

Uncle Sugar giving out our money for 'disasters'

The fact that the City of Oberlin got \$13,000 in federal "homeland security" money for cleaning up after the November blizzard is bad news for American taxpayers. Bad news indeed.

It's just a symbol, though, of how bloated, inefficient, wasteful and corrupt our federal government has become.

Pay Oberlin for blizzard costs!
This was a two-day storm, a minor event. In years past, the city would have cleaned up the limbs and power lines and gone on about its business. It's not that big a deal.

But it was declared a federal disaster, and under present rules, cities and counties could apply for federal aid.

Federal Emergency Management Agency officials, anxious apparently to be seen as men of action, swarmed out of Topeka and told local officials how to apply for some federal dough.

FEMA, which couldn't find New Orleans after Katrina, has plenty of time to help disaster-ridden western Kansas.

Let's make it clear, we imply no criticism of city or county officials for asking for — or spending — federal money here. If the feds are going to give it away, we might as well get ours.

But that's part of the problem, too. The more money the feds give to more people, the harder it is to cut the budget.

Federal money is addictive. The more you get, the longer you get it, the more you depend on it.

Until you can't exist without it. Ask the school board. Ask any farmer. There are strings, of course. Take their money and the feds get to tell you what to do.

Farmers, schools, cities, counties, the state, you name it. Federal money goes everywhere. Federal rules affect everything.

These programs always sound like "a good idea."

All of them build a following, addicts who depend on the help.

Now, just try and cut the budget. Zero out a program. Even reduce a line item.

"But you can't do that," someone will holler. "We need that money. We depend on it."

Meantime, the government can't do what we really need it to do.

Our military is depleted after three years of war.

The piddling help that came after Katrina was too little, too late. Only the Army came through, at least at first.

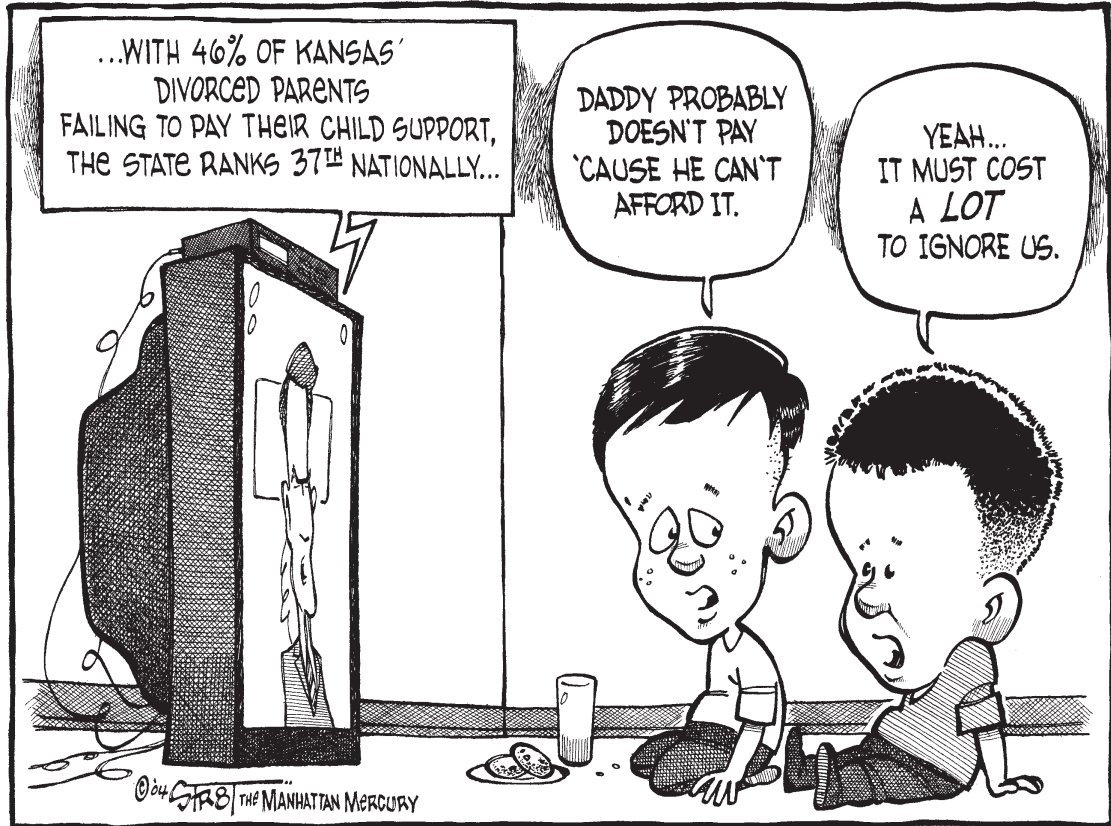
We can't solve the crisis of Social Security and we can't agree on balancing the budget.

Because of the corrupting influence of federal money, Congress can't even agree on President Bush's plan to cut the deficit in half by the time he leaves office.

Enjoy your federal help, Oberlin. But remember it's dirty money, money the government can't afford to give and we really can't afford to spend.

Not without feeding our national addiction.

— Steve Haynes



Ice takes her to another world

I was on the bridge of my ship Wednesday morning as I cut through the icebergs in the North Atlantic.

The world was a beautiful white around me with a few touches of brown, green and gray. The brown was the muddy tracks in the street. The green were the tops of my daffodils breaking the crusty snow and the gray was the sidewalk Steve had scooped the day before.

I spent Monday running back and forth between a newspaper and a pharmacy as I tried to do two jobs at once. The pharmacist was stuck in Kansas City and I wasn't going anywhere that required a vehicle. In fact, I walked to work — all of five blocks — with my portable computer on my back.

Tuesday, I took off early over snowpacked roads to relieve a pharmacy which had been without help for three days. Its owner was in Mexico and the relief was snowed in two counties away. I filled a lot of prescriptions, but I didn't get any snow shoveled at my house.

Steve, however, cleaned off our deck and the front walk from the porch to the street.

Wednesday, I took shovel in hand



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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and went to work on the sidewalk that runs along in front of the house. It took about 40 minutes, but I got it cleared from our property line to alley.

By then, the snow that had been so light and fluffy the day before was crusting over. I really did feel like I was moving icebergs most of the time. Besides, a little daydreaming made the work go faster.

The roads were too messy to walk that night, so the next morning I got out my shovel and started to work on the sidewalk on the other side of the alley. Now I was really starting to notice the icebergs. In some drifted spots I had to push the shovel straight down like an ax about a foot in front of me. This would break up the snow into icebergs, and I could grab them and toss them out of the

way. There was still some slush underneath that needed shoveling, but my workout was getting more muscles involved.

Friday morning, I grabbed a couple of Ibuprofen before hitting the high seas. My back had started to notice the different muscles I had been working. I made it most of the way to the end of the block before I had to go in and shower and get ready for work.

Later Steve went out and finished the block. He said he found a few new muscles, too.

On Saturday, the sidewalk was clear as the snow melted quickly. It would probably have been clear if we hadn't shoveled, but it was good exercise, and how often do you get to captain your own ice cutter in the North Atlantic?

Her honeymoon not over yet

Jim hasn't worked away from home since the first couple years of our marriage.

We had been married little more than a year when he agreed to work for my brother Bob, helping build a log house for him at Kanopolis Reservoir.

Now, as Jim's carpentry career winds down, his last two major jobs are for out-of-town relatives. He just started remodeling the basement in the home of his nephew Kurke, in McCook. At the same time, he plans to rebuild the roof and put in replacement windows for his sister Mary, who lives four miles west of McCook.

The mileage combined with the price of gas prompted us to arrange for him to stay in the spare bedroom at Kurke's while he works and come home once during the week. It's kind of new to us, so we don't have the routine down yet.

We don't like the separation, but phone calls will make it easier. Thank goodness for our unlimited-long-distance phone plan and our mobile-to-mobile cellular plan. "Cause we can really rack up the air-time talking to each other.

The girls at my office tease me because it takes Jim and I so long to say good-bye.

I'll hang up after he calls and Veronica might say, "That's some record, she only said good-bye and that she loved him five times."

Yes, I guess we're still mushy — even after 12 years.

—ob—

Do telemarketers annoy you, too?



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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Jim gets after me because I'm too polite to them. His advice: "Say NO, and hang up."

I can't seem to do that, but I did hear of a novel approach to deter them from calling.

A family had just begun their evening meal when the phone rang. The husband answered. The telemarketer totally mispronounced the husband's name when he asked if Mr. So-and-so was there. The husband said, "No, he's not. Who's calling?"

In an aside voice, he said, "Don't step in that blood. Have you notified next-of-kin?"

Then he continued, "Why are you calling this number? Did you know the victim? What is your connection to this murder?"

By this time, the telemarketer is freaking out and trying to hang up, but the husband keeps on going.

He said, "We have tracked this phone call and know exactly where you are. Officers are outside your building right now. They want to talk to you about this case."

That's when he heard the phone hit the floor and footsteps running for the door.

Kind of elaborate, but it just might work.

—ob—

Jim made the observation that the morning show of every major network begins their broadcast with the Iraq death toll for the day.

I think the young men and women serving this country over there are making a difference.

Just once, I'd like to hear a reporter say, "Mr. and Mrs. Muhammed Abudabi opened their own business today. Their children went to school without a care in the world."

If you can't (won't) stand behind our troops — please, feel free to stand in front of them.

From the Bible

I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live: I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the Lord.

Psalm 104: 33, 34



THE PRESIDENT chats briefly with Steve Haynes of Oberlin after talking with Jerry Tidwell of Texas about campaigns past. But the advance man already is calling Mr. Bush to the podium.

— Photo by Brian Steffens, National Newspaper Association

Visit with president is brief

What do you say when you get to meet the president?

Not much. He doesn't have time, he gets more advice than he needs, and how many people does the president meet in a week, anyway?

"It's a great honor, sir," will just about do it.

He's got a schedule to keep. Here's the drill.

If the president decides to talk to your group, the leaders get to go backstage to greet him when he arrives.

In the case of the National Newspaper Association, that meant the president, the vice president and the treasurer — that's me. I guess we could think of it as a little perk for the hours we've spent sitting in meetings.

So about 45 minutes before the man was supposed to arrive, the three of us — already cleared by the White House and Secret Service — were ushered backstage, where a small section of the hotel ballroom had been partitioned off.

There we met the White House advance man — actually a political operative from Veterans Affairs. A couple of Secret Service guys with wires running out of their ears stood by the entrances. Their buddies were all over at the hotel.

Then there was the director — call her J. — who programmed the music, lights and announcements out of a computer setup.

Meantime, our members were

being screened by uniformed Secret Service cops, wanded and sent to their seats in the ballroom. They were locked down as soon as the president left the White House, about 10 blocks away.

J. said, "I'll go out and hang the seal."

After she put it on the podium, she got a round of applause. She queued up some marches for the crowd.

"She's the voice of God," the advance man said with a wink. "You'll see."

We stood around talking. The advance guy showed us where to stand, cautioning us to stay in order so the president would know who we were.

And we talked and waited. Eventually, word came that "he" was in the building. We got back in line, President Jerry first, Vice President Jerry second.

A curtain parted at the back, and the Leader of the Free World strode firmly across the room. Just like that, blue eyes twinkling.

He talked a minute with Jerry from Illinois, then with Vice President Jerry from Texas. They knew

each other from his campaigns for governor, and Mr. Bush recalled surviving the marathon Fourth of July parade in Granbury.

Jerry, an avid Texas Rangers fan, was polite and didn't ask him about the Sammy Sosa trade.

"Where are you from?" he asked. "Oberlin, Kansas," I replied. "Out west."

"That's in Jerry Moran's district?"

I nodded, knowing he'd been briefed. The advance man pulled him toward the stage.

As he walked out, J. pushed a button and the sound system intoned, "Ladies and gentlemen, the President of the United States."

It was her, all right, but from the machine. She didn't have to say a word.

Behind the president was a gentleman with a receding hairline and a bright blue tie: Karl Rove, the political genius behind the Bush movement. Jerry II and I introduced ourselves.

Lots of people get to shake the president's hand, after all, but how many of us get to meet Karl Rove

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