

Bureaucracy before bravery

By: Congressman Tim Huelskamp

While we continue to see and hear stories about America's veterans receiving subpar medical care, the bureaucrats charged with overseeing the health needs of our brave men and women in uniform are apparently sparing no expense in taking care of themselves instead.

As a member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, I take very seriously our responsibility to provide oversight of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). So this summer when it came to light that the VA spent more than \$50,000 on a video featuring a General Patton impersonator, we demanded to know more. We feared it was just the tip of the iceberg.

And the tip of the iceberg it was.

Our own internal digging uncovered the first shock: at least \$2.5 million spent last year on the "National Veterans Golden Age Games" hosted at the luxurious Hilton Hawaiian Village in Honolulu.

While on paper the Golden Age Games seem like a noble cause to provide senior veterans with an Olympic-style sports competition, is it really a prudent use of our taxpayer resources and theirs to have held this event at one of the top - and most expensive - vacation destinations in 2011? Nope. With so many wounded warriors and homeless veterans, was it right for the VA to spend more than \$1 million on an event planner who works in Alaska? Of course not. Was it right to spend thousands of dollars on floral arrangements, polo shirts, and a Polynesian outrigger canoe exhibition? Doubt it.

How can these bureaucrats look our veterans in eye and with straight faces when they are swiping the taxpayers' credit card like there is no tomorrow?

No doubt the cost of airfare and lodging was cost-prohibitive for many veterans who in the past traveled to centrally-located places like Leavenworth in 1997, Topeka in 2000, Des Moines in 2010, or St. Louis this summer. But, of course it was not cost-prohibitive for VA to send 178 employees. The taxpayers picked up the tab for them. Sounds like a nice work trip, right?

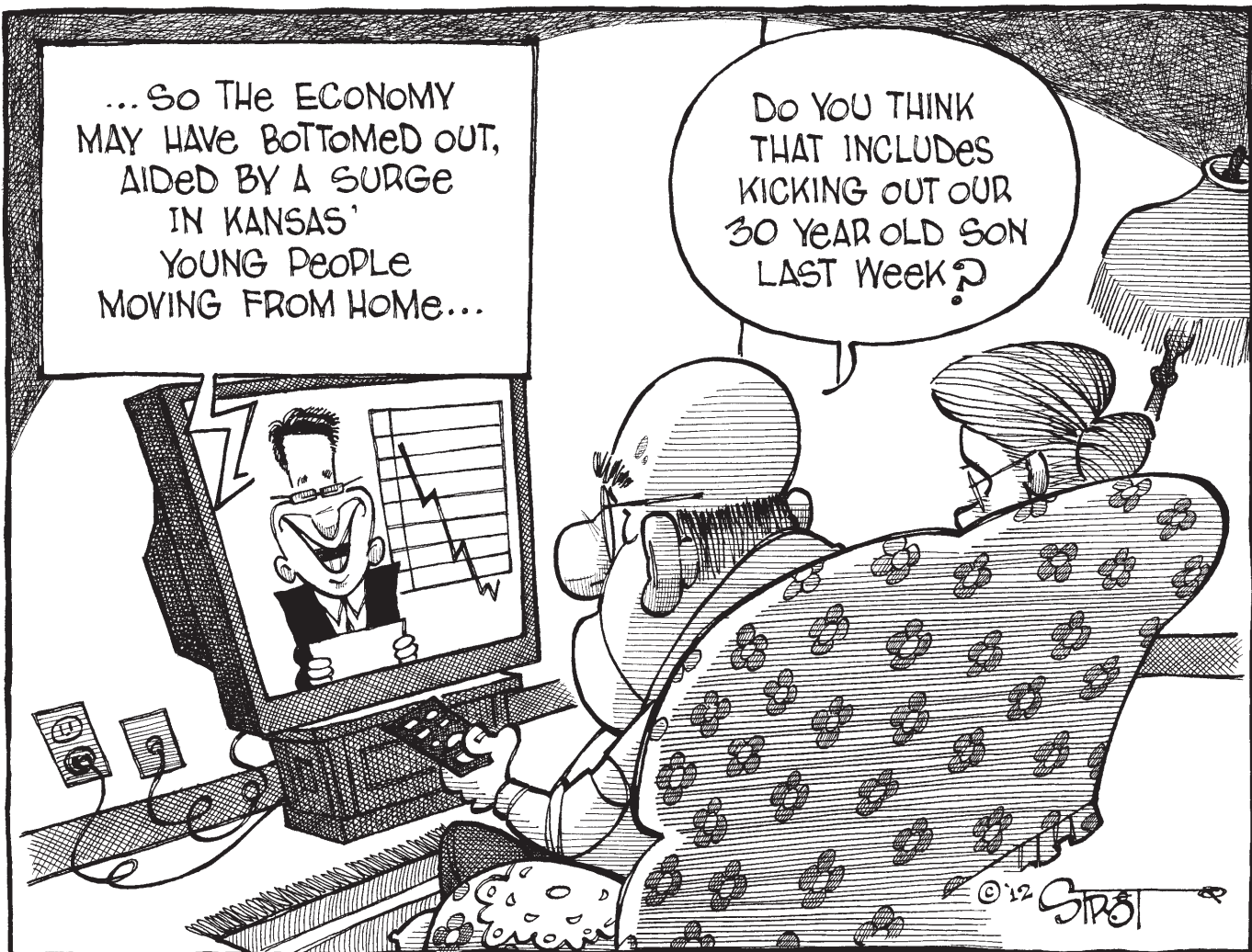
In the meantime, we filed a congressional inquiry with the VA to get more information about the conferences. And then we waited. And waited. A few weeks later, the VA's Chief Financial Officer testified before our Committee and ultimately admitted that in 2011 VA spent \$100 million hard-earned taxpayer dollars on conferences - including \$80 million just for bureaucrat travel alone.

Finally, nearly a month after our initial request, the VA delivered a list of its 2011 conferences including details about the numbers of participants, the purported reasons for the conferences, and the admitted costs.

According to these data, the VA hosted 373 conferences in 2011 with a total cost of \$67 million. Top destinations included Texas, Nevada (Las Vegas), and Florida. About one-third of the total amount spent on conferences was spent in one of these states.

But also, perhaps even more shocking (but not surprising with this Administration) was that about \$5 million was spent on training unions on how to comply with the labor agreement they reached with the VA. As part of the labor contract, the taxpayer-funded VA is required to pay for workers to learn more about the labor agreement. Who would have thought that these twenty-five five-day conferences would be held in such fun destinations as Atlantic City, Las Vegas, Nashville, and San Juan (Puerto Rico)?

As if it were not enough that the VA continues operations like this when our veterans are suffering, they are doing so amid Obama's trillion-dollar plus annual deficits and a massive \$16 trillion in debt. When American businesses were forced to tighten their belts, many did away with conferences and expensive travel for their employees. Washington, on the other hand, just kept spending - even when America's brave veterans should have been the higher, and certainly nobler, priority.



Election: Obama, Romney or Dr. Seuss?

One of my mother's favorite "momisms" was, "It is not so much what you say, as how you say it." In other words, body language (and your tone) speaks volumes. Wednesday night we were returning from Lincoln (Jack had a heart monitor implanted) and turned to PBS to listen to the debate. We arrived home in time for the last half and watched the remainder on TV. It brought me back to the first days of televised debates. The debate between Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy, many believe, was determined by the appearance and, if you will, the performance of the two men. It has often been contemplated that Nixon's refusal to use makeup contributed to how he was perceived and ultimately caused him to lose the election.

One news commentator Wednesday night said he felt former Governor Romney's "performance" was his best ever. Another, a republican strategist, described the debate this way, "It was as if Romney wanted to be there, in

Phase II

Mary Kay Woodyard



Denver, at the debate; and Obama, well, not so much." On the radio, this was not so evident, but watching the debates live it was much more noticeable.

During the previous presidential campaign, Obama was, as one reporter said, "engaging". This was what endeared him to so many. He shared his beliefs, his hopes and his ideals, not only eloquently, but sincerely. A second term president however must answer to the outcome of the previous four years and this is what the President must do if he is going to win re-election.

Romney spouted statistics about job losses under the Obama administration; the President spoke of job creation.

Being triumphant over bullying at any level

A friend referred to the Republican Presidential Candidate as "Mitt the Twit!" I'm not proud of it, I laughed. Not only that, it's stuck in my mind. I find myself wanting to repeat it.

At the same time it troubles me, first and foremost because internationally and economically I believe we need a change in the White House. Thus Mitt is my guy! So why I am laughing at him? Perhaps, because it seems true.

My dictionary defines a twit as "A very stupid person, a nitwit." This country seems in such a mess there is no way a person with half a brain could lose to Obama, right? Yet Mitt just keeps hitting the wrong note. (The first debate is tonight, I hold out faint hope!)

What bothers me most is the double standard to which Liberals hold Conservatives. Conservatives are supposedly insensitive and intolerant to all manner of groups: women, gays, the poor, Latinos, Afro-Americans, those of different religions, etc. But when the enlightened Left calls Mitt a Twit, that's fine!

Lately I've seen several things on-line about bullying. One family I know posts this sort of thing because a teenage family member deals with multiple handicaps. The postings may be their way of playing offense; telling the readers to think before they speak. Or it may be defensive; because the child has been mistreated.

Another on-line snippet shows a news personality defending herself against

This Too Shall Pass

Nancy Hagman



a cyber-bully's suggestion she is not a good on-air example for children as she is over-weight.

A bully is defined as "a person who teases, frightens, threatens or hurts others who are not as strong as he is."

Was she really being bullied? Of course the guy was hurtful, but she is not weak.

The headline to the story read: "Bully Calls News Anchor Fat, News Anchor Destroys Him On Live TV."

I realize she did not write the headline. I know from journalism classes, headline writing is hard. Sometimes the headline makes a serious difference in how a thing is perceived. I was once taken to task because of the headline on something I wrote. I took the criticism but to this day I'd like the person to realize, I don't write the headlines!

When trying to make a case against bullying "destroy" seems like a bad word choice. Hurt my feelings, I'll destroy you!!!!

The Old Testament says, "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth."

People often interpret this as God giving us permission to retaliate. However what He was saying was retaliate on the same level. Blind the

Obama proclaimed the responsibility of those who have achieved wealth to find ways to share it; Romney, on the other hand, wants to limit taxing the wealthy. Both cited authorities to back up their claims. According to FactCheck both gentlemen's claims held a little truth and some falsehoods. You can find almost any statistic to match your point of view and from fairly reputable sources, if you just keep looking.

The debates give voters an opportunity to truly see how their candidate responds to questions, is able to think quickly and voice their ideas clearly and concisely. But the debate is just the beginning, it is our responsibility afterward to find out if the claims made are true or simply campaign jargon or a strong performance.

I believe in relying on experts in this situation and so I turn to Dr. Seuss who said, "Sometimes the questions are complicated and the answers are simple." Mail to: mkwoodyard@ruraltel.net

Letter to the Editor

Every year, Knights of Columbus organizations from across the state conduct their annual Tootsie Roll Drives for the benefit of people with disabilities. The people served by Developmental Services of Northwest Kansas have been many of the fortunate recipients from this fundraiser. For many years, the generosity of the Knights have allowed us to offer additional support to those we serve through a variety of ways.

One of those ways is DSNWK's Consumer Medical Fund. This fund was established due to the contributions made through the K of C Tootsie Roll Drive. Thanks to the Knights, DSNWK has been able to assist individuals with disabilities with the cost of medical items and care that are not covered by Medicaid such as dental expenses and adaptive equipment.

So as the area K of C's gear up for this annual fundraiser, we would like to take the time and wish all of them the best of luck and encourage everyone to stop and support their efforts. We truly appreciate their kindness and support.

Steve Keil, Director of Development
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