

There is no such thing as a free federal lunch

Parents and students are astir about cutbacks in school lunches intended by our nanny government to fight teenage obesity: no more seconds on meat, no oil in the salad dressing, more fruits and vegetables, less of the carbs and meat kids sometimes crave.

Especially put out are the parents of kids in sports, who might need two to three times the calories each day that the average child could get by on.

The new rules strike at the heart of this bunch: the football and volleyball players, runners and others who practice every day.

The no-seconds rule is the biggest visible change, but ever-tighter limits on salt and carbs, and increased servings of fruits and vegetables, may have more impact.

So, if the football players are still hungry? "They can always go back for another helping at the salad bar," one school official sniffed.

Or, they might, probably will, go load up on candy, chips and other unhealthy snacks between school and practice, then down a huge supper when a big lunch would have been better for them.

The reaction of administrators is something like, "Well, it's a federal decision, and we have to go along."

Which is both disingenuous and not exactly true. What's true is this is a decision by the Obama administration, and while they don't have to go along with it, they will — because they don't want to lose their federal lunch money.

Always the strings with that federal money.

Our schools are addicted to federal money, which can make up a big chunk of a district's budget, depending on what programs it's heavy into.

Obesity is an epidemic, no doubt. The only debate should be about whether it's something the federal government should try to fix, or whether it's best left to states, school districts and families.

Administrators should be much more concerned about the damage done by No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top and all these redundant and sometimes harmful tests our kids are taking.

But the lunch issue strikes to the heart of the matter when kids come home and say that they're hungry because of Obama's rules, or that they won't eat the salads because the oil-free dressing "tastes icky."

As John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau points out, kids don't come in one size, and one size of meal doesn't necessarily fit every one.

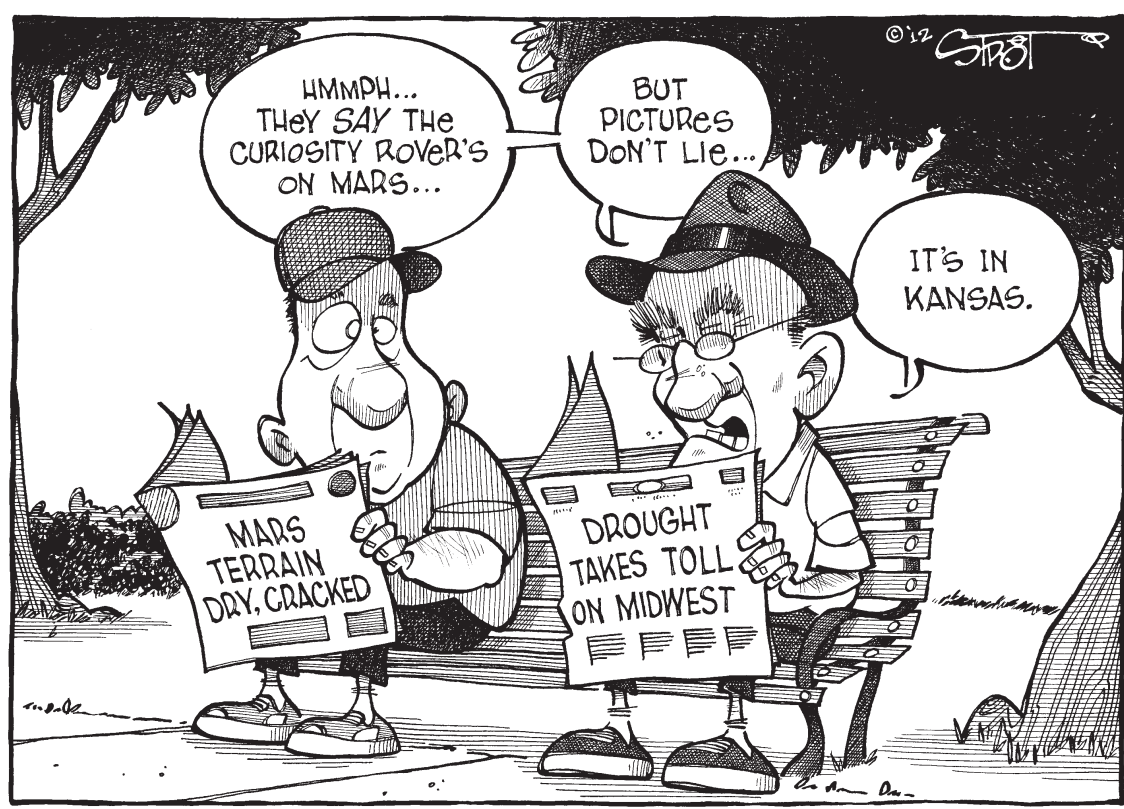
It's also true that in small, rural schools, where most kids take part in some sports activity, obesity may not be the problem it is in the city.

However, the lunch ladies don't want to have to look at the kids and decide who's fat and who can have a second helping, either. One size is a lot easier to deal with.

As long as there's federal money involved, the do-gooders are going to win. Nanny knows best, and if we know what's good for our federal money, we'll go along.

There's an alternative, but no one wants to hear about it.

— Steve Haynes



Friends miss vultures, storms

Friends from New Jersey showed up on Labor Day. They were driving from their vacation in Jackson Hole, Wyo., back home.

Yeah, they're crazy, but we love 'em.

Two years ago when they came our way, Steve took them out storm spotting, and we had a good one for them. They also enjoyed watching the buzzards on the Oberlin water tower up the street.

They were a little disappointed this year. The buzzards have moved on to a grain elevator south of town, and you can't chase what isn't there. The storms have definitely been avoiding us this year.

On the other hand, no large branches hit the house in front of their bedroom window like the one two years ago.

They didn't make it last year because just as they were ready to leave home, they looked around. There were their children — all teen-agers, all drivers, all at home. They decided that a two-week road trip to the other side of the country was probably not a good idea with four almost, but not quite, adults in the house.

It just seemed like a recipe for disaster.

But this year, the kids were scattered. Some had headed off to college, some to jobs and one to overseas.

Now this is the same family to whom we delivered a kachina doll in March in Washington.

One of their sons bought the artifact in Albuquerque and found



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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out it didn't fit in his suitcase. So, the kachina went to Colorado for a few months. Kansas for a few more and finally went into one of our old suitcases on a trip to Washington, where we met up with its owner and made the transfer.

The kachina then went home to New Jersey by train, still in the oversized suitcase, and on to New York, where the young man goes to college, wearing it's seat belt.

We asked after the much-traveled doll and were told that he was safely in New York for the fall semester.

The suitcase, however, was another story.

I really had hoped I'd never see it again. It was old, some of the zippers were broken and we never used it anymore, which is why I designated it as a packing case.

However, our New Jersey friends were bound and determined to return it and had put it safely away with their "stuff to go west." There it had sat since March.

Then when they started loading up the car for their outward trip, it was gone.

They eventually determined that their daughter, who left the

week previous for Jordan (as in the Middle East) had used it to pack her stuff.

Well, I'm jealous. That suitcase is having a better time than I am, but it'll probably have some really good stories when it returns from overseas.

Or, if I'm really lucky, maybe it'll stay in Jordan!

In the U.S.A.

"Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected and handed on for them to do the same, or one day we will spend our sunset years telling our children and our children's children what it was once like in the United States where men were free."

— Ronald Reagan, 40th president, 1981-1989

Hen at bottom of pecking list

It's a case of "The Home Team" versus "The Intruder."

After two days in a separate cage inside the chicken coop, I thought Henny Penny, our single, half-grown, hen, would be accepted by the rest of the flock. Boy, was I wrong.

After putting feed in the big girls' span I opened H.P.'s cage door. She came right out and headed for food.

Bang! One of the hens nailed her with a peck. She tried again. This time it was the rooster that cocked his head sideways before landing a hard peck on her head. Another hen ran her into a corner, pecking all the way. Poor Henny Penny. She was scared to death.

I came to her rescue and put her back in her cage with her own food and water. The next day, we tried it again with pretty much the same results. I'm afraid to leave her alone with the flock. They could all attack her at once and then she would be done for.

It seems like a lot of trouble for one chicken, but Jim is going to varmit-proof the calf pen, which is right beside the chicken run, and give H.P. a safe home free from fear of roommates.

Looking into the future, I wonder if Henny Penny will be as mean to the new batch of chicks that are in her old coop. Will she remember her mistreatment and offer an olive branch to her little sisters? Doubtful. Chickens are chickens, and the term



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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"pecking order" is one they deserve and work hard to preserve.

—ob-

Hats off to all doctors. I couldn't begin to do what they do.

Jim's big toe was hurting him, but by the time he asked me to look at it, it was too late. Even to my untrained eye, I knew it didn't look good and told him he needed to see a doctor. It must have hurt enough that he didn't argue with me, and I made his appointment.

Sure enough, our doctor said the toenail would have to come off, but not until he got the infection under control with antibiotics. He came home with a prescription and instructions to soak his foot every night in epsom salts.

I played nursemaid and fixed his foot bath every night, then bandaged his toe and put on his socks. One night, Jim said, "Maybe I should have you bring me some mittens. That way, you could be waiting on me hand and foot."

On the day of his appointment for the toenail removal, I tried to think of any excuse I could as to why I

shouldn't go in with him. But I always came back to the knowledge that Jim would go with me if the tables were turned, so I "gutted it up" and went along.

When our doctor came in with the needle to numb his toe, I couldn't watch.

Jim didn't flinch. He said she did it so well, he never even felt it. Subsequently, he didn't feel the other shots, either.

I still couldn't watch when she pulled out the pliers to pull off the nail. All I could think of was Nazi torture chambers. I was ready to tell her anything she wanted to know, and she wasn't even touching me.

It was over in an instant, with Jim cracking jokes all the way. I was white as a sheet and he was having a ball. However, the last straw came when he said he was going to cut the toenail in half and make me a set of earrings.

Just for that, I gave him a double dose of pain killer and he didn't wake up for five hours. I don't get even; I get ahead.

Birds attack outdoor feeder

They line up on the roof across the street, a dozen or more at a time, ready for the attack.

Soon, they'll swoop in for the, er, kill, if you can call it that. They'll pounce four, five, even six at a time, hanging on every perch, reaching around the tube, even hanging upside down like bats.

They probably spill as much as they eat, but never mind. Their siblings will clean that up, them and the squirrels.

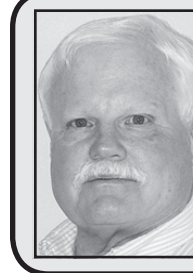
Not a scene out of some obscure Alfred Hitchcock movie. Just our neighborhood blackbirds.

Two or three pair of redwings nested in our area this summer. At first, it was just the parents at the feeder, trying to balance on perches meant for sparrows.

A full-grown blackbird is at least twice the size of a sparrow, maybe larger. Too big for a one-inch perch, or so you'd think. But they find ways. Blackbirds are very resourceful, we've found.

They'll perch on one side of a feeding tube, reach around and peck food from the other side. Or they'll perch on one level and peck below. A couple today tried to perch upside down and feed. I'm not saying that worked, but I watched them try.

Early on, nearly all our visitors were males, with their fancy black, gold and red plumage. They must feed mama and the babies the way they work at it. Seldom if ever did the dun-colored females show up at



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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the feeders.

All that changed in July, though. All the sudden, perches were full up with brown birds about the size of an adult male redwing. Eventually, I realized these were juvenile blackbirds, fledglings now foraging on their own, competing for perch space with their fathers.

Now, they're getting their adult plumage, and you can see where their red wing patches will be. These are sort of mottled right now, mixed brown and red, but they are becoming more distinct. Or not, in which case, you're dealing with a budding girl redwing.

Whole families of them will line up along the peak of the neighbors' roof, waiting a turn at the feeders. Then they swoop in. Their antics are entertaining, but they're not the biggest birds we get at the sparrow feeders.

That would be the Stellar's jays, huge blue-and-black monsters that seem to love milo and millet as much as anyone. Some try to hover, like a humming bird. Others try to

grab a perch. The tubes are 18 inches apart, but I've seen jays perch on one and try to eat from the other. Hunger seems to be quite a motivator.

Then there are the mourning doves, almost as big as a jay, if a little more sedate. They'll come in, perch on the top of the mounting pole and survey the feeders, trying to figure out how to tap the goodies.

If all else fails, they can clean up the leftovers on the ground. That's what the ground squirrel is doing this week.

Cynthia had some tubes out there with little trays attached to catch the spills until he showed up. He could shimmy up the half-inch bar holding the feeders and then jump out to a tray, fill his cheeks, then go home with a load. She fixed that.

Now, he's cleaning up the ground with the less dexterous redwings and the jays, when they show. The free lunch is over, at least for squirrels.

Gotta go now. Cynthia is going to fill her feeders, and I may have to run interference for her.

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