

Maybe they ought to just start over

First District Congressman Jerry Moran has sponsored legislation to extend the enrollment deadline for Medicare Part D, the prescription drug benefit, to Dec. 31.

He discussed problems with the Part D benefit in a conference call with Secretary Michael Leavitt of the Department of Health and Human Services, and Mark McClellan, Administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

You may recall that Rep. Moran voted against the Medicare Prescription Drug Plan in November 2003 because he was concerned the plan would fail to meet the needs of rural seniors.

The needs aren't the only problem. Understanding the prescription drug plan itself ranks right up there at the top. The problem with Plan D is there are just too many Plan D's out there. There are enough of them to suffocate those it is intended to help most.

Why in the world was it necessary to confuse the masses with a multitude of choices when understanding those choices was the main problem? Why couldn't Medicare have been given the green light to negotiate drug prices with the manufacturers of drugs, much as is done by the Veterans Administration where drug costs are low — as we understand the word *low*?

And just this weekend it was noted that President Bush's 2007 budget is trimming \$36 billion from Medicare and Medicaid. That sounds like a bummer.

Congressman Moran emphasized the need for more attention to rural areas as Secretary Leavitt and Administrator McClellan talked about continuing outreach and education efforts being conducted by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. Sounds to us like nothing more than a continuing avenue of confusion.

"I continue to hear from Kansans about how complex this benefit is. There are many plan choices and many things to consider, like drug costs and whether or not your local pharmacy is accepting the plan you want," Mr. Moran said. "Kansans, and seniors across the country, need more time to sort through their options and choose a plan that best fits their health care needs."

Maybe another suggestion is needed: scrub Plan D and begin a new effort aimed at simplifying the basic need to understand. If not, let's try the V.A. thing. — *Tom Dreiling, publisher*

Thumbs Up to...

- ✓ **Edna Paden** — on your 90th birthday!
- ✓ **Northern Valley Youngsters** — for remembering God's Pantry.
- ✓ **Norcatour Volunteer Firemen** — on your highly successful pizza fund raiser.
- ✓ **The Rock Christian Youth Center** — good luck with this worthwhile project.
- ✓ **Family Career and Community Leaders of America** — for your interest in and attention to the needs of The Haven.
- ✓ **School Crossing Guards** — for being there for the welfare of our children.
- ✓ **Coaches Doug Reusink and Kevin Jilka** — on achieving your 400th victories.

(To submit a name, names or group for consideration in this column, simply e-mail tomd@nwkansas.com, call him at 877-6908, drop by the office or slip it in the mail to 215 S. Kansas, Ave., Norton 67654. Birthdays 70 years and over, anniversaries, 50 years and over).

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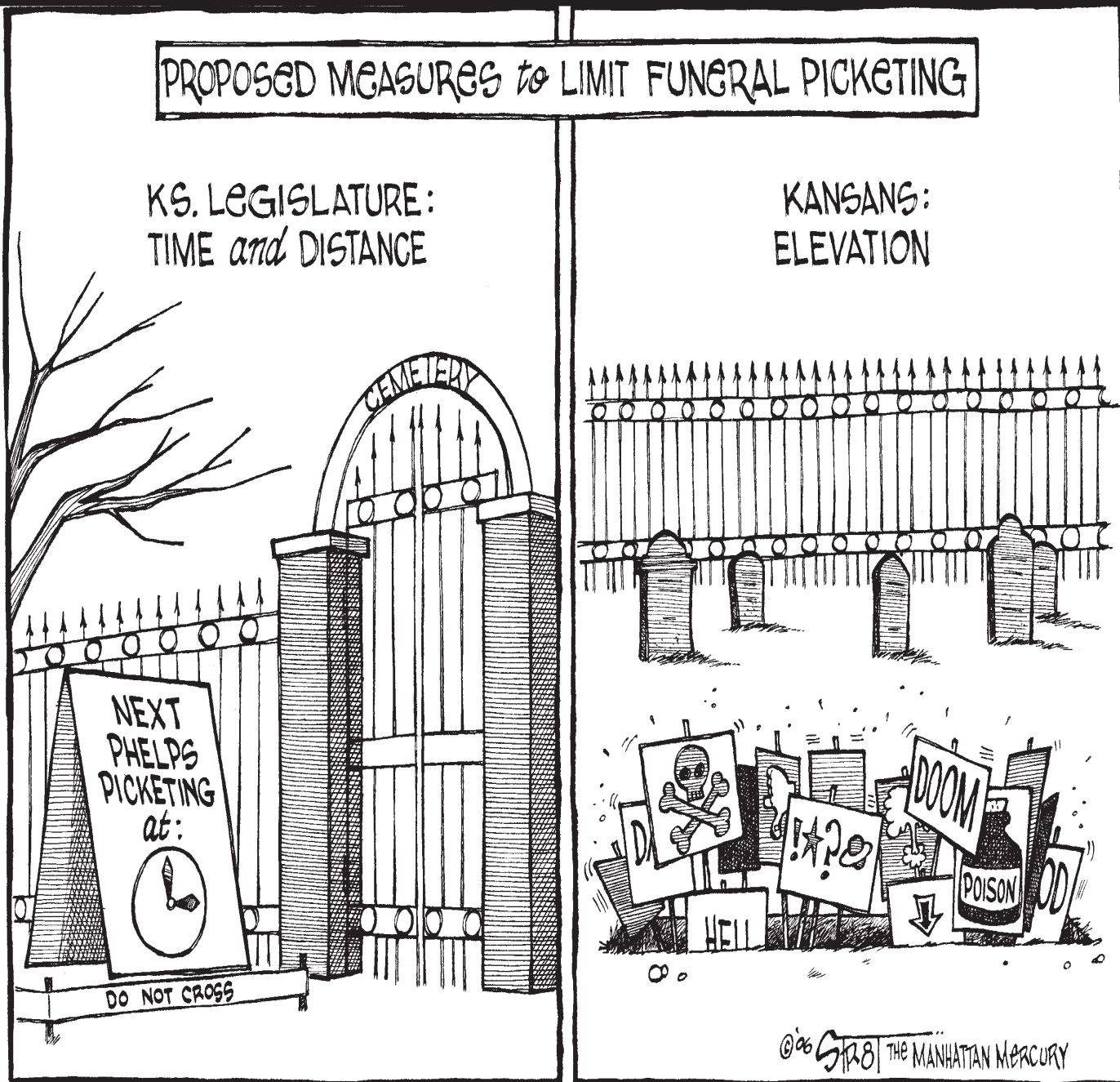
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It's always difficult to say good-bye

I lost two friends this week. Jack died last Monday and Max died this morning. Jack was from the old Liberty-Star neighborhood and his mother and mine had been good friends. Both Dorothys.

Jack was my brother Dick's age, so I never went to school with him. But he was someone I had known forever. That was the thing about Jack. You felt like you had always known him. And, he for sure, knew you. Jack knew everybody. He never met a stranger.

He had a habit of nick-naming people. I told his wife I would miss hearing him say, "Hey, Carolina, Marilina, Hoopensteina, Whoopenstiena." Where that came from, I don't know.

As I drove by the cemetery on my way home after the funeral, I said, "So long, Jack."

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My other friend, was Jim's cat, Max. Now, I mean no disrespect to Jack by including him in a column about our cat. In fact, Jack would probably get a charge

Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



out of it. I don't know if he was a cat lover or not.

The similarity is, they were both good friends.

When I married Jim, I inherited Max. When we merged our households, my cat, Snuggles, and Max became instant "step-brothers". Max wanted to be everyone's friend while Snuggles was indignant about having to share his home with this interloper.

Snuggles died a couple of years ago and that left Max as the sole beneficiary of our laps and affections.

I have to admit that Jim always held the top spot in Max's heart. He liked me well enough, but he loved Jim. He would be on

my lap, but when Jim came into the room, Max would abandon me and plop himself on Jim's lap. Wherever Jim was, you could be sure Max was nearby. If Jim was welding, Max would be laying under the lilac bush, watching. If Jim was building a pole barn for the calves, Max would be laying in the shade of the truck, waiting to see where he might be heading next.

I used to worry that he would get run over, because he would follow if Jim walked up town to get the mail. He always watched for traffic and never got hit.

We knew Max was on borrowed time after his diagnosis of diabetes. Twice daily injections of insulin kept him healthy and active until the very end. Jim estimated his age at 15-17. That's about 95 in people years.

We don't get to choose the way our lives end. Most of us would like to just go to sleep. But, I think my two friends came as close to having it their way as could be.

Jack had always said he didn't want to linger. And Max died in Jim's arms. Both, surrounded by someone who loved them.

The machine is up and running

Starting to hear a lot of talk different school funding plans. Senator Jim Barnett, R-Emporia, has proposed \$400 million school funding plan over four years. He believes this can be done with out tax increase. I'm sure there are more to come.

Apology

Was interesting to see Senator Journey's apology in the paper over remarks about sex offenders being placed in Atwood. I reminded him of my total respect for the 40th District. I'm sure he wishes he could retract his remarks and solidified the fact that we as political leaders must be careful of what we say and do.

Consolidation

Another point of interest is SB-379 which involves city and county consolidation. I need feedback on this. Representative Hayzlett and I have proposed a bill for Greeley County which still honors elected official statues and Dual-Majority vote of city and county. There is a lot of support overall for some kind of consolidation bill. As population declines, we must be willing to cut cost of services, and consolidation of services may be one of many ways.

Animal Cruelty

This morning (Feb. 3), the Judiciary committee began dealing with two bills regarding animal cruelty. For both SB-402 and SB-408, the maximum first-offense penalties for animal cruelty are the same — one year in county jail, though the crime is a misdemeanor under SB-402 and a felony under SB-408. Animal cruelty would be classified as a felony on the second offense under SB-402. SB-402 would also require first time offenders to register as required by the Kansas Of-

Senate Doings

Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer



fender Registration Act. The bills will likely be acted on by the committee early next week.

Biofuels

Several bills dealing with biofuels are still being considered in the Agriculture Committee, and are expected to reach the Senate floor in the next two weeks.

Concealed Carry

In the Federal and State Affairs Committee, a bill to allow some people to carry concealed weapons was heard on Wednesday. With the passage of SB-418, citizens would be required to complete an eight-hour training course in weapons safety before receiving a concealed carry license.

Such licensure would also be noted on the individual's driver's license or non-driver identification card. The committee will continue considering the bill Feb. 7, and it will likely reach the Senate floor later in the week.

Eminent Domain

Senate committees began looking at a variety of eminent domain bills and resolutions this past week. In the Judiciary Committee, bills dealing with several aspects of eminent domain were considered — one adding more due process, one dealing with appeals, and one prohibiting land

being taken from one private individual through eminent domain and then given to another private individual. That bill would restrict eminent domain to more traditional public uses, such as roads. The Commerce Committee considered SB-360, which would allow developers to either acquire land through eminent domain or receive tax credits for redevelopment, not both. A pair of constitutional amendments protecting property rights are also under consideration in the Judiciary Committee.

Funeral Picketing

Last Wednesday was a busy day for the Federal and State Affairs Committee, as they heard SB-421. The bill, aimed at moving protesters at least 300 feet away from funerals, drew criticism from Topeka Pastor Fred Phelps, but was supported by many other groups, and is expected to reach the Senate floor this week.

Tax Proposals

The Assessment and Taxation committee will start looking at several income tax checkoffs next week, including one for Kansas military relief and another for breast cancer research.

Those bills are slated for hearings next Tuesday. A pair of sales tax exemptions — one for food warehouses and another for the Special Olympics — will be considered Feb. 8.

You can reach Sen. Ostmeyer by writing to him at State Capitol, 300 SW 10th Street, Room 262-E, Topeka, Kan. 66612 or call (785-296-7399.) His e-mail address is ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us. Sen.

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