

Other Viewpoints

Women's health falling victim to law

Low-income women in and around Dodge City soon may be denied basic health care services thanks to a new Kansas law. The law passed earlier this year says that Title X federal family planning funds must be distributed first to public health departments and hospitals. The result is that, after the law went into effect on July 1, no funds were available for clinics like the Dodge City Family Planning Clinic and Planned Parenthood clinics in Wichita and Hays. Planned Parenthood has filed a lawsuit challenging the law, and a federal district judge in Wichita ordered the state to continue distributing Title X funds to the Planned Parenthood clinics while the litigation is pending.

However, state officials continue to deny Title X funds to the Dodge City clinic, which was not a party to the lawsuit. The clinic recently asked the Wichita judge to include it in the ongoing Planned Parenthood litigation and to order the state to release funding for the clinic.

In the meantime, the Dodge City clinic has lost more than 60 percent of its funding. Its employees continue to provide services but they haven't been paid since sometime in July. Obviously, that situation can't continue indefinitely. Without some financial relief, the Dodge City clinic will be forced to close, leaving about 650 low-income patients in southwest Kansas without access to a variety of health services including birth control, cancer screenings, pregnancy testing and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases. According to the new law, the Ford County health department would be eligible to obtain Title X funds that offset the cost of delivering these services, but the director of the family planning clinic said she had contacted the health department and was told it wasn't interested in taking over the Title X funding or the services.

The Dodge City Family Planning Clinic has been using Title X dollars to provide health services to low-income residents for 35 years. It has never provided abortion services. If, as the current Planned Parenthood lawsuit claims, the new state law is aimed at eliminating abortion in Kansas, depriving clinics like the one in Dodge City of funding is counterproductive. Reducing access to birth control will certainly result in an increase in unplanned pregnancies. Reducing important health services like Pap tests and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases isn't an attack on abortion; it's an attack on women who can't afford to pay for those services at a clinic that isn't subsidized by Title X funding.

The courts already have ordered the state to continue funding for the Planned Parenthood clinics while the pending lawsuits are making their way through the courts. Why must state officials force the Dodge City clinic to launch its own legal fight to obtain the same consideration? Health services for low-income women shouldn't be tolerated as "collateral damage" in Kansas officials' battle against abortion.

— Lawrence Journal-World, via the Associated Press

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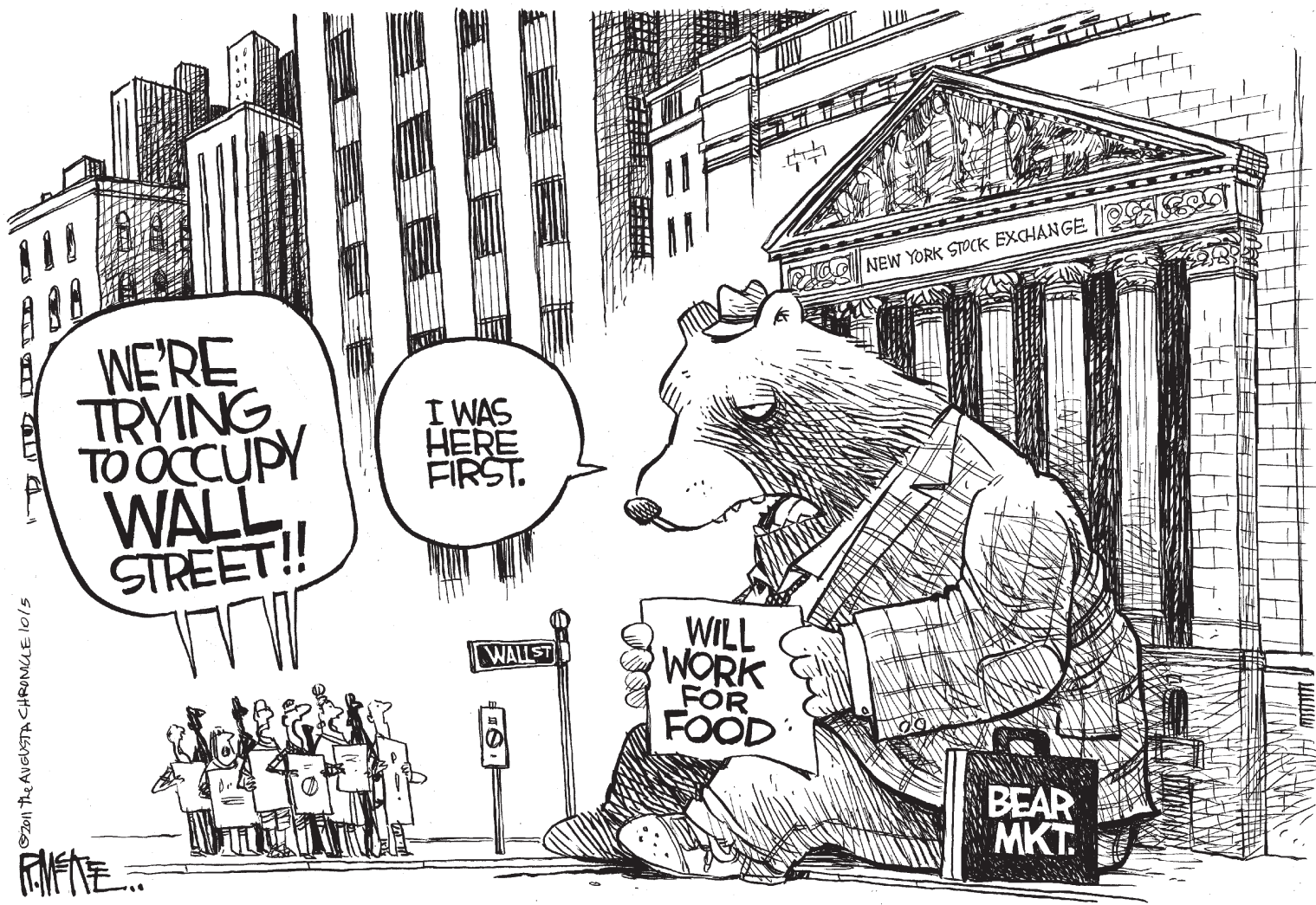
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Movie shows South as it truly was

If you haven't seen the movie "The Help," now showing at the Sunflower Cinema in Oberlin, do yourself a favor and do it this weekend.

It may well be the best movie to play Oberlin in the last two decades. It's not perfect, but it's good enough to move you.

It's the story of a young woman just out of the University of Mississippi in 1963. Skeeter wants to be a writer. She knows she can't live the same life as the women she grew up with, now up-and-coming Junior Leaguers in Jackson, Miss.

She needs experience to get a job in publishing, and she settles on writing the stories of the colored maids she knows. It's not easy to get anyone to trust her, or to take the project seriously. But, of course, it happens.

Along the way, you'll laugh, cry and feel the pain and the fear of the women in the film, white and black. The acting ranges from so-so to brilliant. At times, these young southern matrons appear to be nothing more than caricatures, vacuous, bubbly Barbies with Mississippi accents, nasty attitudes and empty brains.

Real life is a lot more complex, of course. I know some of these southern women, the ones who grew up in the '60s and their daughters. There's a lot more to them than the film shows.

But the fear, the prejudice — a central theme of the movie is one Junior Leaguer's drive to require separate, outside bathrooms for all black maids — were and are real.



Steve Haynes

• Along the Sappa

But of course, we know how things turn out. The country changes, all that is left behind. The lives of those involved were complex, involving many good and courageous actions by those of both races.

For those who lived through those times, the attitudes are all too real. Talking later, Cynthia and I turned to our experience in 1980, when our house in Kansas City, Kansas, sold to blacks. Neighbors we thought of as friends, we learned later, led a boycott of our going-away party. (The ringleader was a prominent Junior Leaguer, as well.)

Others we barely know came to make a statement of support. We found out, as they say, who our friends were. It was a lesson for a couple of small-town Kansas kids who hadn't grown up with much of an idea of segregation.

As much as anything, the movie is a measure of how much the country has changed since 1963. It's marked by two pivotal events, the shooting of civil rights leader Medgar Evers in Jackson that year and the shooting of President John F. Kennedy. Both seem so far in the past, given the changes since, but we know the prej-

udice and hatred that killed both men remains somewhere under the surface.

We live in a better world, but not a perfect one.

"The Help" includes some fine performances, including Viola Davis as Aibileen, the maid who first agrees to tell her tales. She pretty much carries the film. Emma Stone is understated as Skeeter, and Bryce Dallas Howard is arch as the segregationist Junior Leaguer Hilly.

Two fine performances in minor roles reminded me that we're all getting older: Cicely Tyson as a frail older maid who raised Skeeter and her siblings, and Sissy Spacek as Hilly's forgetful but insightful mom. Both are way beyond playing the ingenue, I guess.

As a period piece, it's nearly flawless, the buses and cars properly 1950s, the hairdos and dress early '60s to a "T." The Mississippi accents are a little light, perhaps, and now and then a figure of speech is off: If you've been to the South, you know no one would offer you a "cola" or a "Coca-Cola," but a Coke. In the South, that's the same as saying a "soda" or a "pop" would be here.

I know, we don't often cater to movie reviews, but it's not often we get a movie of this calibre. "The Help" should be up for Picture of the Year, but that's not the point: You'll be entertained, and you'll be moved.

Steve Haynes is president of Nor'West Newspapers. When he has the time, he'd rather be reading a good book or casting a fly.

Cutting Saturday delivery no answer

To ensure its future the United States Postal Service must do more than seek short-term fixes to its long-term financial problems. Year after year, the U.S. Postal Service continues to raise postal rates to cover its growing expenses without adequately addressing its significant underlying organizational and operational issues. Instead it is offering to cut service by eliminating Saturday mail delivery.

These are complex problems requiring a comprehensive plan. Cuts in delivery service should be last on the list of considerations. Projected short-term cost savings from delivery cuts are minuscule in the context of the systemic change required and would only accelerate the decline in mail volume and revenue in the long term. It is difficult to find any business that would choose to increase prices and reduce service as a path to sustainability, yet this is precisely what the Postal Service is recommending.

A healthy Postal Service is vital to Americans who depend on timely, affordable, reliable mail delivery. The dual strategy of raising rates while cutting Saturday delivery is no way to sustain customer loyalty or encourage use of mail. It also overlooks the dependence many — including small businesses and rural customers — have on six-day delivery.

According to research from the Postal Regulatory Commission, an agency that provides oversight of postal rate and service changes, the actual savings to ending Saturday delivery would be only about half what is estimated.

The Commission also found that customers in rural and remote areas would be especially hard hit because their mail delivery would take longer, and that small businesses and other first-class mail customers who depend

Other Opinions

• Donald J. Hall Jr.
Hallmark Cards Inc.

on timely delivery would be affected far more than bulk mailers.

Of course, change clearly is needed, but there are more substantive steps that can be taken before cutting Saturday delivery to eliminate inefficiencies and achieve a sustainable solution to the fiscal dilemma.

A reasonable funding plan for pension accounts, and especially retiree health benefit accounts, is one. Addressing excess capacity and associated costs are necessary as well.

According to the most recent report of the Office of Inspector General, the Postal Service has nearly twice the capacity it needs in its 260 processing and distribution centers to maintain quality service. Excess capacity at this level is something no business could sustain and is a major factor in continued rate increases.

Because wages and benefits make up more than 80 percent of expenses, postal management and union leaders must work together to find viable ways to manage these costs.

In short, the solution to the financial crisis will not be found in failing to adequately serve small towns in remote areas. It's about the need to address major structural issues embedded deep within the business model itself.

It is important to remember the Postal Service is an independent entity and expected to

operate as a business. It is fully paid for by postal customers and receives no public funding — a distinction often misunderstood.

I value postal employees, the work they do and the important role their service plays in our nation's economy. To ensure its continuation, the service must address its underlying organizational and operational issues. Reducing delivery service to customers instead will only further jeopardize its future.

Donald J. Hall Jr. is president and chief executive officer of Hallmark Cards Inc., headquartered in Kansas City, Mo.

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