

from other pens...

## Tough to defend unpopular 'surge'

There are two people we would not have wanted to be 10 days ago: Gen. David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker, the top American officials in Iraq.

Both appeared before Congressional committees to discuss the war and where they felt we were, both militarily and politically since the "surge" of a few months ago.

No matter their answer to the many questions — some hard questions, some questionable, others of the nit-picking variety — it had to be a challenge all its own to be sitting there knowing no matter what you say, you weren't saying the right thing.

While watching the drama unfold, we kept telling ourselves most of the people doing the questioning are the very same people who gave President Bush the green light to invade this country in the first place. No one twisted their arms.

But that was then, and this is now.

It does us no good to continue recalling the past while trying to deal with the present and plan for the future. We short-change ourselves when we adopt that posture.

This is war — WAR — not a political football to be kicked around. When that is allowed to happen, we are, in effect, kicking around our troops.

And when Senate and House members acted the way many of them did at the hearings, it smacked of them not fully understanding that the commander-in-chief and the generals plot, plan and carry out the fighting, Congress pays the bill.

We're all in this thing together and it will take all of us to bring it to an acceptable conclusion. And we need to hold our congressmen/women and senators' feet to the fire. This is not a Republican issue, or a Democrat issue. It is, instead, a United States of America issue. United we stand, divided...well, you know how that goes.

Some folks' reasoning is we should be talking with our enemies, using a diplomatic approach to ease the tensions in that part of the world. While there is some truth to that, we first have to start talking — not shouting — to one another right here on the home front.

The appearance of Gen. Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker on Capitol Hill can't be fully assessed this early, regardless of what the talking heads on radio and television seem to think. But one gets a sense their testimony was an account of how they truly feel.

At one point, when Gen. Petraeus was asked if America is any safer with the plan now being employed in Iraq, he said he didn't know. Talk-show heads had a field day with that answer. Some senators at the hearing shook their heads. That's understandable, because he was telling the truth. And the "I" word isn't much in vogue these days back in Washington.

Politicians calling for a withdrawal of all troops now must be kin to the negative voices that told Orville and Wilbur Wright that the silly thing they invented would never fly.

In a similar way, we "invented" the conditions that today exist in Iraq. Quarterback Bush will, in the months to come, fade back, look at the receivers downfield, and toss the ball. Whoever catches it — Brownback, Giuliani, Huckabee, Hunter, McCain, Paul, Romney, Tancredo, Thompson, Biden, Clinton, Dodd, Edwards, Gravel, Kucinich, Obama, or Richardson — will have to run for the end zone.

We will then see if the recipient of the pass lives up to his/her tough talk. Or if it just turns out to be more political rhetoric.

— Tom Dreiling, *The Norton Telegram*



## We got ushered out of Coors Field

I'd never been kicked out of a baseball stadium before.

Theaters, maybe. A high-school dance once. A murder scene or two.

But there was the usher, waving us off like a cop at a bad wreck.

"Time to get moving," he said. "It's all over here."

Boy, was it all over. I looked around, and there was no one else left in the upper deck.

The Rocks has lost 13-2 to the supposedly hapless Florida Marlins. Only the Fish seem to find their beaks whenever they play Colorado. No catch-and-release here.

Just as well. If the boys in black had to blow a game that bad, and we had to be there, and not, oh say, at the dentist, then this was the one.

We couldn't see much from our nosebleeder seat, just a couple of rows south of the infamous purple line that marks 5,280 feet in upper Coors Field. Tiny men chasing after an even tinier ball.

And the Marlins weren't chasing many balls, at that.

Our friends Merle and Mary had the tickets and asked us to come meet them. They got a couple of dozen tickets from *The Denver Post*, which has a circulation partnership with their newspaper in Colorado.

Merle's had sort of an interesting year. He's gone over the handlebars of his bicycle twice. The first time, a dog tried to catch him. He landed on his face and messed up his wrist.



**steve haynes**

• along the sappa

He claimed it was not big deal, but then he's a Marine.

He's kind of a serious biker. He does 700-mile rallies that take 2 1/2 days to complete. Most people would say he's crazy, but then, he's a Marine.

The second wreck, last month, he did a face plant into a car that pulled out in front of him. A chest plant and a knee plant, too, it seems. They flew him into St. Anthony Central with pretty much everything on his left side broken from his jaws, both upper and lower, to his ribs and knees.

We got there two days later, and he wanted to go for a walk. He claims not to remember that now.

Mary said the first day, he'd wake up and ask two questions: Were they going to France for the big rally he'd been training for? (No!) And, "How's my bike?" (You don't want to know.)

She said she got kinda tired of answering the same two questions all night.

Merle is a lot better now. They took most of the wires out of his jaw last week so now he can eat his blended food with a spoon. He feels better. In a month or two, they might take the

rest of the wires out and let his dentist work on his broken teeth.

It's a minor miracle, if you ask me, but then, he's a Marine.

After the game, we sat around talking when Worm came by. That's what got us in trouble with the usher, I think.

Worm — his real name is Rick Charbonneau, and he's a Frenchman from Cloud County like Cynthia — is state circulation manager for the Denver Newspaper Agency, the partnership that publishes *The Post* and *The Rocky Mountain News*. He's the guy who bought all those tickets for his "partners," 500 of 'em. And he's the hero of this story.

The night Merle crashed, Rick was reading "his" outstate papers online, checking the headlines, when he saw that Merle had crashed that morning. He went right over to St. Anthony and started helping Mary, finding her a hotel, sitting up with her during the six-hour surgery.

Stayed until 3:30 in the morning. Came back to check on her the next day. Took care of a lot of details. He said later he'd known Merle for years, but only been introduced to Mary. She says he's her hero.

What a guy.

Cynthia says they're cousins of some kind, but all those Concordia Frenchmen are related some way or another. Whatever it is, she should be proud to have him in the family.

Even if he does buy cheap seats.

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If Canada's national health-care system is so dang wonderful, why are so many Canadians coming to America to pay for their own medical care?

Why is the hip replacement center of Canada in Ohio — at the Cleveland Clinic, where 10 percent of its international patients are Canadians?

Why is the Brain and Spine Clinic in Buffalo serving about 10 border-crossing Canadians a week? Why did a Calgary woman recently have to drive several hundred miles to Great Falls, Mont., to give birth to her quadruplets?

It's simple. As the market-oriented Fraser Institute in Vancouver, B.C., can tell you, Canada's vaunted "free" government health-care system cannot or deliberately will not provide its 33 million citizens with the non-emergency health care they want and need when they need or want it.

Courtesy of the institute, here are some unflattering facts about Canada's sickly system:

Number of Canadians on waiting lists for referrals to specialists or for medical services — 875,000.

Average wait from time of referral to treatment by a specialist — 17.8 weeks.

Shortest waiting time — oncology, 4.9 weeks.

Longest waiting times — orthopedic surgery, 40.3 weeks.

Average wait to get an MRI — 10.3 weeks nationally but 28 weeks in Newfoundland.

Average wait time for a surgery considered "elective," like a hip replacement — four or more months.

Hello, Cleveland.

The Canadian system is horribly short on consumer choice and competition. But it isn't all bad — if you don't mind waiting to access it. As health policy analyst Nadeem Esmail of the Fraser Institute said last week, it does "a decent job of saving your life but treats you terribly in the process."

Esmail says no one knows exactly how many Canadians go to the United States each year for medical care. His best estimate for 2006 — a

## Uh-oh, Canada



**bill steigerwald**

• newsmakers

conservative one — is 39,282. Whatever the actual number is, however, it is growing.

Clinics in Detroit and Buffalo market speedy MRIs, CTs or ultrasounds to Canadians which, by law, cannot be purchased privately in some provinces, including Ontario.

Ontario residents have three options: wait months for their free public MRI, travel to a province like Quebec where it is legal to buy one privately or travel to the U.S.

It's no wonder private medical and surgical brokers like Timely Medical Alternatives of Vancouver have sprung into existence. Rick Baker said his three-year-old company refers about 100 Canadians a month to U.S. clinics and hospitals for such things as MRIs and knee replacements.

Timely Medical's services came in handy for Lindsay McCreith, a retired auto body shop owner who was told in 2006 he probably had a brain tumor. He needed an MRI fast. But the wait time for a "free" public one was 4 1/2 months and it was illegal to purchase a private MRI in Ontario.

McCreith contacted Timely Medical, which got him an MRI the next day in Buffalo that showed he had a Titleist-sized tumor. Four and half weeks later, McCreith had received the brain surgery that could have taken eight months to happen in Canada — if he had still been alive. It cost him \$28,000 — for which Canada's government won't reimburse him.

Stories like McCreith's — and the downsides of Canadian and American health care — are being exposed by ABC's John Stossel in his "20/20" special, tentatively titled "Sick in America."

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