



Other Viewpoints

Health site flop hurt its credibility

More proof of the rocky launch of Obamacare came in numbers out of the Sunflower State.

According to a recent report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, just 371 Kansans managed to select a private health insurance plan through the federally run online marketplace.

The department also said the insurance exchange had 6,061 completed applications from Kansas from Oct. 1 to Nov. 2, seeking coverage for 12,205 people. Of those people, 3,009, or 24.6 percent, were eligible to receive federal subsidies to help them pay their premiums.

Of course, it was easy to see why so many Kansans were eager to visit the online insurance marketplace, as an estimated 363,000 of the state’s 2.8 million residents have no health insurance.

But slow-loading and frozen computer screens, password snags and other technical glitches in the rollout of the federal website kept many would-be participants from using the on-line marketplace.

While technology should have made the process as user-friendly as possible, poor planning and execution marred the otherwise welcome opening phase of an Affordable Care Act for Americans in need of health coverage.

Naturally, the mess gave Republican opponents of the law an opportunity to pile on and step up demands to scrap the plan.

That won’t happen. Strong interest in the Affordable Care Act from the day of the launch of www.healthcare.gov proved a pressing need nationwide.

The Kansas Insurance Department had encouraged consumers to wait to enroll in a plan so that Health and Human Services could work out glitches. People must select a plan by Dec. 15 if they want coverage for all of 2014.

Unfortunately, the botched rollout made a bad situation worse for many. And now, a fear is in damaged trust. How good could the program be if it’s so difficult for interested consumers to sign up?

Former Kansas governor and current Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius and her department have much work to do in fixing the site and restoring public confidence.

Let’s hope they go about remedying the glitches with far more attention to detail than displayed in giving many Americans their first contact with Obamacare.

– *The Garden City Telegram, via the Associated Press*

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Prepare now for winter driving

When I think about the perils associated with winter travel, I think about my dad’s simple, but sound advice, “Stay off the roads.” Dad has lived by this creed for more than 70 years in northwestern Kansas. He’s seen his share of blowing and drifting snow. When he talks about western Kansas blizzards, the years of ’31 and ’57 are singled out.

The ’31 blizzard hit on April Fool’s Day and killed hundreds of cattle. One of Dad’s neighbors lost 80 head of cattle in a pasture less than a quarter mile west of their small community of Seguin.

I was just a youngster, but I remember the blizzard of ’57. Snow drifted as high as the roof on my friend, Vernon Rietcheck’s two-story home. We sledged down the drifts and played in the snow all day.

Our parents weren’t as lucky. There were roads to open and cattle to feed and water. Our homes were without electricity for five days.

My father and those hearty souls who lived on the High Plains learned from these storms. He learned to travel only when necessary – to feed, water and care for his livestock. He never traveled anywhere in his pickup without several pairs of gloves, a scoop shovel, a log chain and chains for the rear tires.

Dad always wore a cap with ear protection and carried a couple extra on the front seat of his pickup in the winter. The trunk of our car also had extras. He knew a person couldn’t last long outside in freezing weather with all



John Schlageck

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of your body heat escaping through the top of a bare head.

If we traveled anywhere during the winter months, the trunk of the family car was always packed with extra warm clothes, blankets, overalls, gloves, a flashlight, fresh batteries, chains and a shovel to clear the snow from in front of the tires.

Dad had been stuck in snow before. He’d heard of, and known of, people who were stranded and froze to death in some of the fierce northwestern Kansas blizzards. Before every winter season began, and often throughout, he’d remind us of these stories.

My father always topped off his fuel tanks for winter travel. He believed a full tank provided extra weight on the rear wheels.

“It runs better on the top half (of the tank),” he always said.

Although Dad never carried sand bags in the back of his car or trucks, he did carry extra weight during the winter. He always lugged around tractor tire weights while some of his neighbors preferred sand and sprinkled

the gritty stuff in front of their tires for extra traction in snow and ice.

If someone absolutely had to go out during a winter storm, Dad preached extra time and patience. If you’re frightened or overly concerned about weather conditions – don’t drive. Wait the storm out.

Remember, it takes a while to find your “driving legs” each new winter season, he’d say.

Relax. Sit back in the seat. From time to time take deep breaths. Don’t grip the wheel until your knuckles turn white.

Try to anticipate what other drivers intend to do. Let them speed, spin, slip and slide. Allow at least twice as long to reach your destination. Concentrate on the road ahead, behind and on your right and left.

While driving during hazardous weather brings out the worst in some drivers, it can also bring out the best in others. Some welcome the chance to brave the elements. To drive safely under such conditions can provide a feeling of satisfaction and accomplishment.

Drive safely and know your limitations. Remember, if you have to take a chance that could result in an accident or worse, “Stay off the road.”

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm near Seguin, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

Cattlemen value of Kansas farm law

In mid-November, the Kansas Judicial Advisory Committee, with pressure from some Kansas legislators, the administration, and multinational corporations citing constitutional concerns, recommended that the Kansas corporate farming law be rewritten so that multinational corporations be allowed to buy up Kansas’ natural resources and penetrate rural communities.

In recent years, large farming corporations have tried to move into Kansas, but have been met with a Kansas law that limits corporate involvement in agriculture, protecting the interests of Kansans by prohibiting corporations from owning or leasing agricultural land in Kansas. The law does make exemptions for family farm corporations and other small corporations and partnerships formed by Kansans. The law also makes exceptions for forest and nursery products, swine, rabbits, poultry, dairy and feedlot operations.

“This law was put in place by our Kansas legislators more than 80 years ago to protect our economy and rural communities and provide opportunities for Kansas farmers and ranchers to compete in the marketplace,” said stated Brandy Carter, chief executive officer of the association. “Now, because of corporate interests, there are people that want to repeal or re-write this law. They are using constitutionality as their way out of this law, but no

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court has found the Kansas law to be unconstitutional.

“There have been arguments that bringing large farm corporations in will help rural communities. However, these large farm corporations will compete with independent producers. Moreover, these out-of-state and foreign-owned businesses do not help rejuvenate rural communities. Money leaves the community.

Farming operations, owned by Kansans and local residents put money into the community, they have ties to the community and work collaboratively with neighbors to put value into the community.”

The association maintains that it is important to maintain Kansas corporate farming laws.

“Small businesses, which consist of independent operations, are the backbone of Kansas’ economy. Independent producers, often living on the land, and family operations are

not just a business though,” Carter said, “but a way of life. They have a vested interest in environmental stewardship because the land remains in the family for generations.

“Most importantly, food confidence and food safety are critical to our nation’s health. Sourcing food from a larger number of smaller producers helps prevent mass contamination and protects the food system providing safe food for consumers.

“This year, there seemed to be a lot of pressure on legislators in the Statehouse by corporate interests and ag groups and leaders with corporate ties. There was a big lobbying push to change this law. Because it did not happen, other avenues are being used to circumvent the process of having the people being heard and represented.

“What is unfortunate in the effort to address constitutionality by rewriting this law, local and county rights could be taken away from the people of Kansas. The association hopes that legislators will stand up and represent the people who voted them into office and value what Kansas farmers bring to their communities.”

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



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