

from our viewpoint...

Storm brings out best in our people

It was a wonderful Thanksgiving Day, and Friday was just as wonderful, but a winter storm hit on Sunday as travelers were heading home.

The storm put the citizens and the organizations of Sherman County to an extreme test. By Sunday evening over 800 people were taking refuge in motels, shelters and homes throughout the city.

The hotels filled quickly, and with the blowing snow travel was extremely difficult. People and vehicles began filling up every available parking lot as they got off the highways.

The National Guard armory was the first shelter opened, but the blizzard conditions made it hard to get to, and police and volunteers were pushing cars back onto the road to get to the armory.

The United Methodist Church, the Goodland Activity Center and the Max Jones Fieldhouse were opened for the flood of people. There were about 80 at the activity center, 175 at the Methodist Church Fellowship Hall, about 207 at the armory and over 150 at the Fieldhouse.

As the sun began to set Sunday the situation did not get better, and police and fire volunteers were kept busy responding to calls to assist motorists who had become stuck.

City utility crews were kept busy with the city losing power. The line crews were out in the storm trying to repair lines and a few poles, which went down in the near 60 mph winds. Charlie Bandel and his crew worked hard in those conditions to restore power as quickly as possible. Rod Blake and the power plant crew kept trying to restore power to sections of the city, but the high winds kept slapping lines together and kicking off the breakers to some areas of the city.

Late into the night police officers carried blankets to people at the shelters and those holed up in the motel lobbies. Police and volunteer firemen helped man the shelters to let people know what was going on, and to maintain communications with central dispatch. They relayed needs for blankets and food and looked for people who might be missing and reported overdue. The Kansas Highway Patrol were manning the barricades, and trying to help with people who were stranded.

This type of storm brings the best out in the people of Goodland. Citizens called central dispatch and said they had extra blankets. Some county citizens took refuge at the Fieldhouse because power was out at their homes.

With the wind howling and blowing the snow into drifts people were stranded until early Tuesday morning.

Some of those who stayed in Goodland have sent messages to thank the people for how they were treated, and one of those was read on Fox News on Tuesday.

City Clerk Mary Volk and County Clerk Janet Rumpel received a message from Deanna Pumpelly from Gilmore and Bell of Wichita.

"Just wanted to take a moment and let you know I heard on national news (Fox News) this morning (Tuesday) that the City of Goodland and Sherman County are to be congratulated on accommodating more than 600 people during the snow storm this week," Pumpelly wrote. "Steve Doocy is a native Kansan and made note of the kind hearted people out there. I am proud to live in a state that takes care of those in need. Congratulations on that wonderful community spirit."

There is a possibility this winter we may see a few more of these storms, and with the spirit shown throughout the community we will handle what Mother Nature dishes out.. — Tom Betz



Student-loan rip-off test of GOP rhetoric

Special-interest legislation doesn't get much more obnoxious than the bill now making its way through Congress to clamp down on students and former students who want to refinance their loans at lower interest rates. They are about to be severely punished for seeking not only an education, but a debt-free life afterwards.

While homeowners can refinance their mortgages as often as they want and relieve themselves of high-interest debt when rates cycle downward, student and former-student debtors are only permitted to refinance once for the lifetime of the loan! And now the House is considering a bill that would stop students who are in school from keeping their current interest rate of 4.75 percent and would instead force them to pay 7.9 percent, creating a lifetime burden entirely unjustified by the lending market.

Many students are locked into rates that approach 9 or 10 percent, reminders of the grim economic days of the early 1980s, and find themselves with no flexibility. Frequently, students use their once-only refinancing option shortly after graduation and find themselves helpless as the market interest rates drop ever lower.

Home-mortgage refinancing, often similarly guaranteed by Fannie Mae, has become a huge industry and has given many families alternatives to bankruptcy as they face huge debt burdens. But student loan refinancing — beyond



dick morris

• commentary

the one shot now permitted — is blocked by special-interest regulation and legislation.

The legislative efforts by special interests reflect the power of the once quasi-public body Sallie Mae (Student Loan Marketing Association), which has now cut off all connection with the government and instead become a profit-making company unrelated to the government called the SLM Corp.

With a 25 percent share of the student loan market — more than six times that of its largest rivals — SLM has cashed in on federal guarantees against defaults on the one hand and blocked student refinancing on the other. As a result, according to columnist Terry Savage, writing for thestreet.com, SLM has made a profit of 1 percent over its loan volume of \$100 billion — \$1 billion in profit!

Since student loans constitute one-quarter of all outstanding loans, SLM has huge market power that it has not hesitated to translate into political clout through campaign contributions that water and nourish the Republicans who control the legislative process. In all, the SLM PAC contributed almost \$140,000 to the members of the House Education and the

Workforce Committee to lock in their preferential treatment.

Once SLM abandoned its federal charter and went into business for itself, this public-private hybrid should have lost its quasi-governmental status and been forced to compete in the private marketplace like anyone else. All regulations restricting refinancing or consolidation should be repealed. If there was ever an area in which the Republicans should effectuate their rhetoric and deregulate, this is it.

Student loans are the shackles that most young people take into the rest of their lives after leaving school. Keeping this debt hang-over large and rendering it inflexible is about as anti-family a policy as you can get, forcing young people to postpone starting families because of the load of debt with which they begin life burdened. Yet it is the Democrats, led by Sen. Ted Kennedy (Mass.), who are most vociferous in battling for deregulation.

For President Bush, desperately seeking traction with which to regain his popularity, a crusade on behalf of student debtors, announced in his State of the Union speech, might be just the ticket. He could help himself get out of political red ink by mitigating the financial red ink in which an entire generation finds itself mired.

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1935-1989

THE SHERMAN COUNTY

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Nor'West Newspapers

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Moran helps himself to pay raise

To the Editor:

Friday was a tragic, yet also a truth-exposing day for constituents of Congressman Jerry Moran.

On Nov. 18, Rep. Moran helped himself to a pay raise with your tax money — just hours after he helped to pass a cruel measure that will drastically reduce emergency food, basic health care, student loans, money for child-support enforcement, and other vital services to disadvantaged or disabled Kansans.

He and his co-conspirators are squeezing students, the elderly, and the poor to subsidize tax cuts for the richest — and pay-raises for Congress.

Your Republican congressman gave himself an approximate \$3,100 pay raise on Friday, no averaging \$165,200 a year per Congressman. He exercised his "right" to increase his own personal salary based on increases in the costs of living.

Moran seems to think (and he evidently may want you to also believe hook, line, and sinker) that the costs of living in America only increase if you are among the "haves." If you are a "have-not," or if you have stumbled upon hard times, Moran's actions say, increases in your gasoline, heating, grocery, and health care costs won't hurt you.

Do you believe that?

Moran voted to cut funding to services to the poor by \$50 billion. He will surely try to tell you that the Medicaid and Student Loan programs have been growing every year and that



from our readers

• to the editor

he is just being fiscally responsible by stopping the growth. He will without doubt fail mention that these programs have grown each year because of costs of living and economic downturns.

Remember, Moran doesn't seem to think that cost of living is an issue for the poor. He seems to think costs of living are only issues for the already rich. With his legendary charming smile set on full volume, Moran may try to earnestly convince you that the \$50 billion cutbacks he voted for in reduced funding to Medicaid, food stamps and student loans will not be detrimental to Kansans, or anybody you have ever met.

Moran may say these cuts won't hurt Kan-

sans. Here are the facts. You decide.

Moran voted to cut student loan programs by \$14.3 billion. Over 83,000 Kansans currently rely on student loan programs for their education.

Moran voted to cut 220,000 people from the food stamp Program. Currently, 170,000 Kansans rely on food stamps to put food on their family dinner tables.

Moran voted to eliminate \$11.4 billion in Medicaid funding. Right now, over 300,000 Kansans rely on Medicaid for the most basic and life-preserving medical services. Strangely, Moran also voted to force Medicaid recipients to bring more cash with them when they see a doctor or get a visit from a hospice worker.

By way of his actions, the message is, "If these folks don't have the extra cash — then, they just plain shouldn't be allowed to get these basic life-saving health care services."

Pam Ohly

Hays

Letter Policy

The Goodland Star-News encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, and must include a telephone number and a signature. Unsigned letters will not be published. Form letters will be rejected, as will letters deemed to be of no public interest or considered offensive. We reserve the right to edit letters for length and good taste. We encourage letters, with address and phone numbers, by e-mail to: <star-news@nwkansas.com>.

garfield

