

Health system not great, but it's better than most

It's been fashionable to trash the U.S. health care system the last couple of years, especially since the appearance of the Michael Moore movie "Sicko."

The agenda for Moore and other leftists is pretty clear, of course: they want a government-run medical care system to make things "equal," and by that we presume they mean equally bad.

And while the American health-care system is, in many ways, a mess, it works better than most. It produces cutting-edge research, top technology and a broad application of medical knowledge.

It's the medical payment system that's wrong, and though most of the problems have been caused by government involvement, the leftists want even more. There is a certain plausible illogic to that: What we've been doing the last 30 years has only screwed things up, so let's do more.

The socialized medicine crowd points to longer life spans in several developed nations, including France and Canada. Still, you never hear about anyone flying from the U.S. to Paris for heart surgery or Edmonton for cancer treatment.

A supposedly objective news story from the San Francisco Chronicle quotes experts — all favoring socialized medicine, no opponents — as saying many countries do better. One study quoted put the U.S. last among six nations, including Australia, Canada, Germany, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. Moore himself touts health care in Communist Cuba.

Supposedly, the Canadian system works well — if you don't count the overburdened system which has to ration care among users and the flight of many top doctors to the U.S., where they can make a lot more money. Britain has faced legendary problems trying to get its system into line.

The World Health Organization put the U.S. 37th out of 191 United Nations members in health-care services — between Costa Rica and Slovenia and just ahead of Cuba, the article says, but it fails to list any criteria.

But if you've seen the hospitals in Costa Rica, you'd have to wonder who did the ranking. They're adequate, but just that, no comparison to American hospitals.

That's not the way our system is perfect. It's bloated and wasteful, and government intervention often makes things worse. The government on one hand gives out money to build and equip hospitals and on the other tries to limit their scope and function and tells them what they can charge. It offers to pay for welfare clients and the elderly, but not enough to keep the lights on.

It makes rules that often make no sense: One requires hospitals and other providers to use the same price list for all customers, but allows deep discounts for insurance companies and, of course, government programs.

The result: "private-pay" patients, the 46 million uninsured Americans, are expected to pay more than anyone else because they have no one to bargain for them. How much sense does that make?

The uninsured often can't pay, of course, so the insured and the government make up the difference in the end. Private-pay patients eventually leave the system with their pocket-books empty, their credit ruined, paying nothing, many 10 cents on the dollar at most.

Yeah, the system is pretty crazy.

It used to work better before the government got involved. Hospitals were run as charities, never expecting to make money. Doctors made house calls.

That was a simpler time, a different era. Medical care was more primitive and less expensive. City and county hospitals and charity wards took care of the poor.

Today? If you can figure out the system, more power to you. If a political candidate could deliver a solution, he or she'd be elected in a flash.

So far, no one has found that grail. And while medical care keeps getting better, the payment system keeps getting worse. Big hospitals are big business, many run by for-profit firms anxious to get federal dollars.

Care keeps getting better, but the payment system is coagulating. Medicare, the government-run system for the elderly, is said to be nearly bankrupt. No one is doing anything, though everyone thinks the government should do something.

But is that the answer, as Mr. Moore and his buddies would have us believe? Or is it the problem? — Steve Haynes



She just doesn't get sports

It's been a Cinderella year for my teams.

Unfortunately, Cinderella keeps meeting the Prince, she kisses him and she turns into a frog.

The Rockies made it to the World Series and the University of Kansas won 11 in a row — in football.

Yeah, I'm a KU graduate. How did you guess?

Steve and I aren't big television addicts. In fact, we almost never watch the tube. As I write this column early Sunday morning, the television I wanted for my kitchen is turned on — to satellite radio.

But two weeks ago Saturday night, we had to watch the big KU-MU game on the upstairs television — the big one.

Hey, in our world, a 26-inch television is a big one.

We decided supper would be club sandwiches and leftover cranberry sauce at half-time.

Steve got the game on my kitchen set and then went upstairs to tune in the big one and plop in his easy chair while I got the bacon fried so that we could put the sandwiches together and eat quickly at midgame.

By the time I got everything laid out, it was midway through the first quarter and the teams seemed to



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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be doing no more than trading the football back and forth.

Upstairs, Steve was watching the action with one eye and reading a leftover Rocky Mountain News with the other.

That seemed like a good idea, so I tried it. I had worked my way through the travel and entertainment sections before Missouri scored.

By then I was restless and started folding the clothes, which had been sitting in the sitting room for a week. This didn't take long, so I started putting them away.

Missouri scored again. This game was going the wrong way and I was bored. Thank God for half-time.

I got out supplies while Steve assembled our supper, then turned the kitchen television down. We didn't need the announcers to tell us how bad our team was doing. The game started up before we were

done, and I cleaned up while Steve returned to his big screen, easy chair and Rocky.

While things went better for us in the second half, I couldn't get into the game. I would watch for a while, then get up and wander off.

I discovered that cleaning the cat boxes and refilling the humidifiers were more exciting than the game.

Maybe if KU had done better or maybe if I had listened to the game on the radio, where I could have gone about my business and still listened, I would have been more interested.

Ah well, my alma mater's prince may have turned into a frog but she'll still get to go to the Orange ball, er Bowl, and we can always use our Rockies' fight song — "Wait until next year."

Steve said something about listening to a KU basketball game.

Invaders taking over prairie

Cedar trees.

Out here, we plant them for windbreaks. They don't spread too much in this climate, but they can be a nuisance.

They're almost viral: they grow like weeds and, when conditions are right, they spread like weeds, too.

Driving across Kansas, you have plenty of time to think about stuff like this. In the tall-grass hills east of Russell, I started wondering why people don't take better care of their pasture.

Some of it is because they don't really use the land much, I think. Small plots owned by people who don't graze cattle tend to go to trees if you don't burn them. Farther east, you get elms and hackberry and oak, but in the grass country, you get cedars.

While the eastern red cedar is considered a native species, it's not normal to find them growing in Kansas hill country. Centuries of prairie fires and grazing kept them in check, kept the grasslands open and the grass lush for the buffalo — and later the cowman's stock.

Then people started planting windbreaks, and that upped the supply of cedar seeds. Birds eat the berries and spread the seeds, so it doesn't take much to get them started miles from the nearest shel-



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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ter belt.

Today, especially around Manhattan, you see these little plots just choked with tall grass and cedar. Pretty soon they're no good for pasture. The cedars are kind of like prairie dogs, in their own way.

For a guy who doesn't care about using a small acreage, that may be fine. But like the guy with a big stand of dandelions, he's just growing seeds to infest his neighbor's grass.

But then you see some fair-sized overgrown pastures. And the operator, or maybe the guy who just bought it, is trying to get them out.

While burning will control small cedars, you can't get rid of bigger ones that way. They burn the fields, then they spray. They pull them out, bulldoze them, pile them and burn the carcasses.

And it looks like quite a job. I didn't volunteer to stop and help.

I guess it's just one example of

what happens when we introduce something into an ecosystem. And then change the rules.

One thing you can't help but notice, driving across the state for hours and hours, is the condition of I-70. It's great, smooth, quiet, well maintained. Only a few miles of older pavement remain to be replaced with new concrete east of Salina, and west of there, all the asphalt has been redone.

Kansas is lucky to have good roads today. It wasn't always that way, and it won't last if we don't come up with a new highway program. If you've driven the Interstates in any of our neighboring states, you know what I mean.

So, thanks to the state Department of Transportation. Good job. Everyone is quick to criticize, I know; even us on occasion. But the department overall does a fine job and we should recognize that.

Citizen unhappy with police

To the Editor:

I am writing this letter to the editor as I believe it is important for the people to know what is going on in this small town.

I needed to talk to some police officials, so I stopped by the police station to inquire about getting an appointment. An older man was sitting in the office.

I barely got my foot in the door when I was greeted with this kind of behavior. This is what the chief of police said to me: "You stay away from here. There is nothing I can do for you!"

He let me know he didn't believe anything I told him, and he thought I was making it up! I am not a liar and I do not appreciate being accused.

He said I probably put various items away that are missing from my home. That is not true! The chief

Letter to the Editor

didn't give me a chance to tell him what was happening.

I could hardly believe the chief of police could be so rude, disrespectful and unethical!

It is my understanding the police are part of the law and it is their duty to uphold the law and protect the people in this community. The chief of police advised me to go to a neighboring town and ask their police if they could help.

My taxes help pay the salary to the police force. Why should I continue to have such high taxes?

U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran advised me to send a letter to each member of the city Council. I did. I also sent a copy to the administrator and to the

mayor. It has been over two months and I have heard nothing to date.

I told them someone is coming into my home when I am gone and messing up my important papers to take what they want.

Not too long ago, someone came into my home and opened my kitchen cupboard and smashed my glass skillet lid. It was broken in hundreds of pieces!

The chief of police said, "It probably got too hot on the skillet."

This kind of behavior should not be allowed nor should it ever happen.

How would you feel if you were treated in that manner?
Elsie Wolters, Oberlin

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Cousins have fun catching up

During the past two weeks, I've reconnected with my cousin Barbara. She and her husband Art are about Jim's and my age — early retirement.

Barb and I always got along as kids. She was my sophisticated cousin from Denver.

But I have the pictures to prove that she could "go country" with the best of them.

One of my favorites is of us swimming in the horse tank when we were 9 or 10. We each had on those "dorky" swimming caps girls wore and were clad in our one-piece bathing suits. The crowning touch, though, was that the seat of her suit was hanging in shreds. Not dignified, but we sure did have fun.

Barb and Art are at a point in their lives where they want a simpler life. We're kicking around the idea of them retiring here. There's nothing to hold them in Illinois, where they live now, and it would be so nice to have family a little closer.

As Barb and I have been catching



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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up with each other, we have commented about how time is taking a toll on us. She said she felt like she was aging. I told her a return to youth was just a facial away.

Some people try to turn back their odometers. Not me! I want people to know why I hook this way. I've come a long way — and some of the roads weren't paved.

-ob-

The season of Christmas pageants is here. I hope you'll share your pageant "bloopers" with me.

Like the mother who said her son played the part of a wise man in her church's pageant.

Loudly he announced, "We are the three wise men. We come bearing gifts of gold, common sense and fun."

I'm going to try to take some of my own advice this Christmas: take a deep breath, slow down, don't try to do it all, ask for help — and remember the reason for the season.

From the Bible

And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.

Luke 1:30