

Sleep-deprived workers unsafe on overnight shift

High government officials have ignored both science and common sense in their reaction to reports of air traffic controllers asleep at the radar when working overnight shifts alone at airports big and small.

Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood, who forced out the head of the Federal Aviation Administration's air traffic control section, says workers won't be allowed to sleep on his watch.

Controllers suspected of sleeping are being suspended left and right. But that won't solve the problem, rooted in the rotating shifts that controllers work.

And though he's a sorry excuse for a cabinet official, the former Illinois congressman is not alone. Many government agencies and private firms force workers through regular rotating shifts — days, nights and overnight — without a thought of what that does to their sleep cycle or their alertness.

Police officers, airline pilots, truck drivers, railroad operating crews, all work rotating or irregular shifts that destroy sleep cycles. It's not necessary, and as the air traffic controllers have shown us, it could be dangerous. But no one seems to understand.

Sleep scientists long have known that rotating shifts, in particular, give workers fits. Yet, because they otherwise have trouble filling night shifts, and to "be fair," they force all employees to share in the misery. That's barbaric, at best.

"Government officials haven't recognized that people routinely fall asleep at night when their doing shift work," Dr. Charles Czeisler, chief of sleep medicine at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, told the Associated Press. He called claims that air controllers falling asleep were isolated incidents "preposterous."

Rotating shifts ignore two facts: Some

people like night work and would volunteer for it. And workers do better on a stable schedule, day or night. Employers could ask for volunteers, then assign junior workers to fill out each shift.

Railroads and some other union operations have done this for years, at least for jobs with a regular start time. While not everyone appreciates night shifts, some would rather have them than days. Forcing everyone to sleep poorly to be "fair" hardly seems right.

Workers with no regular schedule, such as airline pilots, line-haul train crews and over-the-road truckers have a different problem. While government rules have been tightened, they still are subject to call day and night, often with only eight to 10 hours "rest" between trips. Since that includes time to eat, see the family, do business and relax, as well as sleep, it's hardly restful.

One solution for either situation is, yes, allowing workers to nap. Ray LaHood says no, but railroads now allow it. And the secretary is ignoring the best scientific and medical advice and thereby endangering the traveling public.

"There should be sanctioned on-shift napping," says Gregory Belenky, a sleep expert at Washington State University. "That's the way to handle night-shift work."

Since the Department of Transportation regulates so many sleep-deprived occupations, we should expect a more enlightened viewpoint, but apparently, sounding tough is more important to officials than solving the problem.

And this problem should be solved, for the good of us all. Just the thought of being "served" by sleep deprived cops, trainmen, pilots and industrial workers is frightening.

Wake up, Ray, and get with the program. — Steve Haynes

She can tip her hat, hat, hat

What do you say to a woman wearing three hats?

Mostly, you just smile and try to act like it's normal.

Of course, some people just have to ask.

I had several ready answers: "I'm starting a new style." "They don't fit in my carry-on." "What hats?" "Oh, everyone tells me I wear lots of hats, so I do."

We were headed for vacation in Mexico, and I had not one but three large sun hats on my head.

The top one was a nice face-shading sun hat with a cute little purple stuffed gecko stuffed into the band. The next one was Steve's fishing hat. The last was an older, not-so-nice looking sun hat that I could use if I got out on the water and didn't want to lose my good hat in the wind.

None of them packed well, and Steve refuses to wear his hat unless he gets to go fishing.

He never did get to wear his hat, and my old hat didn't get much use either. Fishing was just too expensive, and we aren't much into the other water sports.

My other sun hat got a good workout, however. I wore it all over



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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the place to the beach, to town, on walks and around the resort.

However, it got its lizard detached on the first trip to town.

Two children came down the street and the little girl looked up and said:

"Ohhh, Ahhhh!"

Then she grinned and made can-I-have-it motions at my lizard.

Sure, why not. I don't need a purple stuffed toy stuck in my hat that badly.

So the girl and the gecko headed off down the street and I continued in the other direction with my lizard-less hat and smiling husband.

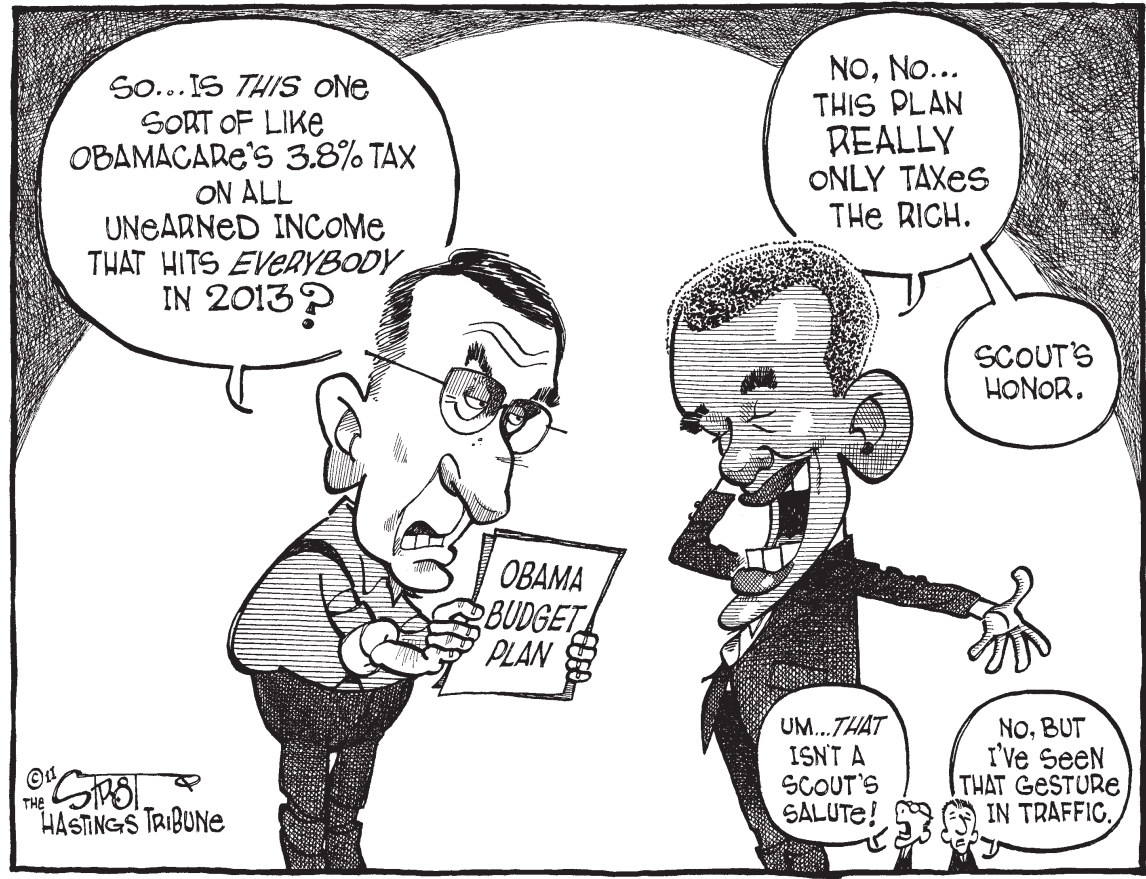
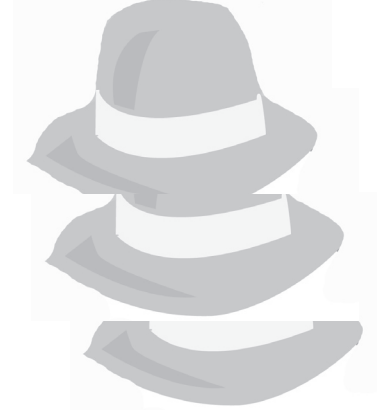
I looked around for another gecko to decorate my sombrero, but couldn't come up with anything.

So, when we returned to the U.S., I went through customs and immi-

gration on the way home wearing the three hats sans purple lizard.

The officials took one look and stamped my passport and waved us through.

Who in their right mind would smuggle anything while wearing three hats?



She wears pearls with nighty

My mama always said, "You can wear pearls with anything." She probably didn't mean my nightgown.

A few nights ago, I was seated on the edge of the bed, about ready to swing my feet under the covers. I was going through my nightly ritual of checking the clock and putting my glasses on the night stand when I discovered I hadn't removed my pearl earrings. After removing them, I placed them on the night stand, too. They aren't real pearls, just a good facsimile.

Fast forward to Monday morning and time to roll out of bed. After putting on my glasses, I spotted the forgotten ear bobs, as my former mother-in-law used to call them. Knowing my hands would be full of some papers and books I wanted to carry downstairs, I just put the earrings on.

So, pearls with a nightgown might be a bit much, but another saying my mother had was, "Better to be overdressed for the occasion than not dressed up enough."

Jim has been working on my sister-in-law Donna's kitchen and I have gone along for the ride several times. I'm not much help except to do "gopher" jobs. You know, go fer this and go fer that.

The other thing I'm good at is to make "helpful" suggestions. Finally, Jim took me aside and said, "Carolyn, you don't need to point out every little gap. I know it's there, and I haven't adjusted the hinges yet. When you say 'uh-oh,'



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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it worries Donna."

I wasn't being critical. Really, I wasn't. I think the cabinets he's built are beautiful. But, more importantly, Donna does, too. I'm almost as excited about her new kitchen as she is. Almost.

I knew I could count on my reader(s) to come through for me. A few columns ago, I mentioned the early sprouting plants like my naked ladies. That's the only name I knew them by. My friend and fan Ila called to tell me the more proper name: "Resurrection Lily." I will try to remember that.

Speaking of resurrection, Sunday is Easter. Jim is one of the preachers who serves a little congregation a few miles out in the country. It's his Sunday to preach, so we are helping plan the sunrise service.

Ordinarily, the service is set for 7 a.m., but I was reminded that Easter is quite a bit later this year, and with Daylight Saving Time, we should bump the time up half an hour.

When I told Jim we had changed the time to 6:30 a.m., he said, "Do you realize how cold it's going to be then? You better find out when

sunrise really is." A call to the National Weather Service revealed the official time of sunrise for April 24 is 6:51 a.m. So, we split the difference and set the service time for 6:45.

I hope your church has sunrise services. And, if it does, I hope you go. Not that one day is more holy than another, but, Easter is the day we all remember why we are Christians. Our God overcame the grave. Amen.

From the Bible

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.

In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you, I go to prepare a place for you.

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.
St. John: 14:1-4

That robin is one smart bird

The robin is back.

We're pretty sure it's the same one. He looks like the one who was harvesting all our meal worms, at least. He shows the same kinds of intelligence.

But how do we know? Well, you can't know. Robins don't wear name tags, and they all pretty much look alike, you know: orange breast, grey wings and head, skinny legs.

They do come in different sizes and shapes, and on that basis, this looks like the same robin to me.

The meal worms are gone, of course. Cynthia finally washed the ones the robin left into the grass where,

I suppose, they either died, pupated or were eaten. That's nature's way.

This time he was following the rototiller as we turned over the garden, picking out the worms we exposed.

Since he seems to be able to adapt to whatever food circumstances confront him, we started calling him "Darwin" after the noted and sometimes controversial English biologist.

Picking worms off of deck chairs or out of the freshly tilled garden are not normal robin dining behavior, after all. Food usually is a lot harder to find.

But this guy seems to have figured out that, when presented with a target of opportunity, you need to respond. Maybe he carries a picnic kit around with him, complete with



Along the Sappa

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napkin and fork.

Anyway, I was plowing the south forty, muscling around a big rototiller rented from (free plug) Stanley Hardware when I first noticed the bird behind me, pulling on a worm. He kept the garden in sight the rest of the afternoon.

I've seen hawks doing this, watching a field as a farmer moved through it with a mower, a disk, a plow or a combine, then jumping on the mice, rabbits or snakes driven out by the equipment.

Hawks are pretty attuned to that kind of opportunity.

But I've never heard of a robin staking claim to a garden plot as it was tilled.

That's a pretty smart robin, I'd say. Not your average bird brain.

Last seen, Darwin was on the fence, keeping an eye out for one more worm.

And for the cats, who spend a lot of the time Sunday — when not sleeping, lounging in the sun, or catnapping — out in the yard.

I could imagine the cats watching the bird watching for worms, sort of like those cartoons of a little fish be-

ing followed by a big fish, followed by an even bigger fish, and so on.

But as far as I know, Darwin made it through the afternoon. He's a pretty smart robin, after all.

Just as the swallows return to Capistrano each spring, the vultures return to Oberlin early each April. This year, the flock seems to have doubled.

There's hardly space for all of them on the railing around the water tower. Especially when the wind blows them off one side or the other.

Still, they big birds seem to like it up there, even if some of them have to roost in the trees. Their arrival is punctual each spring.

Now, what I'd like to know is, when do the swallows come back to Oberlin? Anybody venture a guess?

(It's said they return to the mission of San Juan Capistrano on St. Joseph's Day, March 19, each year, but California is warmer. A lot warmer.)

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