

Insurance companies block health care benefits

Here's a nasty little fact: nearly 63 million Americans, almost one-quarter of the population, have no health insurance.

Business groups, with the backing of President George Bush, are trying to change that, but they have run into a brick wall in the Senate. An unholy coalition of Democrats and big-money insurance companies are blocking a bill to allow national associations to sponsor health insurance plans.

Why? Well, the insurance companies stand to lose a lot of money, because the national plans would likely force premiums down and take business away from traditional, state-by-state plans.

Big among the opponents are "the Blues," state and regional Blue Cross-Blue Shield plans which once were nonprofits, but increasingly have been bought up by profit-making insurance firms.

It's easy to see why these companies want to keep some of this business. But it's criminal that they stand in the way of millions of Americans getting reasonably priced insurance.

Everyone knows what's happened to health care costs and health insurance costs over the last decade. Increases of 25 percent in a year have not been uncommon, especially from the Blues.

Today, if you work for a national corporation like General Motors, or belong to a national union with its own health insurance plan, your insurance is covered by federal law and regulated by the U.S. Department of Labor.

The Blues and other insurance companies are regulated by state insurance commission-

ers and state legislators, which have saddled them with lots of expensive mandates, or coverage requirements. Because each state is different, that drives premiums up.

National plans have to meet federal requirements, and since they have only one set of rules, they tend to be less expensive. With national buying power, association plans would make insurance affordable for members of groups ranging from the National Federation of Independent Businesses and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to the National Newspaper Association, all of which have supported this cause.

Opponents say they fear bypassing the state would weaken coverage, but half those 63 million people live in families supported by someone who works for a small businessmen. They probably aren't too worried about that.

Both small business owners and employees have felt the pinch of higher medical premiums. The proportion of businesses offering insurance has dropped in recent years from 65 percent to around 61, and many employees of firms that have insurance can no longer afford to buy it.

Public employers often pay for full coverage for employees, and can raise taxes when premiums go up, but small businesses just can't work that way.

It's a shame to see the Democrats — and Kansas' Rep. Dennis Moore is one of them — blocking a bill which could help millions of families in this health-care crisis.

Campaign contributions, of course, explain some of the opposition. So does the fact that the president is for the bill. But it's the American people who are losing this battle.

— Steve Haynes



Visit turned into history lesson

A visit to our daughter and son-in-law in Augusta, Ga., turned into a history lesson when we found ourselves on a ferry going from Charleston, S.C., to Fort Sumter.

While most of us don't remember much of what we learned in American history, we do know that the first shots of the Civil War were fired at Fort Sumter.

South Carolinians have always been a hot-headed bunch. The state was the first to declare its independence from Great Britain and the first to secede from the Union.

In November 1860, Abraham Lincoln was elected president as a Republican on a contain-slavery (but not abolitionist) platform. On Dec. 20, South Carolina called it quits.

Charleston was a commercial center and her harbor had several forts, most of them unmanned and in poor repair.

Most of the troops were stationed in Fort Moultrie, which was vulnerable to land attack. The commander, Maj. Robert Anderson, moved his troops to the more defensible island of Fort Sumter in the middle of the night after spiking all the guns left behind at Fort Moultrie on Dec. 26.

At the fort, Major Anderson had about four months of supplies and 85 men, including an eight-man Army band. The fort, under construction since 1829, was unfinished and although there were plenty of cannons, most weren't mounted.

The Confederates took over Fort Moultrie to the northeast, put men at Fort Johnson to the southwest, took over Castle Pickney, a fortification on a small island to the west, fortified Cummings Point to the south and put warships in the harbor, thus surrounding the Fort Sumter on all sides.

Maj. Anderson and his men started making the fort more defensible while diplomats in both the North and South squared off. In Charles-



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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ton, new fortifications were put into place.

On Feb. 18, 1861 Jefferson Davis was inaugurated as president of the Confederate States of America and on March 3, Pierre T.G. Beauregard was appointed commander of Confederate troops in Charleston. The next day, Lincoln was inaugurated in Washington.

The garrison at Fort Sumter had only 40 days of food left and Lincoln sent a relief expedition. On April 11, Gen. Beauregard demanded the fort's surrender but Maj. Anderson refused. The two were friends; Anderson had been Beauregard's artillery instructor at West Point, but such was the Civil War.

At 4:30 a.m. April 12, 1861, the first shot was fired on Fort Sumter from Fort Johnson, an air burst from a mortar to signal the shelling to begin. The fort was caught in a vicious cross fire.

With powder bags in short supply, the fort did not return fire until 7 a.m. when the second-in-command, Capt. Abner Doubleday, who later would invent baseball, fired at the battery on Cummings Point.

The fort was heavily damaged by the shelling. The worst problem was hot shot, heated cannon balls, which set the wooden roofs of the officers' quarters on fire. The powder magazine were directly under them.

There were not enough defenders to fight the rebels and the fire, so after 34 hours of almost continuous shelling, Maj. Anderson surrendered the fort. He, his men and the

flag were allowed to leave for New York.

About 2 p.m. on April 14, the 33-star Union flag was lowered with a 100-gun salute. Midway through the salute, a gun misfired and Pvt. Daniel Hough was killed. He became the first casualty of the war, as no one had been killed during the 34-hour bombardment.

The ruined fort was taken over by the Confederate troops, who reinforced its walls with cotton bales, earth and sand.

Federal forces tried to retake the fort in 1863 and 1864, since it caused a hole in the Union blockade of southern ports.

In its first bombardment by Confederate troops, the fort was hit with 3,000 shots and shells but suffered no deaths. By the time Confederate troops abandoned it in 1865, more than 40,000 rounds had been fired at the fort and more than 300 men had died. The fort was reduced to rubble.

Between 1870 and 1876, the Army began rebuilding the fort. It was refortified and new guns put in place over the next century as it protected the harbor at Charleston through the Spanish American War and World Wars I and II.

By the end of World War II, stationary coastal defenses were considered obsolete, and the fort was named a National Monument in 1948. Today it is a popular tourist spot manned by the U.S. Park Service. Men in uniform had returned to Fort Sumter.

College education is valued

This is going to be an exciting week.

Twenty years ago, I told my oldest daughter I would be there when she graduated from college. Well, it is finally happening. Halley will walk across that stage Saturday to pick up her hard-earned sheepskin. And I'm going to be there.

There probably isn't a worse time to be short-staffed at a newspaper than the month of May. High school graduations and alumni banquets alone make for an incredibly busy time, not to mention the usual news, board meetings, club meetings, engagements, weddings and funerals. So I know that I'm imposing terribly on the good nature of my co-workers by being gone.

On the other hand, when you begin to think you're indispensable, just pull your finger out of a glass of water and see how long it takes the hole to fill up.

Halley wishes I wouldn't make a big deal about her graduation. "It's kind of embarrassing," she says, "to be 36 years old and just graduating from college."

In my best Yiddish accent I said, "Listen to your mother. There are lots of 35- and 40-year-olds who wish they had stuck with it and were graduating from college."

I should know. I'm one of those college dropouts.



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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It's true. The sun is going to come up tomorrow, regardless, whether you're ready for it or not. So if you are trying to make a long-term decision, remember this: in five years (or twenty years) you'll still be just as old as you would be whether or not you go to school, go to work, go overseas, whatever.

Maybe Halley took the long way around. But, my goodness, what a ride she has had. She's lived in Oklahoma, Texas and Maryland. That doesn't count her time in the U.S. Army and being stationed in Germany, where she got to see lots of Europe. She has had diverse jobs, like working at a convenience store, managing a car wash, being a security officer for IBM and a diesel mechanic in the Army, and now she works at the White House. How cool is that?

I warned my kids to be careful. I might try to live vicariously through them. Truth is, I couldn't do half the

things my kids do. Our kids are so talented, so confident, so smart.

Kara is flying in from Dallas for the graduation and a couple of Halley's friends from Austin are coming, too. It's a good thing I'm planning to take some meat from the freezer along. Looks like I may be cooking for quite a crew while I'm there.

I wonder if T-bones and ground round are against airport security rules?

From the Bible

For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth forever. I Peter 1:24,25a

Bird flies the coop after bath

I looked out the bedroom window, and there, down on the back deck, was a blur of feathers and water.

I watched, fascinated.

A robin was taking a bath in the cat bowl.

A very vigorous bath at that.

And this must have been one dirty bird, because when I checked later, all the water spots around the cat bowl were muddy. So was the cat water.

By then, the miscreant was gone. I suppose he must have had a long, dusty flight in from "the South," wherever it is that robins go when they're not in the North.

He sure was cleaning up a storm.

He wasn't the first robin of spring. In fact, if you keep your eyes open, you can see robins here pretty much year around. I imagine those are Canadian robins who leave for cooler climes when spring sets in and southern robins flock to this country.

But I digress.

He might well have been the last robin if the cats had caught him in their water. But he was perfectly safe.

Miss April Alice was on the bedroom windowsill, taking in the water show. She was twitching and mewing like cats do when they want something they cannot have.

There was no way, with a screen and a 15-foot plunge involved, that she could fulfill her fantasy.

Molly Monster (You notice, my wife is given to alliteration when naming cats, huh?) had found a sunbeam somewhere on the east side of the house and was not planning to move until about 2 p.m.

That bird had all the time in the world.

You'd think an adult robin would



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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know better than to bathe in the cat bowl, but I suppose it might be hard to identify. It's an old Club aluminum roaster, a wedding gift from 1971 that got drafted for cat-water duty. It was demoted from kitchen service after it warped, and newer and larger roasters came into service.

How often does anyone need three roasters, after all?

So this old yellow roaster sits on the back deck, filled occasionally with water for the felines, who often spend the day outdoors. They don't drink a lot of it.

In fact, I couldn't prove that they drink any of it. But it's there if they want to drink, and that satisfies the requirements of Cynthia and the humane society.

Between fillings, it grows algae and, periodically, the dog stops by to empty it. And, of course, our odd robin takes a bath.

The cats alternate between lounging in the sunbeam and stalking prey

around the yard. One or more of them — again, I can't prove which one — is a rather successful hunter, judging from the number of bird bodies and brown bats I find in the grass when I mow.

These are usually deposited under the pear tree directly north of the cat bowl, and I have to assume — had the cats been on duty that day — that the robin would have been lunch.

Usually, the victims are dead when I find them. Sometimes, the cats eat the best parts. Sometimes, apparently not.

One day, when Cynthia told me to "do something about the dead bat in the yard," I refused on the grounds that it was hissing at me.

Such is life with the cats on the back porch.

The robin did not wind up on the prey heap, however. I presume he enjoyed his bath and went his way, a lot cleaner and no worse for the wear. Probably never knew what he was bathing in, and just as well.

Couple enjoyed concert

To the Editor:

What a wonderful spring concert at Oberlin Elementary School last Thursday night.

Thank you, Mr. Buchholz, for the fine work you do with our grade school students.

And to you students, you sounded

Letter to the Editor

great.

Bill and Carol Duncan
Oberlin

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Published each Wednesday by Haynes Publishing Co., 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749. Periodicals mail postage paid at Oberlin, Kan. 67749.

Steve and Cynthia Haynes, publishers
Official newspaper of Oberlin, Jennings, Norcatur, Dresden and Decatur County. Member of the Kansas Press Association, National Newspaper Association, Colorado Press Association, Nebraska Press Association and Inland Press Association.

Subscriptions: One year, \$28 (tax included) in Decatur, Norton, Rawlins, Sheridan, Thomas and Red Willow counties; \$32 (tax included) elsewhere in Kansas; \$35 elsewhere in the U.S. Foreign subscriptions, \$20 extra per year (except APO/FPO). POSTMASTER: Send change of address to 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749-2243.

Office hours: 8:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. Mon.-Fri.
(Also open most Saturdays when someone is in.)

