

Opinion



A Kansas Viewpoint

They are listening

From The Hutchinson News
Kansans frustrated with making the transition to Medicare's new prescription drug plan have gained three key advocates in the Sunflower State.
Gov. Kathleen Sebelius, Rep. Jerry Moran and Insurance Commissioner Sandy Praeger all see weaknesses in the plan. They have offered a variety of ideas to fix the problems and ease the transition.
All three have called on the federal government to postpone a May 15 enrollment deadline.
Sebelius, a Democrat, last month announced that the state could cover the cost of prescription drugs for Kansans shifted from Medicaid to Medicare or those who encountered problems receiving medicine. The governor also committed \$500,000 to provide more counselors and phone lines to help citizens sort through more than 40 plan options and enroll in one that fits their situation.
Moran, a Republican who voted against the measure in 2003, has introduced a bill to permit the federal government to negotiate with manufacturers over drug prices and allow states to require registration by insurance companies providing Medicare drug coverage.
Praeger, a Republican who supports the program and still thinks it holds much promise for the future, nevertheless noted that Kansans have encountered problems with it since its inception last month. She cited six serious problems as justification for delaying the 1 percentage-per-month penalty on those missing the signup deadline.
Although the three public officials hold differing views on effectiveness of the new Medicare plan, they've moved along parallel paths to address its weaknesses.
It shows they're listening to senior citizens who invested hours researching a prescription plan, signed up as instructed and then had that plan of choice let them down.

About those letters . . .
The *Free Press* encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, if at all possible, and should include a telephone number and an address. Most importantly, all letters must include a signature. Unsigned letters cannot be published. We reserve the right to edit for clarity and length, and, likewise, reserve the right to reject letters deemed to be of no public interest or considered offensive or libelous.

Comments to any opinions expressed on this page are encouraged. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. 5th St., Colby, Kan., 67701. Or e-mail jvannostrand@nwkansan.com or pdecker@nwkansan.com.

Where to write, call

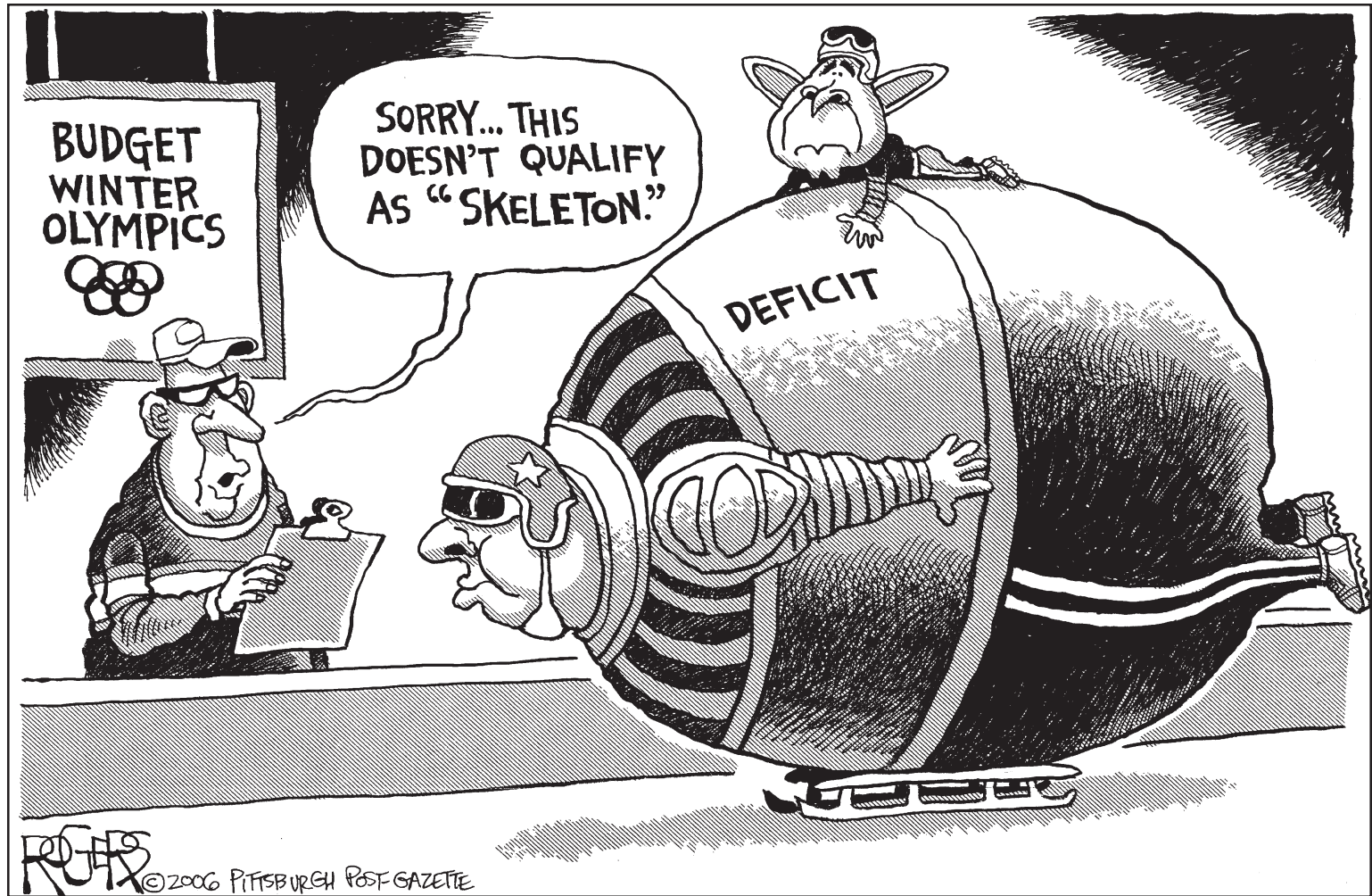
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COLBY FREE PRESS
155 W. Fifth (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963
Colby, Kan. 67701

State award-winning newspaper, General Excellence, Design & Layout Excellence, Column Writing, Editorial Writing, Sports Columns, News, Photography.
Official newspaper of Thomas County, Colby, Brewster and Rexford.
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THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the day observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Haynes Publishing Co., 155 W. Fifth, Colby, Kan., 67701.
PERIODICALS POSTAGE is paid at Colby, Kan. 67701, and at additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to The Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth, Colby, Kan., 67701. THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday to Friday, closed Saturday and Sunday. MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, which is exclusively entitled to the use for publication of all news credited to it or not otherwise herein. Member Kansas Press Association, Inland Press Association and National Newspaper Association. **SUBSCRIPTION RATES:** In Colby by carrier: 4 months \$38, 8 months \$53, 12 months \$70. By mail with in Colby and the nine-county region of Thomas, Sheridan, Decatur, Rawlins, Cheyenne, Sherman, Wallace, Logan and Gove counties: 4 months \$50, 8 months \$62, 12 months \$78. Other Kansas counties: 4 months \$57, 8 months \$67, 12 months \$81. All other states, \$81, 12 months.

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A job well done

A long time ago a friend of mine forwarded me a clever e-mail story about how some things you don't expect can be a treasure.
It's one of the few of the bajillion e-mail forwards in circulation I've enjoyed.
Since the first of the year, that story has rang true for the *Colby Free Press*.
What seemed like hours after I started the job, I had several people politely ask if I could improve our high school sports coverage. I agreed with them, but didn't promise them anything at first. Like with many other business, we are a limited business with limited resources. I needed some time to figure out what we were capable of doing.
Starting this job at the end of the fall sports season and a few weeks before winter sports started, we had some time to test some options.
Colby High School teacher Donna Henry offered to use some of her students to help with sports, but it turned into a struggle with scheduling problems, some kids not liking sports and a lack of consistency using multiple students. After a few weeks, Donna and I mutually agreed to try something else.
During the Christmas break, I again talked with Editor Patty Decker about what to do and she said she had a few people in mind who may be able to help. In a gutsy, but intriguing move, Patty called Tracy Rogers. It's gutsy because Rogers had documented his disappointment with local sports coverage in the *Free Press*.
When Patty asked him he welcomed the opportunity. I've been in this business long enough to know your biggest critics are your best readers. In this case, one of our biggest critics turned



John Van Nostrand
• Line in the Dust

into an excellent solution.
Tracy stopped by the office and we worked out the details. He has been covering Colby Eagle basketball and wrestling since January.
As you may know, Tracy is president of the Colby School Board. In no way do I want to secretly use Tracy as a source for what else is going on in the schools. We agreed with Tracy he would come up with sports coverage and if anything else popped up, we are to ask him. That has already happened, too.
Nearly two months later, this setup is working and Tracy and us are hearing compliments about the coverage. (Although it was a Colby loss, his story last week about the girl's loss to Goodland was some of his best work.)
Tracy has gone above and beyond the call of duty as a school board member. Knowing athletics is only one part of a school district's operation, he is making sure that information is publicly known.
But what Tracy has done also shows how good of a person he is. Rather than just complain about something, he did something about it when the opportunity arose. What a lesson for all of us.
We also have connections with Brewster and

Golden Plains schools. Like I stated earlier, we can't afford to be everywhere at the same time so we are grateful for those who provide us what happened at those schools' games as well.
We also appreciate Matt Dickson, sports information director at Colby Community College. Although Dickson has more on his plate than just sports information director, he provides us what he can about Trojan sports.
Good luck to both Colby High and Colby Community College wrestlers this weekend. The state high school wrestling tournament is in Salina and the junior college national wrestling tournament is in Rochester, Minn.

Oh, the importance of a spouse.
Colby Community College interim President Skip Sharp updated Colby Rotary group Tuesday of the search for a new college president.
Sharp said the 39 initial applicants have been narrowed down to 11. Interviews are scheduled to begin this week. In addition to the person actually applying for the job, Sharp said the applicant's spouse will also be talked to.
The 11 finalists have some kind of relation to rural environments, like Colby. Even though the person may like and want the job, Sharp said the spouse's reaction to Colby will probably also be considered.
"If the spouse doesn't fit, the spouse isn't going to be happy and won't last," Sharp said.
Sharp didn't specify if he meant the president won't last at the job or the marriage won't last.
Van Nostrand is publisher of the *Colby Free Press*.

Company policy

The hunting accident in Texas was a most unfortunate incident. My sympathies, prayers, and well wishes go out to Harry Whittington.
There is no question in my mind that it was a pure accident, a careless one, but, none the less, an accident.
I'm not a fan or a supporter of Dick Cheney & Co., LLC. Maybe when he turned and saw the orange vest his reflexes kicked in and he opened fire, thinking it was an orange alert. Shoot first and answer no questions seems to be company policy. At least the company policy seems to be "don't answer questions until you've had time to set up the proper background, adjust the camera, compare notes, and formulate a plan to put the correct spin to the story. It helps to have a patsy behind the curtain in case you need one.
Company policy is covered by the LLC (limited liability company) that protects any senior personnel from any liability for mistakes or misinformation. If you can't find someone on the factory floor to hang the blame on, it must be the victim's fault.
Mr. Cheney has finally publicly announced

Ken Poland
• Ken's World

that he would take full responsibility for the incident. That should make Harry feel better, now that he is not being blamed for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. It only took three or four days to spin the facts and decide what would be the best thing to do. But, what does it mean.
The company CEO, President Bush, has stated that he would take full responsibility for several misdeeds. There seems to never be any penalties or penance exacted. The company continues to defy, not only world opinion, but the opinions of the legislature, courts, and society. All authority is vested in the Executive Board and Company officials. The Executive Board will determine what the other department's (legislature and court) policies mean. The stockholders are only consulted every four years, af-

ter a long and tenuous season of mudslinging, gerrymandering and pork distribution.
Unfortunately, the above scenario seems to be the norm for whichever partisan company is holding all the aces. Whoever wins the deal gets to call the shots. Our system isn't perfect, but it is still the best game in the world.
The whole unfortunate episode has been a hay day for the cartoonists and talk show professionals. Fortunately, we in the United States don't take political cartoons and political roasts as seriously as some folks seem to.
I'd suggest you beware, though. The sharp finger and handcuffs of Uncle Sam are controlled by Dick Cheney & Company, LLC. You are being watched. The Company knows who you are talking to and what you are reading. They also control all boarding passes and can redirect destinations without notification to you or next of kin.
The dark and musty dungeons and torture chambers are back in vogue, at least for a couple more years.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

