

Congress needs to end bogus telephone charges

If Congress ever does anything except debate the budget, it needs to change the federal laws which allow unscrupulous scammers access to our phone bills.

Unauthorized charges cost Americans about \$2 billion a year, according to a study by the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee. Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-West Virginia), who is leading an effort to change the rules, says these "mystery fees" show up on landline phone bills through a process known as "cramming."

Cramming started after changes in the industry, and federal law, following the breakup of the Bell System monopoly. Sen. Rockefeller blames major phone companies like AT&T (the former Southwestern Bell, or SBC) for not cleaning up the problem.

"It's illegal, it's wrong, it's scamming," he asked at a recent hearing. "Why haven't you cleaned up your act?"

An industry spokesman claimed the companies had made progress, but acknowledged the problem continues.

Scammers get access to the billing system through small firms which supposedly offer some legitimate telecommunications service. They attach bogus bills to home and business accounts, and the phone companies claim they are obligated to include these in your monthly bills. Apparently, they make no effort to scrutinize these charges.

When an odd charge appears on a phone bill, the companies routinely tell people that it's their job to contact the firm making the

claim. Services may be described as voice-mail, directory service or web hosting, among others.

These firms usually will remove the charge, but it costs the consumer or business time and money to accomplish that. When the charge is small, some people just pay. One expert described spending 15 hours to straighten out bills for a group of restaurants.

Whatever the case, when people pay, the scammers smile all the way to the bank.

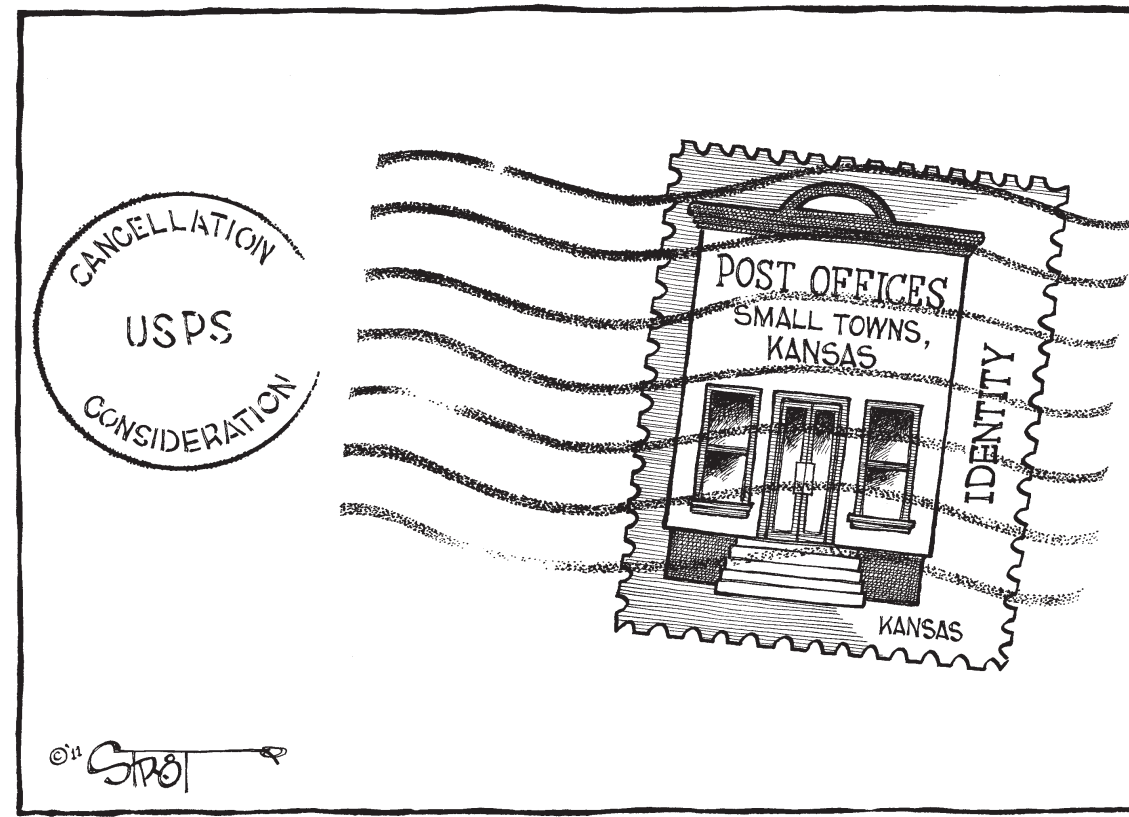
The solution, rather than try to make this system work, would be to repeal the law which allows telecoms to piggyback their charges on landline bills. That'd save the big telcos money and save consumers from having to pay for a cumbersome, unworkable system.

Small firms would have to bill people on their own, but the legitimate need appears to be just the tail that wags this big, smelly ol' dog.

Right now, the effort to reform the billing system is bogged down in the general morass of delays in Congress, partisan infighting and the overall budget battle. What's needed, though, is not a reform, but an end to third-party billing on phone statements. It seems that most are bogus, anyway, so "reform" will accomplish nothing.

If you have received a bogus bill and think this system stinks, it's time to write our senators, Jerry Moran and Pat Roberts, and Rep. Tim Huelskamp and ask them to join with Democrats to end this travesty.

— Steve Haynes



Fair always comes too soon

The county fair comes too early every year. I'm never ready.

Each year, I think, "Why not enter something in the open classes at the fair?"

"I'm a pretty good gardener, so why not show some of those tomatoes, green beans, corn, green peppers, cucumbers or cabbages that I grow every year?"

Well, there's one good reason. It's never ready.

When fair time rolls around each year, the peas, radishes, lettuce and spinach are all gone. The corn, carrots and cabbages are nowhere near ready to pick, and the squash, tomatoes, green peppers and cucumbers are just coming on.

If an entry was one yellow squash or one cucumber, I'd have a chance. But no, they want a selection. That I don't have.

I'd probably have enough tomatoes, except Steve keeps eating my entries.

In another month, mind you, I'll be leaving vegetables on strangers' doorsteps. But not yet. Not now. Not this week.

Speaking of gardens, I'm waging war against the grasshoppers again.

Now, mind you, I believe in organic gardening. I'm willing to share some produce with nature — not tomato horn worms — but the bugs can eat a few leaves and I won't complain too much.



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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But those darned grasshoppers are treating my green beans like dessert. They don't ever eat a whole bean. They just take a bite out of each pod. That's sort of like the couple who go to dinner. He orders dessert and she just takes a bite.

I'd prefer the grasshoppers eat all of one bean instead of taking a bite out of every one in the patch, though.

Right now, I'm fighting bugs with bugs. I've done everything I can to encourage the spiders to take over my garden. The webs over my cabbage plants are incredibly beautiful. I hope to have some really nice cabbages this fall. Or I might have some really pretty cabbages full of itsy bitsy spiders.

Oh well, we'll see how this one turns out.

And, while on the subject of spiders, I saved one's life the other day.

I was on pharmacy duty in Norton when the tech let out a little yelp and pointed out a large wolf spider hiding under a counter. The inside

of a pharmacy is no place for a spider of any kind, and their life span tends to be very short once the girls discover them.

So, I got a plastic container and shoed the spider into it. I then coaxed a manager to let me out the back door. I crossed the parking lot and tenderly let the spider go in the grass. The manager's look told me that she thought I had lost my mind. The tech was relieved and the spider was just glad to be out of there.

Steve did a little traffic control the other night as well. As I was driving up to the garage, he noted that Toadally, our pet toad, was out in the middle of the driveway.

Steve got out of the car and herded the annoyed toad, who was finding great pickings out there under the lights, back to his usual spot by the bushes.

Come to think of it, Toadally is beginning to remind me of Jabba the Hut.

Ah, well. It's summertime, and nature is taking over. Don't ya love it?

Wedding by lake tops week

The main event of our weekend was the wedding of Jim's great-nephew, Everett, and his beautiful bride, Jordan.

Jim performed the ceremony and, as always, I cried when he got to the part about God saying, "It's not good for man to be alone. And, he caused a deep sleep to come upon Adam. Then, God removed a rib from Adam and created Eve. Not from his head so as to lord it over her; and not from his feet so as to trample her; but, from close to his heart so that he might protect her."

I just love that part. It was a beautiful outdoor wedding beside a lake. The stone steps leading down to the water were the altar and the whole outdoors their cathedral. I was glad to see Jordan remained true to her country roots.

Even though she was the picture of poise and beauty, if you looked real close, you could see her bare feet peeking out from beneath her gorgeous gown.

Country girl all the way.

We have the squeakiest desk chair in existence. Jim just complained that I am making too much noise for him to get a nap. I try to sit quietly, but evidently I wiggle more than I was aware of. Now would be a good time to break out the WD40.

Not sure if this is true or not but, I heard that WD40 got its name because it was the 40th experiment when chemists were trying to create a new lubricant, the one that worked. The other 39 failed.

That's how lots of things came



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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to be. I call them happy accidents. How many failures did Thomas Edison have before he finally found the right way to make an incandescent light bulb? Hundreds. But, he never gave up. Silly Putty was the result of a mistake in the laboratory. So were Post-it-Notes. Not sure what all that has to do with anything but, that's where my thoughts took me: Wandering the little rabbit trails of my mind.

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One day when I was leaving the bank in our little town, a stranger parked by the sidewalk asked if there was a library in town.

After giving him directions, I asked what brought him to our town. He told me he and his wife had researched the Great Western Cattle Trail for several years and had recently written and published a book about it.

I thought that sounded interesting, and knowing what a history buff my husband is, I bought one right out of the trunk of the author's car. Had him autograph it and everything.

Jim has poured over that book, comparing its maps to local plats and trying to identify just where the

trail cut through this area and whose land that is now.

When I learned that the Decatur County Museum is taking an excursion bus to revisit the trail and unveil a trail marker, I immediately booked passage for two. The authors will be there, along with the author of a new book giving the Indian's point of view about the Last Indian Raid in Kansas.

The tour is almost two months from now, so it should be nice and cool. I'm really looking forward to it. If you're a history nut like Jim, or just a curious gawker like me, sign up and let's have a good time together. Call the Last Indian Raid Museum at 475-2712.

Write

The Oberlin Herald encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of public interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

Mail letters to 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan., 67749, or by e-mail to oberlinherald@nwkans.com.

Senator unhappy with plan

Over the last few months, the American people have endured the many ups and downs of an ever-changing debate in Congress over whether we should raise the debt ceiling for the 11th time in the last decade.

I, along with many of my colleagues, hoped we could use this moment in history to bring about significant change to the way business is conducted in Washington.

In fact, on March 22, I informed President Obama that I would not vote to raise the debt ceiling in the absence of substantial reductions in spending and structural changes to the way Washington spends taxpayer dollars. In my view, the plan that passed Congress this week failed on both accounts. This legislation might be considered a good "deal" in Washington — but it is not good for the future of America.

The reality is the bill did not offer a solution to the underlying problem of our financial crisis today: our government's out-of-control spending. Even if fully enacted, the bill only slows the growth of spending — but just barely. Next year, this plan will reduce spending by \$21 billion, and \$21 billion may sound like a lot of money, because it is. But given the fact Washington spends \$4 billion more than it takes in each day — those savings will disappear in less than a week.

This deal also ignores the stark



On the Potomac

By Sen. Jerry Moran
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warnings from credit rating agencies, which said a \$4 trillion deficit reduction plan would be necessary to prevent a downgrade in the U.S. credit rating.

The one positive result of the debt debate is that Washington is now talking about how much it should cut instead of how much it can spend. Even though significant cuts did not occur, the debate informed the American people of the magnitude of our spending problem — but that's no reason to pat ourselves on the back.

Can you imagine a family congratulating themselves for talking about their spending habits without ever changing the way they spend money? When Kansas families are in serious financial trouble, they don't just slow down how quickly they spend borrowed money — they cut up their credit cards.

Our national debt now stands at more than \$14 trillion, but under this plan, our debt will continue to grow until it reaches \$22 trillion in 10 years. Over the next three decades,

our debt will become more than three times the size of our entire economy.

This reality served as a wake-up call to Americans last November — and they called on Washington to come up with a responsible solution to this growing problem. Unfortunately, business as usual continued this week in our nation's capital, and solving our fiscal problems was pushed off for yet another day.

There is much work to be done in the months ahead, and I will redouble my efforts to bring common sense to Washington and put Kansans back to work.

The money we need to balance our books will come not from tax increases, but revenues that come from a growing economy where Americans are working.

When our economy is strong, the federal government can pay down its debt, Americans can provide for their families and we will have the opportunity to see our children and grandchildren pursue the American dream.

Norcatour needs to protest closing

To the Editor:
Hello to the people of Norcatour. As you have most likely heard by now, our way of life here in Norcatour will make a drastic change as the

Letter to the Editor

U.S. Postal Service has slated our post office as one of the 3,600-plus offices to be permanently closed across the nation.

Please join me in contacting our elected officials and voice our concerns on how this will affect our community. We must do this collectively or the post office most certainly will close. The more people we get to voice their opinions, the better chance we have to save it.

Sen. Jerry Moran, state Sen. Ralph Ostmeier and state Rep. Ward Cassidy, our 120th District representative, would be the obvious, closest-to-home choices to

contact. We also could write to Gov. Sam Brownback, Sen. Pat Roberts and U.S. Reps. Tim Huelskamp, Lynn Jenkins, Mike Pompeo and Kevin Yoder.

Another place we must voice our opinion is to the Postal Regulatory Commission. Please take a few minutes to voice your opinion to these people, as the post office is very vital to the survival of, and the way of life we enjoy in, Norcatour. Time is of the essence, as the service is going to make rulings on the locations soon.

Scott Hartzog
Norcatour

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