

Congress will help you until you just can't stand it

Don't think for a minute that the federal government is your friend.

It's the single greatest enemy of liberty and economic vitality in our country today. But only because we asked it in.

It's not the income tax we're worried about, though that can be oppressive enough this time of year.

Nor is it the Homeland Security Department, dangerous as that might be in the wrong hands.

It's not that the government is bad or evil. It's neither.

It's not that the government is incompetent. It does some things quite well; look at our military. Look at our National Parks. Look at the Weather Service and a hundred other useful functions the federal government performs, day in, day out.

The problem with the government, really, is us. We expect it to do way too much. We expect it to solve every problem in the world, now, not yesterday.

And the government, good as it is, can't do that. But don't tell Congress. They don't want to hear.

No, Congress is busy passing laws, taking positions, posturing, lookin' good. That's how you get re-elected. Lookin' good.

Here's how it works.

Somebody sees a problem. Say insurance companies are selling people's medical information to each other, and somebody thinks it's a good idea to force them to stop.

Somebody say, "Pass a Law."

And the machinery of Congress is set in motion. It's a complicated process, and you don't want to watch.

Eventually, after much wrangling between the lobbies and the parties and the interest groups, the law is passed.

The law requires the government, the bureaucracy, as it were, to draw up regulations. This is where it gets sticky.

In Washington, they judge regulations by weight. They are bound to be thick, complicated — and expensive. There is more wran-

gling. No one ever asks if they are practical.

Then, and this is seven years after the law is passed, the regulations come into force. They are legion.

They cover every detail of the medical system, from how insurance companies and employers have to handle people's health information to whether a nursing home can put a patient's name on the door of his room. Fines reach \$20,000 per occurrence.

And there is much wailing and gnashing of teeth. But the law is the law, ya' know?

That's pretty much the story of the new law we've all been learning about, called the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, or HIPPA, for, ah, short.

It's reached into every medical and corporate office in the nation. It's caused no end of consternation. It means that if you call a hospital to see if your neighbor is there, they probably won't tell you. It means you have to sign dozens of forms you'll never read or understand or care about.

Estimates are that just implementing the regulations will cost \$15 billion to \$20 billion, maybe more. And that does not count the continuing social cost.

This bill started out as somebody's good idea. It came out of the office of former Sen. Nancy Kassebaum, a good Kansas Republican.

Nobody intended it to cause this much trouble. No one thought much of it taking another chunk out of our way of life.

But like most big sets of federal regulations before it, in banking, business, labor and so many other parts of our life, it did.

The toll just keeps adding up. Nobody talks about shrinking the government or the Code of Federal Regulations.

Or about the cost.

So, the next time your congressman or senator tells you they're trying, in Washington, to "do something about the cost of health care," smile and nod your head.

They are. — Steve Haynes



Easter lays an egg for grandma

I had hoped to have a sequel to my Washington story.

I could almost see the headlines: "Four-year-old 'Wows' the President", or "Taylor Lane Bravo Speaks For Children Everywhere in Her Address to Congress". You see, Halley, my daughter in D.C., had arranged for Taylor (her niece, my granddaughter) to attend the annual White House Easter Egg Roll on the South Lawn.

The non-refundable airline tickets were bought, the little Easter dress was purchased, and it had been explained to Taylor that she was going to visit the President's house.

Last Monday, two days before Kara and Taylor were scheduled to leave Dallas, Halley called them with the latest decision: only children of military personnel would be allowed to attend. And not just any personnel either; only Pentagon personnel.

Now listen, I can appreciate heightened security due to the war in Iraq, but please. Taylor was just one of hundreds of disappointed little kids, let alone disappointed parents and grandparents.

My first reaction when Kara called with the decision was "don't take no for an answer". I went online and e-mailed the President, I e-mailed Fox News Network, I e-mailed Bill O'Reilly. Trying to get sympathy, support, or at least publicity. No go.

I advised Halley to "call in any markers she had." I wanted to see that child get grass stains on her new



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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shoes from that rarefied grass on the South Lawn. She assured me that she had tried every angle and that "it didn't look good".

Bottom line: Kara and Taylor flew to Washington anyway (non-refundable tickets, remember), and plan to see all the sights they can and just do some "sister stuff." I called Thursday to confirm their arrival and Halley told me that Kara had a cute idea about how to redecorate the bathroom, so they were busy painting and papering.

Well, we have one more shot at getting Taylor in that Easter Egg Roll. The cut-off age is 6 and Taylor turns 5 next January. Aunt Halley better start campaigning now.

A friend shared this with me, so I'm passing it along. Hot weather is almost here. And with summer comes mosquitoes. Here are some "bug-off" ideas. Surely, one will work for you.

- Bounce dryer sheets. Just wipe on and go. Great for babies.
- Vitamin B-1 (one tablet, once a day).
- Stop eating bananas during mos-

quito season. There's something about the way the human body metabolizes bananas that "skeeters" like.

• Vicks Vap-o-Rub. (I think I'd rather be bitten by mosquitoes than smear Vicks all over me, though. But, hey, I don't make this stuff up, I just report it.)

• Plant marigolds around your yard.

• Avon Skin-So-Soft mixed about half and half with alcohol. Doesn't specify if it's "rubbing or drinking".

• Clear, Mexican vanilla. At least, with this one, you don't care if it works. You'll still smell good enough to eat. And after all our trips to Mexico, I have a lifetime supply.

From the Bible

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. (Hebrews 2:10)

Woodsman, spare those trees

The pink X's on all those beautiful old trees.

Somebody should have said something about this months ago. But the pink X's make it so real.

Apparently, there's fear that some of them will die after the contractor on the city water project undercut their roots on one side.

Because the city wants any tree removal to be done under the water contract, not later, the trees are coming down, though they're still quite alive.

Not small trees, mind you, but 100-year-old elms that have been alive longer than anyone reading this column.

It's vandalism, pure and simple.

The deal is this: If a homeowner lets a tree go now, the city pays. If the homeowner wants to keep the tree, apparently, he or she will have to pay later if the tree dies a year or two down the road.

For my part, I'd gamble. The contractors didn't think our trees would die, but I wouldn't let them go. Besides, they only cut the roots on one side, maybe a quarter of the total.



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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We have lost too many great trees in this town already. Someone always thinks it'd look better if those old trees were taken out and replaced. Sometimes, that's the right thing to do.

But you should never be hasty when you're dealing with something that took 60 years to a century to grow. You can't get it back tomorrow. Replace it with a sapling, and it's take another 100 years to grow a new one.

Trees are one of the things that mark this as a livable community. Oberlin has great shade trees. But not enough that it can afford to squander some.

All too often, when the old elms and hackberries have been taken

down, they've not been replaced. Or they've been replaced by showy ornamentals that look fine in the spring but never make much shade.

Many blocks today are almost devoid of shade trees. The city has a program to replace them, but it's a long and expensive process.

Meantime, it makes very little sense to tear out fine old elms on the premise that they might die.

The city needs to reconsider its policy, which coerces homeowners into killing their trees.

Let them live. If they die, the city could afford to have them removed. There are not that many that the city couldn't afford to help remove those that die. We need to plant trees, not kill them.

Learn eggactly how to cook omelet

They say you should learn something every day, and I expected to learn a lot of things at the Kansas Press Association meeting earlier this month in Topeka.

I didn't expect to learn how to make an omelet in 40 seconds.

The omelet was part of our bloopers program.

Each year on Saturday morning, there is a slide show of our mistakes. These can be mildly humorous — *The Salina Journal* put a one-half page ad for Krispy Kreme donuts on the same page as a story on dieting, and *The Norton Telegram* had a bazzard sounding at the end of a basketball game.

Some can be very embarrassing for those who forget to put all the letters in common words such as public and count. Spell check will not catch these mistakes, but the readers sure do.

The winner this year was, which quoted Barbara Bush as saying that she had lived through wars, presidents and three breast sizes.

What she had said was dress sizes. Mrs. Bush wrote a nice letter to the *Eagle* saying that her family had had quite a laugh over the mistake. At the end of the typed letter she wrote by hand, "I just had to get this off my chest."

Before we got into this tantalizing bit of teasing of each other, however, we had breakfast, and this year that was a program by the American Egg Board.



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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I guess I wasn't aware that we had an Egg Board. We not only have one, but it has a spokesman, Howard Helmer, who is the world's fastest omelet maker and knows more about eggs than most hens.

He had each of us make our own omelet with a press association past presidents helping out. That meant that Steve was a helper. For this, he received an apron and a miniature whisk with a plastic egg on top. He also became real good at making omelets.

The trick is using a hot 10-inch non-stick skillet. Each omelet contains two eggs and two tablespoons of water. If you are making lots, you still make them one at a time, but you can mix them all up and use a soup ladle, which just holds two eggs and two tablespoons of water, to spoon the well-stirred mixture into the hot skillet.

You start by putting in a pat of butter or margarine or a little oil. Allow it to melt or heat for a couple of seconds and add your beaten egg mixture.

After you have the egg mixture in the skillet, you move it from the sides to the middle with a spatula, tilting the pan to allow uncooked egg to run into the holes you create until the egg is just set, but not done. You then grab handful of whatever you want in your omelet — onion, green pepper, ham, cheese, mushrooms — on the left half of the eggs. You then use your spatula to flip the egg over the goodies and then turn the skillet over onto a plate, which allows the omelet to hit the plate upside down. This makes a perfect omelet in about 40 seconds.

We tried it at home, and it works. The skillet handle should always be turned towards you, you need to have all your ingredients ready to go and most importantly, you need the stove to be really hot.

If you are making scrambled eggs, ??? said, you use milk, but only water for an omelet. That's what makes them fluffy, the steam from the water.

Well, you learn something every day. And some lessons are edible.

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There's nothing good on at Sunflower Cinema

To the Editor:

While going down Penn Avenue, I noticed "Opening Soon" is still playing at the Sunflower Cinema.

If I remember right, that went up at the beginning of the Christmas shopping season.

Now that the days are getting longer, shouldn't we bring back last year's long running and all time favorite, "Closed for the Summer"?

Rebecca Helm
Norcatur

Letter to the Editor

