



Other Viewpoints

Liability costs sicken health care

The exclusion of “tort reform” – controlling the cost of mal-practice suits – from health care system legislation is curious. Controlling liability costs would not be a cure-all, for sure, but it would be a good ingredient to have in the package. At least it wouldn’t have hurt. But the Democrat leadership in Congress resisted. Democrats shouldn’t be surprised they didn’t get Republican votes for the bills that passed the House and Senate. Tort reform is one concession they easily could have granted the GOP. And it would have been a good strategy for reducing costs of the health care system, which should be a primary focus of the legislation. Why Democrats fought tort reform is bewildering. So was the fight for allowing the government to pay for abortions. Why was that so important? Abortion coverage easily can be put in the category of nonessential and too controversial — except to save the life of the mother or in cases of rape or incest — at least for government-paid coverage. Let it be done with private dollars. But back to tort reform. A simple cap on punitive damages helps keep costs down, not just directly but indirectly. Doctors call it “defensive medicine” — having to order excessive tests primarily because of the fear of a lawsuit. Tort reform would have won the support of more doctors, too. While national organizations such as the American Medical Association and the American Hospital Association have endorsed health-care reform, state associations have not. The Kansas Medical Society and the Kansas Hospital Association are among those opposed or with concerns, and the lack of tort reform is one reason. Local health care professionals also expressed disappointment that tort reform is missing. Pick your battles, as they say. A little more compromise easily was possible with health care legislation, tort reform being one bone Democrats should have tossed Republicans’ way. — *The Hutchinson News, via The Associated Press*

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- U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-6521
- U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 2202 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715 or Fax (202) 225-5124
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Weather watchers, watch out

Many things that can get you in trouble in the journalism business, and one of them is the weather. When a storm is coming and the weathermen say they can predict it, you want to help get the word out. You want people to know when and how bad it’s going to be so they can batten down the hatches. But there’s always the danger of over- or under-reporting a storm. Take this last snowstorm, for example. I had the day off Monday, and when I came in to work Tuesday, the publisher had some forecasts on my desk, a hint, I guess, that he wanted me to write a story for that day’s paper. The forecasts from the National Weather Service office over in Goodland predicted a band with 8 inches of snow around Colby and heading northward into Nebraska and beyond. They also predicted the snow would last a couple days, clear up by Christmas Day and the sun would start shining on Saturday. Of course, that’s not exactly how it happened. The snow sure looked like it was coming down hard Wednesday. From the *Free Press* windows it almost looked as dense as Tuesday’s fog. But Thursday it stopped with only about 3 inches on the ground. Thursday afternoon, we could all walk around outside



Kevin Bottrell

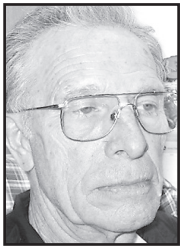
- Simple tricks and nonsense

without a single flake hitting us. A single flake from the sky, that is. The wind, which had been high Wednesday, really went for broke on Christmas Eve. It swirled the snow around so much it still looked like a blizzard, but no more fell from the sky until just a little bit Christmas Day. And there lies the danger. Weather is so unpredictable that it is extremely difficult to get it right. You can only tell people what the experts are saying and why, and then report how it really went afterwards. Even the big “media outlets” often get weather wrong. KSN News out of Wichita had a crew in Colby – we hear the cops chased them off the shoulder of I-70 where they had been filming – and their report said we’d get 15 inches. Now, I don’t know what forecast they were looking at, and the day they were

here certainly looked bad, but it didn’t turn out to be anywhere near 15 inches. To be fair, it wasn’t even half of the 8 inches I reported, either. It wasn’t the first time and it certainly won’t be the last. Back in tornado season, I wrote a story reciting a prediction of severe thunderstorms and tornados over the weekend. I don’t remember exactly, but I think there ended up being only a few showers and nary a tornado in sight. There have been several big snowstorms since then, most have turned out to be very similar to what was predicted, but not all. Like any journalist I hate to get things wrong, but with weather, when the experts are predicting something bad, I think its better to let people know rather than underreport it and leave fewer people prepared when a storm hits. Kevin Bottrell, news editor of the Colby Free Press, is a Colorado State University graduate who believes that the middle road is often the high one. Contact him at kbottrell @ nwkansas.com

Where has the family farm gone?

What has happened to rural America? Gone is the pastoral scene of family farms with neatly fenced yards and gardens. Farmyards with chickens, cows, and pigs running loose within walking distance of the house have disappeared. No longer do we see fields with neatly shocked fodder and small bins holding grain to winter the livestock. The advent of the internal combustion engine replaced the neatly matched teams of horses. Mom, in her sun-bonnet, and the barefoot kids no longer can be seen working the garden in the early morning. The industrialization and commercialization of agriculture has destroyed a way of life that rewarded agriculture with a serene and simple lifestyle. Yes, it was a time of extreme hardships due to vulnerability to the whims of nature and the markets. The straw hat and stoneware water jug, wrapped in a wet gunny sack, were the standard protection from scorching sun and arid breeze. Open windows in the summer and red-hot heating stoves in the winter were the means of conditioning the air in the house. But the hard work of agriculture never killed anybody. In fact, it allowed us to enjoy the privilege of consuming the tasty cuisine of fat-fried beef steaks, cream-covered vegetables (real 40-test-weight cream), bacon and eggs, lard-based pastries, chicken fried crisp in the



Ken Poland

- Ken’s World

old iron skillet (again with lard), and the like. A rind of crisp fried fat on the beef steak makes my mouth water, even now. Can’t have it though — don’t work hard enough to burn the calories before they bind themselves to my arteries and overwork my heart. Today’s political world, with tax incentives to favor huge specialized production units and the influx of outside finances provided from investors looking for tax havens, has eliminated the traditional family farm. No longer do we find diversified farming operations that depend upon family to supply the labor to till the land, plant the crops, harvest the crop and take care of livestock. We have truly lost a way of life that taught a reverence to nature, both animal and plant. Agricultural people probably weren’t any more inclined to be Christian in their religious convictions than others, but we did have a much higher degree of respect for a power beyond ourselves. Even those who prided them-

selves in having pulled themselves up by their own bootstraps had to acknowledge having to depend upon favor from God and nature, and sometimes, having to enlist the helping hand of a neighbor. Nostalgia is great. I barely arrived in this world in time to enjoy or endure, depends on your perspective, this agricultural scene of the early 20th century. And I have no desire to return, if it were possible, to the good old days. I don’t miss the kerosene lanterns or gathering kindling or having to wait for the stoking of the heating stove in the morning. The hoe and pitchfork handles don’t fit in my arthritic hands. Using real horse power is great for hobby time, but I’ll take the instant power at the twisting of the ignition key in my environmentally controlled tractor cab. Times have changed. Our culture has changed. But man’s social, spiritual and physical needs are the same as they have been since creation or the beginning of time. Are we up to the challenge of meeting those needs? Ken Poland describes himself as a semiretired farmer living north of Gem, a Christian, affiliated with American Baptist Churches, and a radical believer in separation of church and state. Contact him at rcwinc@cheerful.com.

Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

