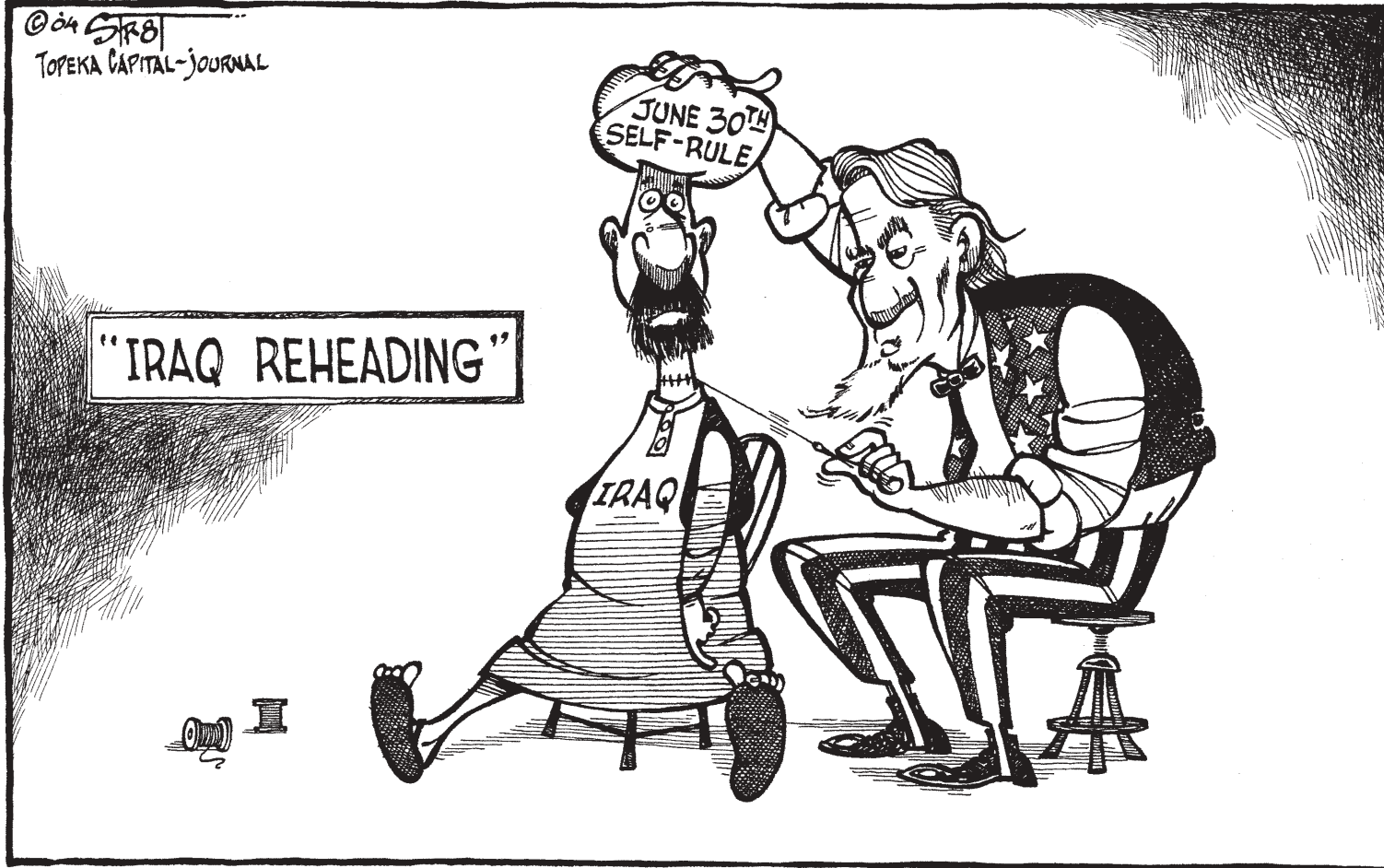
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Dealing with the facts of Alzheimer's

My dad has Alzheimer's disease. To me, that has the same connotation as the "C" word did when I was about 25 and discovered that my grandfather was dying of lung cancer. I only had one short visit with him before he died. My father has had growing signs of dementia for nearly 10 years, and I have tried to see him when possible. For most of the year, he and my mother live in Arizona. Earlier this year, he told my sister, Lynn, who lives in Lakewood, Colo., and me that he wanted to come to Denver to get an opinion from the doctors at the University of Colorado Medical Center. Talking to my sister and Mom, we decided to see if this couldn't be done while she was going to Michigan to see her older brother and her 102-year-old mother. We were able to arrange an appointment with a Dr. Christopher Filly, who is a top specialist in treating Alzheimer's, and I went with dad, mom and Lynn to see him on Wednesday morning. Before the appointment, Dad kept saying he was scared. He had reason to be worried. Besides suffering from memory loss and dementia, dad has a growth on his spine that produces pain in his back by pressing on the nerves. This was my first time to see Dad get put through the cognitive test, where they ask you a series of questions and then give you three words to remember to see how your short-term memory is doing. Dad did not get everything right, but he did well on some of the harder ones. The doctor



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said he was impressed with how well he did on the test, and told us he felt dad was in the "mild" stages of the disease. We talked about other things, and he examined Dad to check on the back pain. For that, he did not have good news. He confirmed the diagnosis of a doctor in Arizona that the growth on the spine is inoperable. He said if they tried to operate, there was a good chance Dad would be paralyzed. That was what Dad was afraid of, but he seemed to take the news pretty well. The doctor said the best they could do was to help manage the pain. He suggested some changes in dad's medications to help with this, and to try to relieve the anxiety and depression the constant pain is creating. It is one thing to deal with the problems of Alzheimer's when you're fully healthy, but having another complication adds to the difficulty. After the appointment was over, Dad seemed to be relieved and more positive about himself. Time will tell us if the medication changes help relieve the pain, which makes his days more difficult. I told him good-bye at the hospital and headed back to work in Goodland. It seemed remarkable that when I go to the newspaper

office, a lady came in to see me from the Alzheimer's association. It was Rhonda Riedel of Quinter, who is the western Kansas outreach coordinator. She was there to talk about the Arts and Inspiration Center that is held the fourth Thursday of every month at the First Presbyterian Church in Colby. It's a day program for people in the earlier stages of Alzheimer's and related dementias. She said the program provides a stimulating environment for people suffering from the disease and a respite for their caregivers. The day includes activities, music, poetry and literature, exercises, art, drama and an opportunity for the person to talk to others and maybe recall some memories of better times. Riedel loaded me down with literature about the Colby program, and pamphlets about Alzheimer's care options. The Alzheimer's Association of the Great Plains is operated out of Wichita, and Riedel has most of the counties of western Kansas, including all of northwest Kansas. What she has to offer is not going to help my Dad, but I did feel a bit better about what we are facing with him in the future. There is no cure for the disease, but every case is different. I will continue to be as positive as possible because I believe it rubs off on him. I do not know how long he will be with us, but before he goes back to Arizona, we are hoping to take him back to Lamar, Colo., where he grew up, to give him a chance to see some old friends, special places and the changes to the old hometown.

The reasons to oppose association health plans

To the Editor: I read with interest your recent editorial entitled "Insurance companies block health care benefits." A healthy debate regarding the pros and cons of association health plans is timely as Congress continues to grapple with this proposed legislation. It is likely this topic will soon generate more interest in Kansas, as statewide organizations and legislators discuss possible changes to current state insurance laws which could create the same dynamics that could arise from federal legislation. I believe you overlooked some important facts while presenting your point of view to readers, and I hope you will allow me to point out a few pieces of information for your readers' consideration. You are correct in saying the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association is one of the opponents of association health plan legislation; however the group of 41 independent licensees which collectively represents more than 88.8 million members is far from the only opponent. There are more than 1,000 national and state organizations that oppose federal legislation that would exempt health insurance sold by association health plans from state consumer protection. Opponents are not limited to health insurers who you characterize as opposing legislation simply to protect their own business interests. The list includes groups such as the National



from our readers

• to the editor

Governors Association, the National Association of Insurance Commissioners, 42 state attorneys general, the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Nurses Association, the AFL-CIO, the NAACP, the American Diabetes Association and the American Cancer Society. The National Association of Insurance Commissioners, an organization that represents the chief insurance regulators from all 50 states, the District of Columbia and four U.S. territories, is a vocal opponent of the association health plans legislation currently before Congress. Last year, the group asked Kansas Insurance Commissioner Sandy Praeger to testify on its behalf before a Senate committee in Washington. It is equally important to consider the reasons why certain organizations support the creation of association health plans. The *Wall Street Journal* predicts association health plan legislation "will provide a major boon to the deep pockets of small business lobbies." The *Journal* claims the National Federation of Independent Businesses, one of the chief proponents of the bill, could "reap more than \$100 million in annual revenue by selling policies." If you are going to suggest that Blue Plans are fighting the

legislation for purely business gain, you should note the possible financial motivation of organizations on the other side of the issue. The opponents agree that association health plan legislation is bad public policy because it would actually make matters worse for more small businesses, and their employees, than it would help. Here are some of the reasons why: 1. Consumer protections. Association plans would be exempt from state-mandated benefits. 2. Destabilization of the small group market. The *Washington Post* concluded association health plans would "destabilize the current insurance markets and wind up hurting the consumers they are intending to insure." 3. Ranks of uninsured likely to grow. A study by Mercer and the National Small Business Association found association health plans would cause the ranks of the uninsured to swell by one million people. 4. Potential for fraud and insolvency. Association plans would operate through a giant loophole in an otherwise highly regulated industry. The idea of exempting insurance sold by association groups from state consumer protection and oversight has been debated in Washington for nearly a decade. It is time to explore new, meaningful solutions to provide small businesses with access to reliable and affordable health benefits. S. Graham Bailey, vice president Communications and Public Relations

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