

Other Viewpoints

## Health care cuts leave needs unmet

The Legislature violated the Hippocratic oath of physicians this past session and "did harm" to health care, but given the state's budget problems, some harm was inevitable. And to lawmakers' credit, there were also a few bright spots.

According to the Kansas Health Institute, budget cuts to health care and health-related social services included:

• Elimination of a \$5.6 million fund used to underwrite community-based services for more than 2,300 people with developmental disabilities.

• Cuts in the state-funded MediKan program, which provides services for people awaiting Social Security benefits.

• A \$1.5 million cut in Senior Care Act money for in-homes services for the state's frail elderly.

The Legislature didn't take action on several health care reforms or needs, including:

• Not approving a statewide public smoking ban.

• Not providing money to lift the waiting list for in-home services for people with physical disabilities.

• Not eliminating the waiting list for Medicaid-funded services for people with developmental disabilities.

"I don't think we advanced anything," Rep. Brenda Landwehr, R-Wichita, chairwoman of the House Health and Human Services Committee, told the institute.

That wasn't too surprising, given the nearly \$1 billion budget shortfall the state faced. Still, some of the action or inaction didn't make much financial sense.

Cutbacks in community-based services could result in more people ending up in nursing homes, which could cost the state more money than it saves. And a smoking ban wouldn't have cost the state any money, but it might have reduced smokingrelated Medicaid costs.

Yet even in a difficult budget year, lawmakers made progress on some health issues....

The state's budget problems are unlikely to improve anytime soon – and could get worse when the federal stimulus money runs out. As a result, significant health reform likely will be up to Congress....

But if state lawmakers are unable to fix many health care problems, they at least need to avoid making them worse.

- The Wichita Eagle, via The Associated Press

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# Take a page from Bob Dylan

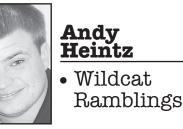
Bob Dylan wrote a song called "Everybody Must Get Stoned" that many people believed was about smoking marijuana, but you have to listen closely to the lyrics to understand what the song is really about.

When Dylan sings, "but I would not be so all alone, everybody must get stoned," he is saying that everybody needs to be made fun of in order to understand how bad it feels to be dumped on by society. And I think there is some real truth behind this line of thinking.

While I certainly don't endorse any kind of bullying, it's easy to see how the person with the smooth personality, athletic skill and superior intellect would have no real understanding about what it's like to be lonely, misunderstood, slow or overweight. How could they know the panicky feeling that envelops the socially impoverished kid when he's faced with a particularly awkward situation that he's ill-equipped to handle?

I have always had a lot of empathy for the outcasts in society. While I have been fortunate enough to have friends throughout my life, I'm well aware that I share some of the traits of the misunderstood and forgotten.

After being diagnosed with obsessive-compulsive disorder, I have become even more sympathetic to the plight of the people who constantly find themselves outside the social groups that dominate today's society. It's hard to put into words the numbing loneliness that comes with being on the outside looking in to



a society that doesn't have a place for you.

It's easy to be angry and bitter when watching how easy it is for some people to adapt to almost any circumstance while you find yourself constantly feeling awkward and tongue-tied. You wrack your brain for a clever response to a question posed by a woman you like, but the right words never come and you end up clumsily trying to put together a sentence that ends up sounding weak and feeble.

Years of feeling nervous in certain social situations has left me well-attuned to when other people are having trouble coping with the many obstacles that define everyday life. In a sense, my many imperfections have left me perfectly equipped to tolerate and empathize with other peoples weaknesses.

There have been times when I have wanted to be the guy who picked up new things right way and always knew the right thing to say, but if given the chance, I wouldn't be willing to trade places with him. People who have been forced to endure the painful agony that comes He says he loves K-State athletics and fishing, with being a little slow in school, a little over- sports and opinion writing.

weight, poor, lonely, shy, or misunderstood have been given a gift. While it is true that the gift was acquired through painful experiences, it's a gift nonetheless.

Society's outsiders have a chance be their own advocates. They can challenge the prevailing social norms that too often promote conformity and cliques by championing a more inclusive society that embraces empathy and understanding.

I have met people in my life who didn't fit in due to some perceived weakness. They were generally nice people, but their inability to fit in left them holed up in their room at home or spending the weekend alone in their dorm room. Their plight should anger everyone because it's easily fixable.

Life moves at a rapid pace and it's tempting to judge people based on first impressions and simple-minded stereotypes instead of really trying to understand a person. Judging people in such a narrow-minded way often leads to the disenfranchising of those who lack the social skills to relate in certain social environments. This is unfair to those rejected and it is uncomfortable for a community as a whole. A society that embraces a culture that accepts everyone is the ultimate example of morality.

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## Decoration Day recalls all forebears

Seeing Memorial Day notes come up on calendars and schedules in the last few days brings up a number of memories from my collection. Some even have to do with the holiday.

First is the name. It's Decoration Day forever in my mind, because that's what we did on that day. We gathered flowers from the garden and took them to the cemetery to decorate the graves of family members. This was in northwest Nebraska, so the flowers in season were sweet rocket, lilacs and iris. To my mother-in-law, iris were "flags," though it took me a while to get the translation straight in my head. The sweet rocket came from an aunt, and I have never been able to find it since.

The grave sites we visited changed over the years. In my earliest memories of the ritual, we visited the burial place of my father's Grandmother Cripps. His father died when I was about 7, and after that, Grandpa Hood's grave was a stop we made every spring. He was buried in the town cemetery, a place much like Colby's Beulah Cemetery, though with bigger trees

Once in a while, though, we went farther afield – literally. As pioneers in the area, a number of ancestors were buried in country



cemeteries. It was always an adventure to me when we headed off down graveled county roads with a car full of flowers, winding up at a tiny one-room church, with a wood stove for heat and an outhouse for plumbing. Around the church was a graveyard with tilting, weather-worn headstones surrounding by dry stems of wild grasses - wheat grass, grama and military grass, with a few patches of buffalo grass. Around the graveyard was a barbed-wire fence, and around the fence was pasture, and sky, and wide-open spaces. Once in a while, Dad brought along the old push lawn mower to clean things up a bit.

In later years, there were more graves, and now there is no one left of my immediate family to go there.

When I moved to this part of the world,

though, I felt homesick on Decoration Day and went exploring. My mother's roots were around Stratton, Neb. Sure enough, I found a tiny country cemetery north of Stratton, on the top of a hill, and a lot of familiar names there.

Instead of Hoods and Crippses and Stumphs, I found my Smith grandparents' graves. Both died years before I was born, so I knew them only through my mother's stories. Greatgrandparents named Smith and Taylor are also buried there, along with my mother's older brothers and some cousins.

I felt right at home visiting the final resting place of those I had never met, for we share a tie that joins all pioneer ancestors with their descendants. Needing a new place, a new start, a chance to spread their wings, they moved across a country to take on a new challenge. We build on their foundation, but in turn take on new challenges.

Decoration Day is a time to visit the past. It's also a time to consider the shape of the future.

Marian Ballard has collected careers as counselor, librarian, pastor, and now copy editor for the Colby Free Press. She collects ideas, which are more portable than other stuff.

## Remember past, don't sentimentalize it

#### To the Editor:

On May 5, 1868, three years after the end of the American Civil War, Gen. John A. Logan, as commander-in-chief of the Grand Army of the Republic, issued a proclamation declaring May 30 as Decoration Day, later renamed Memorial Day, to memorialize those who lost their lives on both sides of that war. The killedin-action on both sides totaled 203,000, the wounded 412,000, the total dead 620,000.

I've heard again this year, "We don't celebrate this like we used to ... in the good-old days." I always bristle. In truth, that is never an option. It never was like it used to be!

But it is also true that remembering the past is essential in building a good future. Remember Santayana's words, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to fulfill it." But the past must be remembered as it was, in as much honest detail as possible - not as we like to remember it. And not revised to prove some sinister scheme. (This happens so constantly that there is even a name for it: Revi-

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#### sionist History.)

As time passes, wars get romanticized. A few heroes are remembered, as are some memorable actions and the generals who led them. And those stories become larger than life. There is no dishonor in this, but it is the whole story, written and remembered as it was, that in being remembered builds into our present lives what is of everlasting value.

This Memorial Day, try searching for Matthew Brady's photographs of the battlefields, after the glorious, murderous charges, with swords slashing and bullets thudding into those

bodies sacrificed for the cause. See them lying flattened in the mud and grass, limbs contorted as they fell useless, and sightless eyes staring forever. Remember as well, those whose bodies and minds were torn beyond repair, whose dying lived on in extinguished abilities they never recovered.

In every war, these are the politicians' and generals' calculated losses who (to quote Mr. Lincoln) gave that "last full measure of devotion," or who languish in the back wards of veterans hospitals, in scattered mentality, or as the street-homeless from whom we have always turned our eyes.

After each fresh war, we add those new fallen to this old Memorial Day, "lest we forget." Fly the flags, on poles, in yards, on the graves ... but first unfurl them in your heart of hearts, as we make our remembering a fresh honoring once again.

Larry L. Booth, Colby

sound off