

## Should telephone users pay all kinds of charges?

Regulators who are supposed to protect consumers from unfair treatment at the hands of telecommunications companies seem to be not watchdogs, but in fact, running with the wolf pack.

Don't believe it? Take a good look at your next cellular or landline telephone bill.

On a typical landline bill in Kansas, for instance, you'll find that as much as a quarter of the entire bill goes not to pay for your phone service, but to pay taxes and special fees which may or may not benefit the guy who uses the line.

The lion's share of this money, about \$5.30 per line, goes to something called the "Federal Subscriber Line Charge," which is not a tax, but a charge paid directly to the telephone service provider, AT&T in this case. This fee is not regulated by the states, as are basic charges, but the Federal Communications Commission caps it at \$6.50 per line.

While it may look official, it's just a way for the phone company to inflate the bill to pay for "costs." It's a scam, in other words, and some consumer web sites report the companies will sometimes waive the charge when someone complains enough.

Next-biggest fee on the list is the Kansas Universal Service Fee, about \$4 a line, which is supposed to help pay for better service in "rural" areas. A Federal Universal Service Fee is similar, but less than half as much, \$1.75 per line. These are established by state and federal law.

We've never figured out what actual good these fees do those of us out here, who live in rural territory and might be happier with lower phone bills. One multi-million-dollar project which got a federal loan involves a cooperative telephone company building a new phone system in Hays and other area towns, places that already have good phone and Internet service.

Competition is good, yes, but should users of an existing phone service be taxed to pay for it? Couldn't the phone companies just get a bank loan?

We say Congress and the states should eliminate these charges.

Then there is the Special E911 Tax, a state levy which collects money used to "modernize" county and city dispatch operations. While these are vital, we wonder if the tax isn't a little high at 75 cents per line. When legislators questioned this, and tried to reduce

the fee last year during debate on reauthorizing the tax, county commissioners screamed bloody murder.

There was no one there to represent telephone users, however, and guess which side won?

If you live in town, you may pay a "Special Municipal Charge," basically a city tax or franchise fee. This comes to 75 cents a line on our bill, but cities have taxed phone bills for years.

"Ordinary" taxes, state and federal, amount to roughly \$3.60, and the \$10 in "Surcharges and Other Fees" makes that seem cheap.

In some ways, your cellular bill is worse. The surcharges are lower, but cellular companies charge made-up fees that pad their bills beyond the monthly charges they advertise.

Our carrier assesses a "regulatory cost recovery fee" and a "telecom connectivity fees," totaling \$1.15 per line. If you read the fine print, these supposedly represent real costs of doing business, but "(these) are not a government mandated tax or surcharge."

In other words, they're just part of what you pay to use your cell phone each month. They mean a \$10 add-on line really costs \$11.15 plus taxes and required fees. And that amounts to deceptive advertising.

Otherwise, cell users pay lower fees than land lines — the 911 tax is only 50 cents per line though cell phones make most of the 911 calls today, and state and local taxes run about 8 percent. Universal service charges are 4 to 5 percent for the state and the federal funds, again with no perceived real benefit to rural cell phone users.

What to do? Demand that your legislators reduce the 911 tax, for starters. Pressure Congress and the state to eliminate the "rural service" fees or show that they're really doing something for us. Same for the "subscriber line charge."

And write the Federal Communications Commission and the Federal Trade Commission and ask that all phone companies be required to advertise, in big type, the real price, with and without taxes, of their service. And make them add the phony surcharges into the advertised price.

Phone service would be a lot cheaper — at least easier to understand — if, instead of going along, government put a stop to this folderol. Consumers deserve as much.

— Steve Haynes

## Budget cut eliminated vital services

To the Editor:

The state budget year ended on June 30. Organizations such as Developmental Services of Northwest Kansas, which serves some of our most vulnerable citizens, shouldered much of budget cuts that hit our state, totaling more than \$1 billion.

Our organization alone was cut \$1.4 million. In the past three years, we have had to lay off 70 staff and eliminate vital services. Meanwhile, people who still need services languish on long waiting lists totaling more than 4,000 across the state, 147 in northwest Kansas alone.

We worked very hard during that time to inform our neighbors in the region about the damage to services to persons with disabilities, which

### Letter to the Editor

nearly everyone agrees is a necessary and vital service in Kansas.

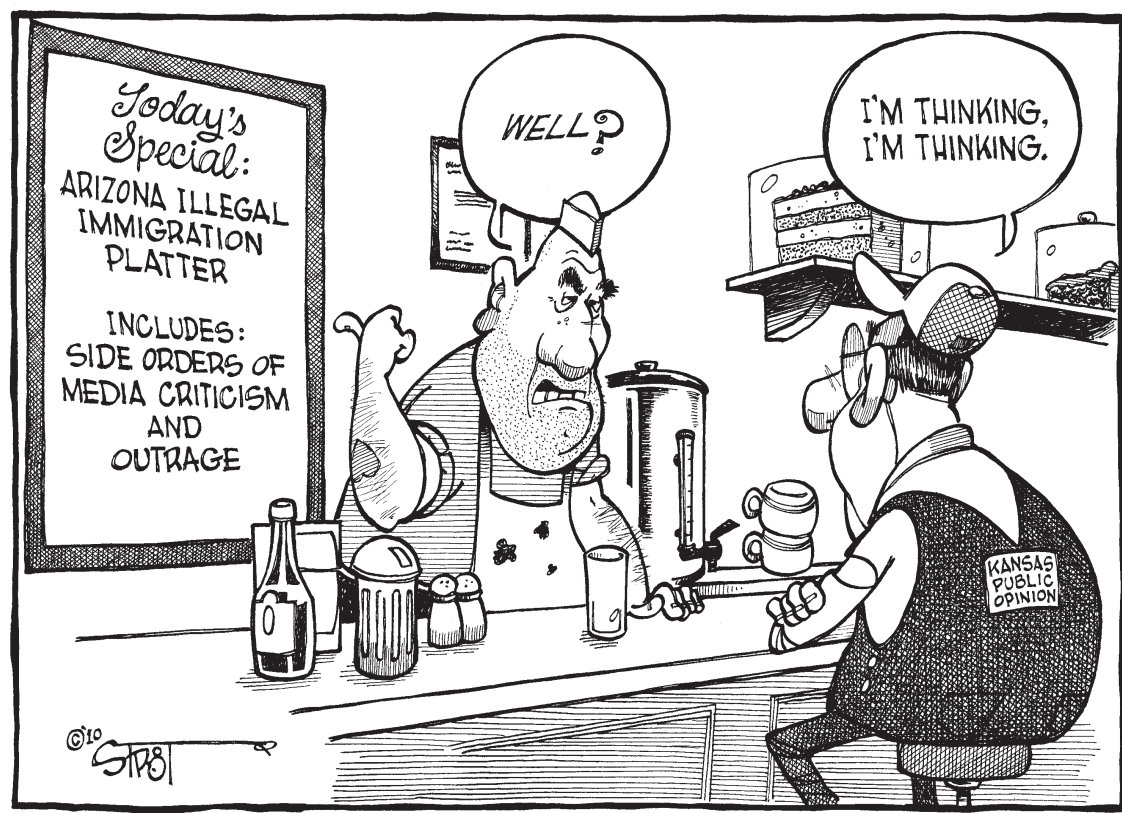
Some legislators worked hard in this past session to propose more cuts to schools, to disability services, to public safety, and other programs which strengthen our communities. Thankfully, most legislators cast their votes to protect persons served by our organization from further harm. These votes took courage and leadership, and were votes to do the right thing.

Thanks are owed to Gov. Mark Parkinson; Sens. Janice Lee and Ralph Ostmeyer and Rep. Dan Johnson, Don Hineman and Eber Phelps. Their efforts helped restore

previously eliminated resources, and will help allow services to continue for our neighbors with disabilities. These efforts this session helped avert disaster for our communities, for which we are grateful.

The future looks full of challenges for our state, and we pray that our public servants in Topeka show this same kind of leadership for our future.

A grateful community partner and advocate,  
Jerry Michaud, president  
Developmental Services of  
Northwest Kansas



## Present was standing on porch

I love surprises.

If it's close to Christmas and I find a bag under the bed or in the closet, you can trust I won't peek. I don't want to ruin the surprise.

That's why, with my birthday fast approaching, I didn't say anything when Jim began taking suspicious phone calls, the kind where he would get up and leave the room. One was from my youngest daughter, Kara.

Jim and I were in the truck when his cell phone rang. He was driving and asked me to answer. It was Kara. She sputtered and claimed she must have dialed Jim by mistake. We talked but, she didn't have much to say.

Later, he got another call. I sensed it was Kara again, and that they were talking about me.

The real kicker came when, four days before my birthday, Jim said, "Hey, let's pretend we're having company and clean the house from top to bottom." Followed by the dead give-away, "And I'll help."

That's when I knew someone was going to be coming for my birthday.

Now, don't get me wrong. Jim is a big help to me around the house. He's not so good at loading the dishwasher, but he doesn't hesitate to throw in a load of laundry, clean the toilet or run the sweeper. But for him to say, "Let's pretend" and "I'll help" in the same sentence was over the top.

Assuming no one would show up until the weekend, I didn't get too excited about things. I'm more of a "putterer" anymore. I work a little



### Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts  
quality-pro@webtv.net

on this, take a break, work a little on that, take another break. I was in the middle of a long break Thursday evening when the phone rang. It was my oldest daughter Halley, asking if my present had been delivered.

"No," I answered. "I didn't even pick up the mail today."

"It didn't come through the mail," she said.

"Well, maybe they just set it inside the house," I said. "Let me check the kitchen door. Nope, not here. Not inside the front door. Not inside the dining room door. (We have lots of doors) Wait. Let me look on the front porch."

When I opened the door, there stood my 11-year old granddaughter, Taylor.

"Hi, Grandma," she said. I started screaming and hugging Taylor all at the same time. Then, I realized I still had Halley on the phone. I started to say, "You're never going to believe this, but Taylor is here, right now."

Then, I looked up, and Halley and Kara both stepped out from behind the bushes.

What a surprise. After that, I didn't even worry about the cobwebs in the corners or the soap scum on the tub. My girls

were here and we had three whole days ahead of us.

"Is there any project we can help with while we're here?" they said.

To which I had an instant reply: "Yes, I want some pictures hung."

They said, "We won't leave until it's done."

They kept their promise. Even if it was the last thing they did Monday morning before getting in their car and heading back to Texas.

We talked, we ate. We talked and ate more. We shopped the antique stores and went to the fair.

So, yes, I love a surprise. And, the surprise of a visit from someone you love is the best surprise of all.

### From the Bible

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.

In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Matthew 5:14, 16 NIV

## Senate race down 'n' dirty

The conversation got pretty crazy in the Republican race for the U.S. Senate, which was decided in the party primary on Tuesday.

Conversation? Some days, it seems more like a shouting match.

The two major candidates, U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran of Hays and Rep. Todd Tiahrt of Goddard, both tried to show that they were the farthest to the right. And that is a hard race to call.

Both are true conservatives, judging by their voting records and their campaign statements, but there are differences.

Mr. Moran is conservative in the old-fashioned sense. He's an independent thinker like Barry Goldwater, perhaps the most revered conservative Republican of the 20th Century.

Mr. Moran has voted against big spending programs for years, both those proposed by the Democrats, such as the Obamacare bill, and those put forward by Republicans, like President Bush's No Child Left Behind law. He says he voted against every bailout bill.

He's always voted against big government and he's been a consistent voice against big spending, regardless of what the Republican leadership told him to do.

Rep. Tiahrt is a different sort of conservative, a religious or social conservative in the mold of Sen. Sam Brownback, who's leaving the Senate seat to be the state's next governor. Like Mr. Brownback, he



### Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes  
s.haynes@nwkansan.com

has become the darling of Kansas for Right to Life and other social-conservative groups.

It's not that Mr. Moran is for abortion, but he apparently has not worshiped at that shrine often enough to win the group's endorsement. While Sen. Brownback has not made an endorsement in the race, he went out of his way early in the campaign to make joint appearances with the Goddard congressman.

In some ways, the contest may have been about "wings" of the party; Sen. Brownback is clearly the leader of the far-right conservative wing. While he's not exactly a moderate, Rep. Moran is too independent to fit nicely in the right wing. He's never held himself out to be a follower of the House leadership, either.

Burdett Loomis, a University of Kansas political science professor who's been following the campaign, pegs Mr. Moran as something of a maverick. He notes that the Hays congressman has been an independent thinker who often as not bucked the leadership.

Mr. Tiahrt has been more ortho-

dox, and that shows in his endorsements from Speaker Dennis Hastert and other party regulars. He has good relationships with the leadership, even the liberal Democrat chair of the House Appropriations Committee.

Mr. Loomis figures Mr. Moran for a more independent senator, Mr. Tiahrt for the organization guy. He points out that Mr. Tiahrt and his family now live in Washington, while Mr. Moran comes home each weekend to Hays. That puts Mr. Tiahrt squarely in the old Washington tradition, he notes.

Oddly enough, the Tiahrt campaign attacked Mr. Moran for leaving his wife Robba "alone" to raise their two daughters. Mr. Moran not only comes home every weekend, he's visited all 69 counties of his huge district every year.

What kind of senator will we get? Conservative, for sure. Independent, in contact with the voters, or distant, living in Washington? The voters got to decide.

What was your choice?

### Photo Policy

The Oberlin Herald wants to emphasize photos of people doing things in the community. If you know of an event or news happening that we should attend, please call 475-2206.

Please be sure to allow a couple of days' notice so we can arrange to be there.

Space in the paper is limited and so is the time of our staff, so we may not be able to get to every event, but

we will try.

Because space is so limited, we cannot run team or group photos, any pictures of people lined up or of people passing checks, certificates and the like. (We will always try to make room for a story about any of these events, however.)

We do run wedding and engagement pictures and "mug" shots with stories and obituaries, when they are provided to us. Please

remember that we need a clear, sharp picture. Dark or fuzzy prints will not work.

We cannot return photos unless you submit a self-addressed, stamped envelope with clear instructions for return. Other photos submitted may be picked up at our office within two weeks. After that, they will be disposed of.

## THE OBERLIN HERALD

Serving Oberlin and Decatur County since 1879

USPS 401-600

170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749-2243

Phone: (785) 475-2206 Fax (785) 475-2800  
E-mail: oberlin.herald@nwkansan.com

### Nor'West Newspapers

STAFF

Steve Haynes ..... editor  
Kimberly Davis ..... managing editor  
Mary Lou Olson ..... society editor  
Leslie Nolette ..... proofreader/copy editor  
Carolyn Kelley-Plotts ..... columnist  
Joan Betts ..... historian  
Cynthia Haynes ..... business manager  
Pat Cozad ..... want ads/circulation  
Tim Davis ..... advertising representative  
Linda Bunney ..... advertising make-up

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

Steve and Cynthia Haynes, publishers  
Official newspaper of Oberlin, Jennings, Decatur, 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, \$38 (tax included) in Decatur, Norton, Rawlins, Sheridan, Thomas and Red Willow counties; \$42 (tax included) elsewhere in Kansas; \$48 elsewhere in the U.S. Foreign subscriptions, \$50-\$250 (in U.S. dollars only) 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.

