

Getting Washington under control

A wire-service story on the Republican plan to ban "earmarks," that peculiar congressional perk which allows members to set aside millions for pet projects, maintains the ban will do no good.

It's just window dressing, the "experts" argue; eliminating earmarks won't keep Congress from spending our money or from directing to their districts.

And while that may be true, a ban on the much-abused earmarks would be a start to reforming Congress and cutting down on federal spending. It will take more, much more, to get Washington under control.

"It's a symbol," said one former Congressman turned lobbyist. But symbols are important. If people are tired of ever-growing government spending, they need to see some progress.

The truth is, earmarks are only a small part of the picture. Lack of discipline is the biggest problem: Members of Congress gain by spending money and offend pressure groups when they cut budgets. There's no force that pushes them to cut spending, except of course the voters.

But voter behavior is contradictory. We say we want less spending and smaller government, but in the same breath demand that our own "pet" programs be spared the ax. And every program is someone's pet.

Every program has a pressure group that protects it - farm groups for farm subsidies, senior citizen groups for Social Security, business groups for tax breaks, and so on. Organized lobbying groups put direct pressure on Congress. Dispersed voter movements like the "tea party" are effective only when they actually affect winning and losing, as they did this year.

But by the next election, the tea party may have faded or weakened. The lobbyists will still be in Washington, still be dispensing campaign money, still be influencing votes.

Citizens who want lower spending, a balanced budget and cuts to major programs first need to realize that it will take some courage for members to vote against the pressure groups. Fear of losing office is the only thing that will create it.

And voters will have to agree to cuts in some sacred cows, first among them Social Security. No one is talking about benefit cuts, understand, but trimming planned increases and raising the retirement age.

Even that will take a fight.

Every program has someone defend it, someone who benefits. The government can be changed, but not without an upheaval. Not without cost. And not without agreement that we need to bring fiscal sanity to Washington.

A balanced-budget amendment would be a good start. So would a plan to save Social Security from bankruptcy. So, in fact, would be an end to earmarks. It might be symbolic, but symbols can be powerful.

So why not try it?
- Steve Haynes



Being thankful for our "Home"

Our Pennsylvania kids will not be home for any of the holidays. The sisters are going to PA right before Christmas and all the girls are going into NYC to see a Broadway Play and go to the Today Show!

Then I've promised Craig and Patricia tickets for the Pin Stripe Bowl at Yankee Stadium, Dec 29; if that is where KSU goes. It seems like rather a lot of fun and celebration for them. Why would they feel lonely or like they are missing something?

Then someone asked me what we were doing for Thanksgiving? I had not really thought about that. I don't see them cooking a turkey, making rolls, pies, and so on. They do have friends but their friends are locals and probably have their own family things.

That's when it struck me holidays are not so much about food or how many fun diversions are available. Holidays are about HOME.

In this case the HOME the kids long for is my house. It's easy to discount the importance of what it means to be here. I'm here every day. And trust me not much goes on!

I had my right knee replaced Nov 8 and I'm still recuperating. I could do a turkey dinner but I'm not going to. I

This Too Shall Pass
Nancy Hagman



may bake some rolls. I will probably do pie. The girls who can come home have promised to bring food. So since I have as good an excuse as I'm ever going to get, I believe I'll just sit on the couch. (Don't tell anyone but I'm really doing fabulous, I NEEEEEEEEED to milk this thing just a little!)

I've been doing a lot of sitting on the couch because I'm not released to drive. True the foot moves a little slow but compared to some of the people that drive in this town I have the reflexes of a 16 year old. Oh well, a topic to discuss with Doc when the staples come out Tuesday.

Being confined to the house makes me a tad grumpy, which is at odds with my usual personality. Anyone who knows me knows I'm always a ray of sunshine, never a complaint from these lips!

Okay---that may not be completely true. But I do try not to loose the ability to laugh at myself. Sometimes we all feel

just miserable. Sometimes we deserve to! A lot of things are hard to get through.

That's the thing about Thanksgiving above all other holidays: It helps us recognize what gets us through the rough spots!

A former pastor at Lenora, Phil Ramer, always said his habit of giving thanks for food before every meal helped him greatly when he was in then army. It's hard to complain about something you have just thanked God for! He was on to something.

"Please" and "Thank You"; that is what Mrs. Mai taught the kids in kindergarten.

There are many things we wish for, things we will never get. When we ask, do we think we are entitled, or do we say "Please"? When a request is granted do we say "Thank You"?

What am I thankful for this year? Nurses, doctors and even Physical Therapy! All the food on the table; traditional or not. A warm house, electricity, running water!!!

But mostly I'm thankful I'm HOME even as I miss those who are not. There is a joy in that also. How wonderful that we have a bond that makes our hearts long for each other!

Happy Thanksgiving!

It can all change in the blink of an eye

"It was an accident. It could've happened to anyone. It could have been the other way around," reflects Rachelle Friedman. At a time when we witness so much blame and throw so many stones, I welcomed the story of a young woman's incredible spirit. Ms. Friedman, a 22 year old college graduate, seemingly had it all, the education, and the fiancé, an upcoming wedding, preceded by a bachelorette party. But at the party everything changed in a split second leaving her paralyzed.

The aspect of this story which is so endearing to me is the reaction of all involved. No one is blaming anyone. In their minds, it was exactly what it was, a playful poolside push which ended in disaster. Neither Ms. Friedman nor the family is blaming the unidentified best friend. These girls have been best friends for years. What a wonderful example they set for all of us. Accidents happen, blame

Phase II
Mary Kay Woodyard



serves no purpose, and life goes on.

The young fiancé, Chris Chapman, says they will marry hopefully within the year. The only thing keeping them from setting a wedding date is insurance. With their combined incomes, his as a school teacher and hers from a non-profit, they would not qualify for Medicaid. In order for her to regain as much of her mobility as possible, therapy and treatment will be mandatory, all expensive and critical.

As a great advocate for commitment, this couple reflects what it is all about.

Their belief is they are a couple, before and after. Neither was surprised at the other's approach to the situation. The things which bound them before still bind them. It isn't physical looks, or educational or career accomplishments, or financial potential. It is attitude and personality. It is who they were before and what they will be following the accident.

Good wishes for continued improvement to the young woman. The young couple and their families and friends have taken a very difficult situation and turned it into a positive lesson for all of us. Will all their days be great? Not always. Will they weather the storm? Only time will tell. But for today, we can rejoice in their hopefulness and congratulate the young couple, their family and her best friends. Together they have taught us forgiveness, hopefulness and a lot about moving on.



Dear Editor:
Every November for National Hospice Month, Hospice Services reaches out to our community to raise awareness about the compassionate care that hospice and palliative care provide patients and families coping with serious and life-limiting illness. This month of awareness provides an opportunity for us to remind people that hospice care and palliative care helps patients and families focus on living.

This surprises some people. Those of us who have worked in the field have seen firsthand how hospice and palliative care can improve the quality of life. And research shows that families report a better quality of life under hospice and palliative care. To further the surprise, there's a growing body of research showing that hospice and palliative care may prolong the lives of some people who receive care.

The hospice team provides expert medical care to keep patients comfortable and able to enjoy time with loved ones. The hospice team answers questions, offers advice on what to expect, and helps families with the duties of being a caregiver. The team also provides emotional and spiritual support for the entire family.

With the help of hospice, patients and families alike can focus on what's most important - enjoying life together and living as fully as possible.

This important message lasts beyond the month of November and is important all year round.

The time to find out more about hospice and palliative care is right now. There is more that can be done.

For more information, contact Hospice Services at 800-315-5122 (in Phillipsburg 785-543-2900) or visit <http://www.hospicenwks.net>www.hospicenwks.net.

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Dear Editor,
It has been a tradition in our family for as long as I can remember to drive around and look at the Christmas lights. My children love driving by the courthouse because it is all lit up with lights. Now that there will be no lights on the courthouse my children and I are very disappointed. Why mess with tradition? I am sure that my family is not the only family that does this during the holidays. You can go to any other town and the courthouse is all bright with lights. I say if you are going to be a scrooge, be one at your own home. How disappointing is it going to be to go see Santa at the courthouse with no Christmas lights. I also say add more not take them away. My kids and everyone else's kids love seeing them.
Jessica Karnes

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