

from our viewpoint...

Saving endangered common sense

Some people seem to think that anyone in favor of reintroducing the black-footed ferret also wants to see prairie dogs expand into every quadrant of the High Plains and beyond.

To set the record straight, we don't think prairie dogs need to be protected. We'd as soon shoot one with a gun as we have with a camera.

It's a problem, though, that the black-footed ferret has been on the endangered species list for 25 years. Wildlife groups are trying to find places where the little prairie-dog eater can live and reproduce. The goal of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other conservation groups is to get the ferret off the endangered list, and that could be a good thing for farmers and ranchers.

This little nocturnal raider catches prairie dogs for dinner, and a den of four will chomp through about 500 in a year. Allowed them to multiply by 10 families, and suddenly there are 5,000 less prairie dogs on a given ranch.

The ferrets alone won't control prairie dogs, but they can take a bite out of the population.

Five years ago, environmentalists backed an unsuccessful push to get the black-tailed prairie dog added to the endangered species list. Farmers and ranchers wailed that it would be impossible to consider the hated prairie dog as endangered. The truth is, however, that the range and number of prairie dogs in the High Plains today is less than 10 percent of what it was less than 100 years ago.

If this becomes a national battle, farmers and ranchers are not likely to win. There are more people who think prairie dogs are cute back East than there are ranchers out where the cows outnumber voters. Recent stories about the battle over prairie dogs in Logan County have brought a strong reaction across the country, with people offering to organize protests against the poisoning.

The 1901 Kansas law calling for the eradication of prairie dogs and allowing counties to poison them over the objection of the landowner — who then gets the bill — might be thrown out today, as it appears to be in direct opposition to the federal laws, including the Endangered Species Act. The situation in Logan County might grow into a court battle that would end up costing lots of money and not satisfying anyone.

Debate about allowing the black-footed ferret to be introduced on private land in Logan County have gotten far away from reality. The plan would not stop neighbors from poisoning prairie dogs, nor does it say that a ferret found in a neighbor's field would halt agriculture operations.

If the ferret doesn't do well, then the experiment is over, but it doesn't mean the efforts to introduce the critters won't pop up again. Kansas is a historic home of the prairie dog and the black-footed ferret, and bringing the ferret back would help bring nature back into balance.

When the white man first started breaking out the prairie grass of the High Plains over 140 years ago, he changed the natural order. As with the American Indian, he waged war on any animal he felt was getting in the way.

The black-footed ferret is not the enemy, though, and given a chance to live and breed in Logan County, it will be at the top of the list of predators, which like to feast on prairie dogs.

— Tom Betz

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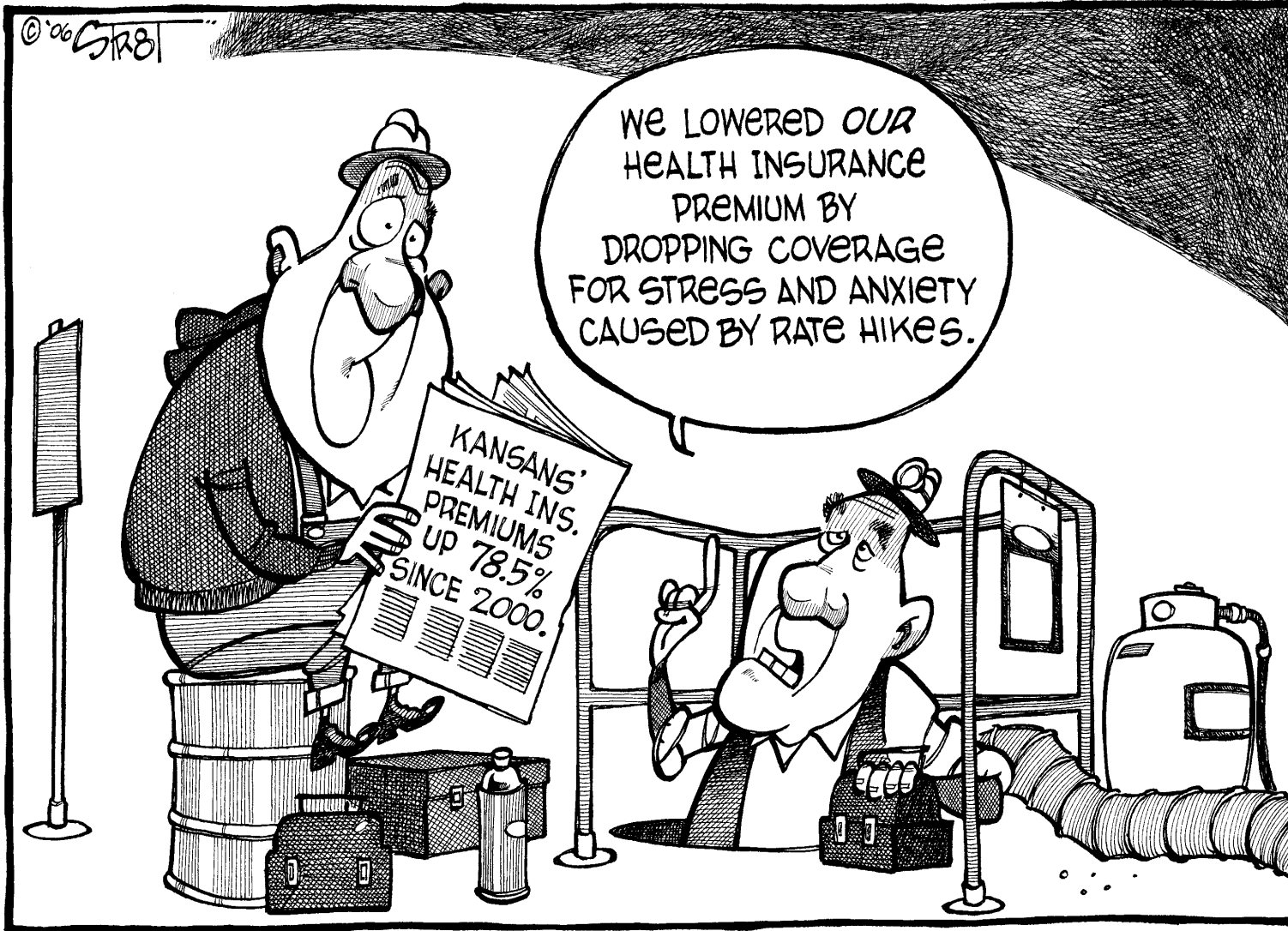
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On the road we had eight beds in two weeks

I feel like a traveling salesman. Over the last two weeks, we've slept in eight different beds.

That's a bit dramatic, I know, since two of them were mine, but still....

Steve's been complaining that his back hurt in the morning, so he went out and bought a new bed. Of course, it couldn't be delivered for about a week — or four days after we were supposed to leave town.

Kim, the editor, said she'd make sure the bed got put in the right spot and the old one moved to a spare bedroom, so we were set.

Monday night, we worked late and slept in our old bed (No. 1).

Tuesday after lunch, we headed for Concordia and Emporia to see my mother and deliver Christmas presents. We spent Tuesday night at Steve's sister's home in Emporia (No. 2).

Wednesday morning, we headed for Kansas City. While Steve went on to a meeting in Columbia, Mo., I checked in to the Marriott on the Plaza (No. 3). We stayed there for two nights while Steve attended two more meetings in Kansas City.

The Big 12 championship was in town and the place was swarming with Nebraska and Oklahoma football fans. It was red everywhere



cynthia haynes

● open season

you looked, and we had to move to the Intercontinental Hotel (No. 4) about eight blocks away, since the Marriott couldn't put us up any longer.

We spent three more nights — Friday to Sunday — at the Intercontinental attending the annual Associated Press publishers' and editors' meeting and making short dashes out to the Plaza to look at pretties and view the lights.

On Monday, we headed for the airport to take wing to Augusta, Ga., to see our daughters for a couple of days. We spent the next two nights with our daughter Lindsay and her fiance Brad (No. 5).

We took the opportunity to wash our clothes, since everything we had taken to Kansas City was dirty, especially the one sweater I had worn almost every day we were there. It was nice when we left and I threw it in the bag, just in case. The deep freeze arrived from Canada after we got to K.C.

The giant, helpless, pitiful Democrats

For all of the dire warnings and pre-election commotion about the impact of a Democratic majority in Congress, the fact is that — now that it is upon us — it can do little or nothing but harass the administration.

There is no real danger of any legislative action emerging from this Congress. Yes, the president has a veto the Democrats cannot override, but nothing will ever make it as far as the desk at 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., are just spinning their wheels.

In the Senate, there is no such thing as a majority. Ever since the elder Bush's administration, the filibuster has become routine. No longer reserved for civil-rights issues or for egregious legislation, it now is used to counter even motions for recess and adjournment. Members of the Senate are no longer subjected to the indignity of standing on their feet and reading a telephone book. Rather, the gentlemen's filibuster applies.

The majority leader phones the minority leader and asks if a filibuster is in effect. With his feet up on his desk, the Republican replies that it is and the Democrat, despite his majority, does not even think about bringing up his bill for consideration unless he has a good shot at the 60 votes required to shut off debate. In the Senate, 51 votes determine who gets the corner office, but to pass legislation, one needs 60.

In the House of Representatives, with its 435 members, the Republican Party needed a simple majority — 218 — to rule. The Democrats need considerably more. The normal rules of a mathematical majority do not take into account the fractious nature of the Democratic Party.

Where the Republican majority best resembled the Prussian Army — disciplined, unified and determined — the Democratic majority in the upcoming Congress is disunited, dispersed and divided into myriad caucuses and special interest groups. One could purchase the Republican majority wholesale by making a deal with the speaker and the majority leader. But to get the Democratic majority in line, one has to buy it retail — caucus by caucus.

First, one has to go to the Black Caucus — hat in hand — to see if one's bill has enough



dick morris

● commentary

liberal giveaways to round up its 40 or so votes. Thence to the Hispanic Caucus for a similar screening. Then, with one's legislation weighted down with liberal provisions added by these two, one has to sell it to the Democratic Leadership Council moderates and, even worse, to the Blue Dog Democrats — the out-and-out conservatives.

If you are fortunate enough to pass these contradictory litmus tests, you then have to go to the environmentalists, the labor people, and even the gays to see that your bill passes muster. Only then can you begin to hope for House passage.

The result of this labyrinth is that the relatively moderate bill you first sought to pass ends up like a Christmas tree, laden with ornaments added to appease each of the caucuses. Unrecognizable in its final form, it heads to House passage.

This road map will be familiar to all veterans of the Clinton White House of 1993 and 1994, the most recent administration that had to deal with a Democratic House. the shopping from caucus to caucus and the festooning of moderate legislation with all manner of amendments will seem deja vu to all of the early Clintonites. When Clinton proposed an anti-crime bill with a federal death penalty, he

Wednesday night, we got on a plane in Columbia, S.C., an hour's drive from Augusta, and headed for Norfolk, Va., the site of the 2007 National Newspaper Association convention.

We stayed at the Marriott Waterside for two days as we visited museums, ships and attractions that people going to a convention might want to see (No. 6).

We enjoyed Norfolk. The weather was warm, the people were friendly and the battleship Wisconsin sits at the end of the street, looking like it's ready to sail downtown. If you've never looked head-on at a battleship, it's pretty impressive.

We flew back to Kansas City via Charlotte, N.C., where we had an almost three-hour lay-over.

Finally back in K.C. we headed for Lawrence and the Springhill Suites for the night (No. 7).

After brunch on Saturday with our son Lacy, we headed for home arriving about 9:30 p.m. to find that our bed had changed (No. 8).

After almost two weeks of "if this is Wednesday, this must be Missouri," we're home and happy about it. It'll take some time to get used to the new bed, but the cats have already staked out their sections.

needed to add pork projects in the inner city like midnight basketball to get it past the Democrats in the House.

Nancy Pelosi will face the same obstacle. By the time her legislation emerges from the lower chamber, it will bear little resemblance to what she had in mind, liberal as that might have been. As Clinton said, after he watched the mangling of his legislative program by the various caucuses in the House, "I didn't even recognize myself."

Once the highly amended liberal legislation emerges from the House, it will make easy fodder for a Senate filibuster so left-leaning that it stands no chance of attracting 60 votes. It will be dead-on-arrival.

So forget the nightmares about an amended Patriot Act or restrictions on wiretapping for homeland security. Don't worry about House Ways and Means Chairman Charlie Rangel's, D-N.Y., ravings about the draft or the rumormongers of a tax increase. It's not going to happen.

What is the Democratic majority good for? One thing and one thing only — to give their party control of the committees and the subpoena power that goes with it. The two House Democratic majority can only make noise and make trouble. It can't pass legislation.

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