

Opinion



Free Press Viewpoint

A good start for insurance for all

From the Winfield Daily Courier
Health and health care have been a priority for Gov. Kathleen Sebelius.
She has given special attention to the rising costs of Medicaid, the federal/state health insurance program for the poor and disabled, and to the needs of Kansas children.
Now comes Sebelius' challenger, Sen. Jim Barnett, with a proposal to bring the Massachusetts experiment in commercial health insurance to Kansas.
This is no small thing.
The Massachusetts experiment would deliver health insurance directly to individuals, not through employers. This would be a sea change in Kansas. It would relieve small employers of the burden of delivering costly health insurance — even as it raised the risk that more individuals might go without such insurance.
Health insurance, like auto and life insurance, would become an individual responsibility for many Kansans.
Gov. Sebelius should seriously consider embracing Sen. Barnett's proposal as part of her own package of health policy initiatives. The Massachusetts experiment would not be good for all Kansans, but it would be a good start on a public/private partnership in health care that could be good for the state as a whole.

About those letters . . .
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An 'a-maze-ing' experience

The moon was hanging low in the eastern sky Saturday night, veiled by clouds. Silvery light shone through the trees, gently illuminating a corn field just east of Goodland.

Armed with flashlights, passports and a map, brave adventurers prepared to enter a labyrinth.

The labyrinth was the Cole Family Farms corn maze and the brave adventurers were myself and my younger sister, Chris.

We ponied up for the adventure because it sounded fun, and we've never done a corn maze before. So we drove over and made an evening of the maze.

The maze covers 10 acres and is supposed to take about an hour to an hour and a half to complete. We were in it more than two hours, but being maze newbies, I think that can be excused.

Our trip into the first part of the maze took a little longer than necessary because we kept getting turned around and dead ends.

We found the first two checkpoints not so easily, and the third took the longest. The search for it found us lost for a while, but we received a little help from an outside source.

We were tromping down one of many paths when Chris' cell phone rang. Our mom called to see what we were up to. Chris was so annoyed with our plight she stopped thinking about where she was and just walked.

Seconds later, we found the third checkpoint and later, the lookout tower, which was the end point for the first part of the maze.

Chris' sense of adventure took over after that



Tisha Cox

• Off The Beaten Path

and we decided to give the back 70 percent a try.

We went from front to back and side to side on the search for the checkpoints.

There were more meandering paths on the main part of the labyrinth, and we didn't spend as much time getting lost, but we were wiser. We started looking for our footprints with our flashlights and made decisions on where to go based on whether or not we were treading the same path.

Focus was key as we learned to shut out the wind and the sound of the rustling corn.

Occasionally, the sounds of other people moving through the maze could be heard, but we encountered only four other people the entire time in the maze.

After getting lost a couple of more times, we found five more checkpoints, bringing our total to eight. We tried looking for the ninth, but eventually decided to end the quest after passing one of the emergency exits twice. Except it was way back on the end of the maze and we had a long hike back to the car.

I know I had fun. So did Chris. And after her first maze experience, she came up with a few ideas that would have been beneficial. Like paying attention, taking red ribbons or M&Ms, wear distinct shoes and don't go at night.

Besides the corn maze, the farm has a few more fall attractions, but they're open in daylight.

There is a pumpkin patch and a hay castle. Plus the corn cannon. Chris got to fire it a few times, even though it was after dark. That was fun, too, except the corn cob kept missing the targets and sailed into the trees instead.

I understand closer to Halloween the maze will be haunted. That should be a good time. Last year, Jessica Cole, one of the Cole family, said they showed "Signs," the Mel Gibson movie about unexplained crop circles appearing in a corn field.

That would've been fun to see, and I can imagine that made the corn maze experience even more eerie.

But for us, the wind was high and it was dark, but the experience was well worth it.

To have the chance to do something so fun and unique close to home is a great thing. And I'm surprised nobody thought of it before.

So, if one feels like having an adventure close to home, they should brave the maze.

Tisha Cox is a general assignment reporter/photographer for the Free Press. Her column appears on Mondays. tc Cox@nwkansan.com.

Protection for the rich, competition for poor

By Mark Weisbrot

"Globalization" is one of the major challenges facing American workers - which include not only factory and office workers but more than 80 percent of our 144 million-person labor force. But it is widely misunderstood.

Most of the people writing and talking about globalization for the major media know little about economics, and of the few who know something, most are dodging the most important issues.

The central one for Americans facing the global economy is income distribution. Whether it's international trade or investment, or immigration, the main impact on most Americans' lives has been the distribution of income. And that distribution has gotten dramatically worse over the last 30 years: the rich have gotten a lot richer, the poor have languished, and the middle class has shrunk.

From 1972 to 2001, the bottom 20 percent of wage and salary earners got only 1.6 percent of the increase in this income over the three decades. The majority got less than 11 percent. But the richest 1 percent received 18.4 percent of the increased income - vastly more than went to the majority of Americans.

The "managed globalization" designed by our political leaders has contributed very much to this upward redistribution of income. The key word here is "managed."

It is not, as the pundits argue, simply the re-

sult of market forces combined with technological changes in communication and transportation.

The architects of the global economy have not thrown their friends and neighbors - the doctors, lawyers, executives and other professionals - into brutal international competition with the tens of millions of highly educated, English-speaking people who would be willing to do their jobs at half the salary. That is why, for example, our doctors earn twice as much as their counterparts do in the rich countries of Europe.

Instead, our political leaders have devoted decades of careful and often protracted negotiations to rewriting the rules of international commerce so that the nearly three-quarters of Americans that do not have a college degree would face lots of global competition. Partly as a result of these changes, the real wage for most workers in the United States has barely grown over the last 30 years - about 9 percent - while productivity, or the amount that is produced by an hour of labor, has grown more than 80 percent.

Immigration policy follows the same rationale - foreign citizens who want to work here in restaurants or as construction laborers can do so by the millions, but the same is not true for foreign dentists or engineers.

The result of this "protectionism for the few, international trade and competition for the many" has been exactly what economists would

expect: The gains from a growing economy have gone increasingly to the protected and privileged few.

Of course, managed globalization is only part of the story. Political and legal changes have undermined the bargaining power of organized labor and its membership has steadily fallen. Health care costs have been allowed to spiral - the United States now spends about twice as much per person as other developed countries and has worse health outcomes - and these burdens are increasingly shifted to employees. And the tax code has been rewritten to favor the upper classes.

The federal minimum wage, in terms of purchasing power, is now at its lowest point in half a century.

The majority of Americans have so little influence in our political system that despite the overwhelming support for an increase, the party that controls Congress believes it can get re-elected in November while refusing even to allow a vote on the issue. We shall see.

Reform in all of these areas will be necessary if this country is ever to return to an economy in which most Americans share in the gains from economic growth.

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce

Tinsley

