

Earmark ban not magic, but it might send a signal

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.

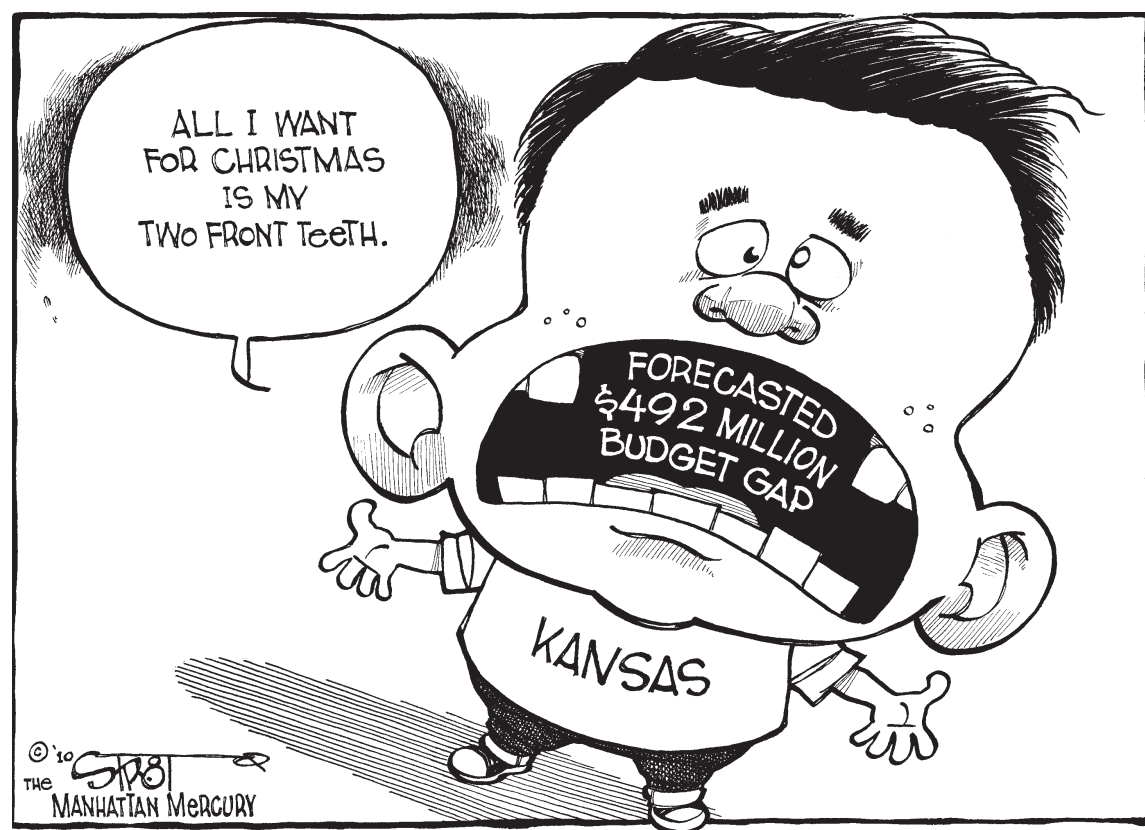
And voters will have to agree to cuts in some sacred cows, first among them Social Security. No one is talking about benefit cuts, understand, but trimming planned increases and raising the retirement age.

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*



Some things never do change

Since Thanksgiving is approaching, I’ve tried to think of my most memorable holidays.

The New Year’s Eve we spent at a funeral home comes to mind.

Then there was the Christmas when my baby sister got sick and tore off all her clothes, screaming that there were bugs in them. Bugs with feathers on their tails sort of tipped Mom and Dad off that this was not an insect infestation. The doctor came to the house and gave her a penicillin shot.

That was a looooooong time ago. Little sister is now well past 50 and doing just fine.

Then there is Thanksgiving.

The only thing I really remember about Thanksgiving at home is that Dad didn’t like turkey and he loved to hunt. We usually had pheasant, quail and rabbit on the table instead of the iconic bird. Only when my aunt came from Kansas City for the holidays and we went to Gramma and Grandpa’s, did we have turkey. Then I had to sit on a piano stool and eat at the card table with the rest of the children.

More memorable, I guess, is the year Steve and the kids and I went to Wyoming to spend the holiday with oldest daughter.

This was her first Thanksgiving away from home, so we packed up



Open Season

By *Cynthia Haynes*
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her two younger siblings and set out for Casper, Wyo., about an eight-to-nine-hour drive when the weather cooperates.

This was daughter’s first apartment, since she had spent her entire college career living in the dorms at the University of Colorado.

It was a small one-bedroom place, sparsely furnished. We slept on a futon, her sister slept with her and her brother got the couch.

Fixing a big holiday meal in her efficiency kitchen was an adventure. The oven was barely big enough for the turkey, let alone stuffing, pies and green-bean casserole.

I don’t remember how we did it, but we did it. Thanksgiving turkey, mashed potatoes, green beans, stuffing, cranberry sauce and a pumpkin pie were all set out in her tiny place. This took me back to my youth, since there was no dining room and Thanksgiving was once again served on a card table.

Then there was this photographer

who had to work Thanksgiving, so she invited him over for supper. The six of us sat on the couch or floor eating with one hand and using the other to shoo off her two cats, which were trying to help themselves.

It was a fun and memorable feast, and after dinner we watched a football game on her 12-inch black-and-white television.

This year, Steve and I will go to the community Thanksgiving feed and eat with others who have no family or don’t want to bother making a big meal.

Oldest daughter will be having her sister, brother-in-law, niece, mother-in-law, father-in-law, five friends and the photographer, who married her many years ago, at her Thanksgiving table. They’ll eat at a real table with real chairs and watch football on a huge flat-screen television. But first, they’ll have to fend off the four cats, which are trying to help themselves.

Some things never change.

At long last, he listens to her

In my husband’s opinion, if empathy was money, I would be bankrupt.

It’s not that I don’t care (I do). But if I can’t do anything to fix the problem, I want you to find someone who can.

This all stems from the fact that Jim had not been feeling well. In fact, he had begun a slow decline. He told me how bad he felt and I told him he needed to see a doctor. He said I wasn’t empathetic. I said, “I’m not a doctor.”

I can hold someone’s hand while they’re retching into the toilet. I can hold a broken arm while we drive to the hospital. I can put a bandage on a wound. But I cannot see inside someone and diagnose what the problem is. Nor can I prescribe the proper treatment.

So, if that’s being unsympathetic — I’m guilty.

Bottom line is he finally agreed to seek treatment, and I’m glad he did. He was retaining so much fluid that his heart was doing double duty to keep up and his lungs were stressed. Two days in the hospital fixed him up — good as new. Maybe even better.

Turns out Jim is a good hospital patient. He ate all his food, listened to his nurses and kept everyone laughing. Hospitals are not places you want to go, but if you need to, you’re sure glad it’s there. Everyone was kind yet professional, the facility was immaculate and the food was quite good. His only complaint was the “no-salt” order on his tray. His doctor hasn’t given the order, but I’m sure we need to cut down on



Out Back

By *Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts*
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his salt. It wouldn’t hurt me to learn how to cook with other seasonings anyway.

It’s going to be a low-key Thanksgiving. For the first time in years, we’re not going to Dallas for the holiday. We were just there a few weeks ago and will be going back in March, so the decision had been made to stay home.

With Jim’s stint in the hospital, it’s a good deal we weren’t planning any extensive travel.

I have a small turkey thawing in the fridge, and we will share the day with son James and our soon to be favorite daughter-in-law Charlotte. Lest you think we’re playing favorites: Charlotte will be our only daughter-in-law.

A grocery store employee shared this overheard exchange between a mother and her 8- or 9-year-old son. The two were shopping in the juice and bottled drink department when the boy said, “Mom, can we get some more of that Coors Light drink?”

The mother looked around to see if anyone had heard and whispered to him, “Don’t say that! It’s Crystal-Light! Crystal-Light!”

Have a wonderful Thanksgiving. If you can’t be with family, find someone else who’s going to be alone and ask them to join you. It’s a day to celebrate being alive and having enough. I know I’m thankful to have my husband home.

Photo Policy

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Face to face with — Bambi

I stepped out the door, and she jumped. I jumped. We looked at each other across 10 to 15 feet of yard, a standoff.

Neither one of us seemed willing to back off.

Hey, it was my yard. She was eating my food. Well, the bird food Cynthia put out the day before. We were in Colorado to close the house for the winter, and apparently, she wanted to help us get rid of all the birdseed.

Well, Cynthia thought she was feeding birds, anyway. Apparently this one bag of food she bought has a lot of cracked corn in it. A mule deer must be able to smell that stuff a half mile away.

And the neighborhood deer — we took to calling her Bambi — found it earlier this summer. She’s gotten so she can empty a tube of the stuff in about half an hour, licking at the openings with her tongue, something that takes birds a couple of days to peck away.

Eventually, I went on to the car to retrieve some papers I’d forgotten. Bambi backed out into the street, but no farther. She seems to have lost her fear of humans, which could be a costly mistake this fall.

As soon as I went back inside, she was back at the deer feeder. So I went back to the car and got the camera. I learned something: auto focus doesn’t work too well when there’s no light to focus with. Took a while to adjust, but I did get some pictures.

Like I said, Bambi has been around all summer. Last time we arrived, I noticed the dog stationary



Along the Sappa

By *Steve Haynes*
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in the side yard. She refused to come when I called.

Usually, when we let her out after 10 hours in the car, she runs her fool head off, so I figured something was up.

There, out in the empty lot next door, was Bambi, facing off with Annie, our Brittany.

Behind were her two half-grown, spotted fawns. They’d been bedded down in the soft grass behind the neighbor’s house.

Earlier in the year, after she’s learned the trick of eating out of the bird feeder, Cynthia switched to a mix that didn’t have any corn in it. She went away after a couple of nights.

Later in the summer, we’d see her and the growing fawns wandering around the neighborhood. Mostly, they graze and browse, eat stuff deer eat. Unless, apparently, they happened to smell cracked corn.

I wasn’t the only one to be startled in the yard. My sister was pretty surprised one night when she stepped out to find the deer at the bird feeder, too. Lacy’s cat, Frank, who accompanied us because he had an infection that needed treatment, came face to face with her, too. Frank wasn’t backing off, but when

I opened the door, he sure ran back inside fast.

Anyway, the birds had been a little slow in taking up Cynthia’s dinner invitation, and she was worried she might have food left over. That was before Bambi emptied two of her four tube feeders.

The birds were back this morning, but I have a feeling whatever they leave, the deer will get.

It’s not that we want to feed the deer. The game wardens discourage feeding wildlife, especially deer. And bears. And we don’t intentionally do that. With bears, you can wind up on the menu.

But like a hungry bear, this deer does not take no for an answer.

From the Bible

And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?

Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like.

St. Luke 6, 46-47

Holiday gesture really a blessing

To the Editor:

During this season of Thanksgiving, I want to take a moment and thank a very special person. I can’t give the name, as she has asked to be anonymous.

This person, without hesitation or a second thought, gave a gift to a special little girl because she saw an opportunity. I was moved beyond comprehension and it challenged me to look closer at given opportunities to make a difference in another person’s life without regard to my own situation. Isn’t this what Thanksgiving should be about?

Remembering all the blessings we have, being thankful for those

blessings, and giving back to those we see in need. I challenge each and every one of you to watch for given opportunities and to step out of your

comfort zone — become a blessing to someone else as this person was to a little girl.

Robin Rouse, Oberlin

Letter to the Editor

Write

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