

Opinion



Your Views Count

- Letters

Don't let them ruin it

To the Colby Free Press:
Right now in Washington, D.C., lawmakers are being pressured to make up their minds about the future of Social Security. We know many in Congress view radical reform as a mandate handed down by the voters in this last election
And, of course, a good number in Congress — including Senator Harry Reid, who pressed the point that, “The most successful social program in the history of the world is being hijacked by Wall Street. They are trying to destroy Social Security.”
The thoughts expressed above are from President Barbara B. Kennelly of the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare. She also listed four of the outrageous and unfounded claims being made to convince Congress — and us — that our Social Security system will FAIL without the “miracle cure” of privatization, in her most recent correspondence.
I am thankful for Mrs. Kennelly and for all like her who have helped me see how my Social Security and Pension money are **really going to disappear** by the way the current administration is handling our money.

Most wealthy people wouldn't mind giving back the tax cuts they've received. A tax cut of \$2,000 for a person making \$90,000 a year really wouldn't hurt his/her subsistence much but for persons making \$10,000, \$20,000, \$30,000, \$40,000 — it could make a huge difference even in just meeting that person's minimal health needs.
So, I'm complying with Mrs. Kennelly's request and have signed the transmittal petition for its presentation to Senator Pat Roberts, Senator Sam Brownback and Representative Jerry Moran. Representative Jim Morrison and Senator Ralph Ostmeyer also would like to know about this before we get the axe.

Governor Kathleen Sebelius is cooperative. When you write your next “thank you” or complaint you might let her know what is going on.
I'm sending all of them a copy of this letter and am copying the words of the petition which is enclosed in this letter.
Sincerely yours,

Ms. Edna A. Hatcher
Colby
(Letter #10)

Comments to any opinions expressed on this page are encouraged. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. 5th St., Colby, Kan., 67701. Ore-mail td@nwkansas.com, or fax (785) 462-7749. Your comments need to be signed and include a daytime telephone number and the address of the writer. The latter two are for verification only.

Where to write, call

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202/224-4774
U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202/224-6521
U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 2443 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. 202/225-2715 or Fax 202/225-5124
State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building Rm. 171-W, Topeka 66612. 785/296-7676 e mail: jmorriso@ink.org web:http://www.ink.org/public/legislators/jmorrison
State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol Building Rm. 128 S, Topeka 66612. 785/296-7399

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Now the dog rules



Jan Katz Ackerman

• From Where I stand

Sitting in front of the computer totally mindless about what to write for a column, the hound dog howl of my 7-month old baby beagle grabbed my attention.

It's moments like that which makes me occasionally question my sanity, but then the wet touch of Katie's nose against my cheek makes me aware of how much we love each other.

Katie's a gift to my life from God.

You see, I swore I'd have no children after the age of 25 so that I'd still be young when my children were grown. I missed the mark by only a couple months, the younger of my two children being born shortly after I turned 25.

And, now, almost 24 years later, empty-nested and footloose and fancy free, I wanted a puppy.

Our family dog of 14 plus years died and I didn't plan on having another pet. Being able to pick up and run on a moment's notice was something very important to my husband and me.

Well, that changed last October while watching a nationally televised dog show.

Over the past two years since Iris' death, we've talked about what breed of dog we'd choose should we purchase another one.

I like dauschands, having had parents who owned a kennel full of them, and hubby likes bigger dogs. Not agreeing on the “walking, talking hot-dogs” as my favorite is called by hubby, we agreed on a beagle.

While on a day trip to Hays about a year-and-a-half ago, we saw a man from Colorado walking two beagle puppies at a gas station. I approached him and asked to see the puppies, and learned he was a beagle breeder and was on his way home from a dog show where his puppies had won championships.

Inquisitive about the cost of buying one of his puppies, my hopes were daunted when I learned they each cost \$700.

Forget that option!

To make a long story short, the man had given me his name and phone number, which I tucked away in silent hope that one day I'd own a beagle.

You are probably telling yourself I said earlier I didn't plan on owing another pet, but God had different plans for me.

While watching the dog show last October, that desire to own a puppy resurfaced.

Having owned dogs all my life, it isn't surprising to me Katie is now part of it.

Well, back to my story about being careful what one prays for!

I had a talk with God after watching the show,

and told him that “His will be done,” and if he wanted me to have a puppy things would work out.

The next morning, I gave the Colorado breeder a call and asked about a puppy.

While he wasn't home, his wife said she'd have him call me. Knowing the \$700 was still out of my price range, I told her I'd have to save up the money, but I was interested in owning one of their puppies.

Before we hung up the phone, the woman asked if I'd be interested in adopting a beagle puppy from Colorado Beagle Rescue, Inc.

She told me she and her husband were volunteers with CBR, Inc. and they had a 12-week old female to place and she'd have her husband call me yet that day.

Without her knowledge, her husband had already made plans for the puppy's adoption to a couple in Wyoming.

However, as promised, he did call me back and let me know the news that the puppy, then named something other than Katie, was headed to Wyoming.

Despite there being no puppy to adopt at the time, he asked if it would be possible for him to further interview me.

Colorado Beagle Rescue, Inc. has certain criteria for adopting a puppy through the agency, one of which is that the adopting “parent” must agree to have the puppy spayed or neutered.

In addition, while the organization does not charge for puppies, it does suggest a \$110 donation to cover boarding and veterinary costs while keeping a pup for adoption.

While the first two issues were no problem, but not having a fenced yard was.

After a lengthy conversation, and my agreement that a puppy was going to be a house dog and only out on a lease or cable for short periods of time, he said he'd submit our application to CBRI for my husband and me to be approved as “beagle parents.”

Remember now, I had prayed that God's will

be done in my acquiring a puppy.

About two hours after the breeder and I hung up the phone, he called me a second time.

This time, he asked if I was still interested in a puppy because the couple from Wyoming had called him two minutes after he and I talked saying they decided to wait a while for a puppy.

The next day, we made a trip to northern Colorado and picked up Katie.

It was love a first sight, and the little lady has not only stolen our hearts, she's taken over our home and lives.

One of the last comments the breeder's wife said to us as we were leaving their driveway was, “It won't take long and she'll have you well trained.”

Was she ever correct.

The mostly black backed, long brown eared, white faced and legged, brown freckled spotted young lady has our entire schedule evolved around her.

Katie's schedule is now our schedule.

Up at 6:30 a.m., breakfast, out for a walk with “Dad,” home for a nap under “Mom's” desk for two hours, in and out all morning (except when she's on the road “working” with Mom), lunch, nap in the sun in front of the patio door until 3 p.m., in and out some more, an afternoon walk with Mom, supper, in and out some more, a nap on Mom or Dad's lap until 8:30, and off to bed for the night.

Not only have we acquired Katie's schedule, we've acquired a maze of toys to navigate throughout the house.

I never let my children leave their toys all over every room of the house; I wonder why I'm allowing Katie to do it?

Goes back to my initial comment, about questioning my sanity.

How come I've allowed this 15-inch tall creature to invade my life?

How come I've allowed her to totally consume my waking moments?

It's because God recognized a need and filled it.

Goes back to what my mother used to say, “Be careful what you pray for, you just might get it.” Indeed I did.

I got a 15-inch tall creature completely filled with the understanding of unconditional love! *****

Jan Katz Ackerman is a reporter for the Colby Free Press. Her column appears Thursdays. Email ackermanjk@ruraltel.net.

Federal judges influenced, too

James C. Turner
Suzanne Mishkin

• Guest Commentary

What could you do if you found out that the judge hearing your case had taken an all-expense-paid vacation to the Elkhorn Ranch in Big Sky, Mont., with your adversary? Sadly, the answer is “nothing.”

Even worse, it's not just a single judge who has a problem. Since the 1990s, over 230 judges — more than one-quarter of the federal judiciary — have traveled to resort locations at the expense of private groups that have vested interests in the outcome of federal litigation. Pretending to provide “education” about complex legal issues, some of the nation's worst polluters wine and dine federal judges at the Sea Pines Plantation in Hilton Head, the Omni Golf Resort & Spa in Tucson and the Ritz-Carlton in Naples, Florida.

Who foots their bills, which run as high as \$10,000 per judge? An outfit like “The Foundation on Research and the Environment,” which is in turn funded by major oil and chemical companies including Texaco, Exxon, GE, Monsanto, and Shell.

But the \$10,000 gifts come at a price — the judges must attend classes where they are systematically indoctrinated by these special interest groups in lobbying sessions urging “rejection of top-down, command and control environmentalism.”

Make no mistake. The Foundation on Research and the Environment is not shelling out \$10,000 gifts to judges out of the kindness of their hearts. They have a carefully planned mission: to shape courtroom verdicts for their financial profit.

Judges are supposed to be above influence.

They have a special duty to remain objective, neutral and fair. Yet James Huffman, one of the leaders of the Foundation on Research and the Environment candidly admits they are peddling influence: “If people feel strongly about ideas and they want to influence someone in government, they can — that's the way the system works.”

On the contrary, this is not the way our system is supposed to work. The Ethics in Government Act prohibits employees of all three branches of government from accepting “anything of value” from those whose interests may be affected by their actions, and allows each branch to establish specific rules for itself. The Executive Branch imposes strict limitations on gifts (no more than \$20 in value), while Congress has similar gift restrictions (no more than \$50 in value). In fact, if cabinet members or senators accept a lavish \$10,000 vacation package, they are breaking the law. Unfortunately, the judicial branch places no such limitation on federal judges.

Instead, they resist all efforts to end the corrupt junkets they enjoy. When Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) introduced legislation during the

last Congress banning judicial attendance at private seminars, the judges asked him to wait and “allow the judiciary further opportunity to propose self-regulation on these important issues.” Rather than curb their lavish perks, last August the judges actually created a new gaping loophole in the rules that limit gifts, deciding that they can accept vacation gifts and attend lobbying sessions as long as the topic is not “directly related” to a specific case they are currently hearing.

These unethical junkets feed a growing distrust of our justice system. By continuing to accept lavish gifts and vacations, our federal judges are not acting as public servants dedicated to integrity, but rather as a special privileged class whose favors are for sale.

Federal judges have made it clear that they are unwilling to police themselves. Now it is up to Congress to step in and restore some sense of responsibility and impartiality. Senator Leahy plans to reintroduce legislation strictly limiting privately funded judicial junkets later this year.

This time around, we must demand that Congress put an end to this extravagant and corrupting practice.

James C. Turner and Suzanne M. Mishkin are executive director and associate counsel, respectively, with HALT — An Organization of Americans for Legal Reform, a national non-profit consumer advocacy group dedicated to improving accountability and increasing access within the civil justice system. www.halt.org. This column is distributed by MinutemanMedia.org.