

Editorials



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Letters

Costs involved in veterinary services

I'd like to respond to Sheila Ringer's letter [Feb. 5 letters] concerning the cost of veterinary services.

I am a semi-retired veterinarian. I have four degrees, all related to agriculture or veterinary medicine. I am also a Diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Preventive Medicine, which requires additional training and a series of examinations. The degrees represent 11 years of college at Texas A&M.

College is not cheap, and certainly not as economical as it was 40 years ago. Today, the average student loan debt of a recent graduate from veterinary school is a little over \$94,000. In 1970-71, I had the type of veterinary practice I thought I had gone to college for in Lamesa -- about 70 percent cattle, 15 percent ranch horses, 15 percent small animals, a few hogs and one monkey. I had one employee. I was my own receptionist and bookkeeper. The practice at that time required around \$100 a day to open the doors. I still remember my most financially rewarding day: I spent a very long day palpating 700 cows at \$1 a head for a large Panhandle ranch.

I went back into the U.S. Army in 1971 because I had no time for myself or family. Seemed like I was working 24/7 by myself. Occasionally, I'd check into a local motel to watch a Dallas Cowboys game on a Sunday afternoon, but people would find me and knock on the door. Think about that a bit.

I spent 26 years in the Army, retired, moved to Lampasas County and joined two of my classmates in a three-practice group in Temple. I sold my practice last year. According to my accountant, I needed to make somewhere between \$1,500 and \$1,600 a day just to cover expenses, and that was before I made a buck. I earned more net income from my status as a retired colonel, disabled veteran and former POW than as a practicing veterinarian working 5 1/2 days a week.

My younger brother, also a veterinarian and former professor of veterinary physiology and pharmacy at A&M, had a mixed-animal practice in Austin. He quit full-time active practice in 1984. His clients were mostly under-achieving lawyers by day, cowmen by night and quick to sue any time. He never lost a case, but frivolous and unfounded lawsuits cost time and money.

My son, also a veterinarian, built a first-class veterinary hospital in San Antonio a couple of years ago. His loan to build and equip was for \$1.5 million. His monthly expenses are between \$80,000 and \$90,000, and that is before he makes any money. He has one other veterinarian on staff. He has a lot more courage than I do.

Most costs of a veterinary practice are driven by rules and regulations of the Texas State Board of Veterinary Examiners and various federal agencies' regulations. These agencies and their regulations are there to protect the consumer to assure them they are receiving services of high quality and lawfully appropriate, but not inexpensive service.

My malpractice insurer requires that I keep adequate records to defend malpractice suits. For example, veterinarians must establish a patient, client and doctor relationship before treating an animal or dispensing drugs and maintain records that prove the animal was examined, diagnosed and treated with appropriate drugs. Many times, one can just go to a feed store or an online pharmacy and obtain the same drugs without any problem if they know what they are doing; however, if I give advice over the phone and someone goes to the feed store and buys what I suggested, I am not only open to libel, but I have broken a regulation and can be fined or receive other administrative justice. I also have a legal duty to refer difficult cases to veterinary specialists, just as a physician is required.

I wholeheartedly agree with Ms. Ringer, the costs of veterinary services are too high, but they are only going to go higher. Small, "country town" and "big city" are the same from a legal point of view. The American Veterinary Medical Association recognizes this problem and is working with various governmental agencies and Congress to solve it. There is no solution yet. I personally have enjoyed the practice of veterinary medicine and would do it all over again.

Tom Kyzar, DVM
Col. (Retired) U.S. Army
Kempner



Military trial and terror

Americans will be learning a lot about themselves as six Islamist terror "suspects" (I guess we have to say, technically) held at Guantanamo Bay finally face trial on murder and war crimes charges connected with 9/11.

A country in which women fall in love with convicted murderers, one largely alienated from the president who brought down Saddam Hussein, may have some surprises in store for foreigners who think the Yanks mean to hang, draw and quarter these lambs.

Prosecutors at the military trials of the six will seek the death penalty in each case. That's as you might suspect, given that the death toll the six are accused of engineering totaled nearly 3,000.

Khalid Sheik Mohammed — do you often see, by the way, more baleful mugs than his, even if physiognomy signifies neither guilt nor innocence? Khalid, I say, supposedly has confessed to numerous anti-U.S. terror activities, with 9/11 the capstone atop the granite shaft. Ramzi bin al-Shibh is said to have signed up for the hijackings, only to fail in his attempt to procure a U.S. visa. He carried out, supposedly, other assignments for the brothers.

What mood the country, and the world, will be in to hear the charges is something we may not know for a while. There's an abstract quality to the setting in which the proceedings will be held. So many accusations about American policy and behavior in the Iraq War have for so long filled the air that portraying the United States as innocent victim of unprovoked attack may be less easy than it seemed back when Khalid & Co. were first hauled in and the snaring of bin Laden himself seemed imminent — or anyway not out of the question.

The corrosive power of Western anti-Westernism has been a work for a long time, dulling the thirst for justice, posing a false equivalence between victims here and victims elsewhere in the twilight war on terror. "Can't we all just get along?" is the refrain of many, many Americans and, especially, Europeans.

The ponderousness of the Bush administration in not managing sooner to bring the captives to justice has its match in the carping of politicians and Op-ed experts about waterboarding, "torture" and conditions at Guantanamo, as well as the precariousness of efforts to assure dear Khalid and the rest fair trials. None of which is beneath notice. None of which deserves cen-

William Murchison



trality in considering how — and whether, of course — we're to punish the alleged perpetrators of the worst act of barbarity ever carried out on American soil.

How do we do this thing and keep the Iraq War out of it? And George W. Bush? And Don Rumsfeld? And Condi Rice? It's certainly not doable in any complete sense. Even insulated from the civilian court system, the military tribunal charged with trying the six can't consider itself as operating on the slopes of Olympus, where never is seen a protest march or an incendiary posting on a leftwing blog. Certainly not with a presidential campaign under way.

And yet the thing has to be done — even if done poorly (though clearly that's not what we want). Too many people may be watching, yes — among them the terrorist brethren abroad, looking for every sign of moral slippage or confusion on America's part. And planning how to exploit that slippage, that confusion.

A nation unwilling — or afraid? — to punish its enemies firmly and resolutely, and in accordance with what they deserve, is a nation with problems that need defining: say, in a presidential election.

Listening to the candidates, as the proceedings go forth, could be instructive. I think we all know that John McCain — despite past riffs on waterboarding — isn't going to nudge the electorate toward guilt for their country's attempt to bring national enemies to justice. Hillary Clinton? Barack Obama? We'll be listening carefully. And what about death-penalty foes who suppose you can murder 3,000 people and still qualify for lifetime room and board at state expense?

Yes, we'll be learning a lot about ourselves. Possibly too much.

William Murchison is a columnist with Creators Syndicate.

Letters Policy

The Lampasas Dispatch Record encourages letters from its readers. Letters should be to the point, typed if at all possible, and signed. Address and telephone numbers also should be included for verification purposes. Only one letter per writer will be considered in a 60-day period.

Letters will be printed on a space-available basis. Letters should stick with issues, and not simply be personal attacks. Letters endorsing a particular position on issues of local interest will be accepted, however letters endorsing a candidate for political office will not be accepted.

We reserve the right to edit for length, content and potentially libelous statements. Correspondence should be mailed to:

Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 631, Lampasas, TX 76550. Or send an opinion via e-mail to letters@lampasasdispatchrecord.com.

Linda Chavez



Our Congress should enhance its performance

You would have thought Congress was about to hear from a top al-Qaida operative or maybe a mafia kingpin, what with all the accusatory statements and self-righteous indignation being flaunted by members of Congress. But no, an august congressional committee was gathered to waste the taxpayers' time and money interrogating a baseball player, seven-time Cy Young award-winning pitcher Roger Clemens.

And for what? For allegedly using hormones to enhance his performance on the field. I'm sorry, I just can't get my dander up on this one.

I may not be a sports fanatic, but I do admire the tremendous skill and dedication players like Clemens display year in and year out. Our top athletes have always wanted to achieve at the highest levels and have been willing to do whatever possible to get there.

Then, along came substances that professional athletes knew would improve their performance and are used legally in other contexts. Sure, the drugs — steroids, human growth hormone and whatever else drug companies can whip up that make muscles grow stronger and more quickly — have some pretty nasty side effects that may endanger the health of those who choose to take them. But shouldn't this be the individual's choice?

There are serious risks to using steroids and human growth hormones, but to treat these drugs as if they were equivalent to cocaine or other illegal substances is terribly misguided. Doctors prescribe steroids and HGH every day because the drugs have important uses in speeding recovery from certain injuries and in treating inflammation, asthma, delayed onset of puberty, body wasting in AIDS patients, even low sex drive in post-menopausal women. Cocaine, heroin, psychedelics and other illegal drugs have no such benefits.

As employers, Major League Baseball, the National Football League, the National Basketball Association and other sports associations have the right to set up rules that forbid the use of performance-enhancing drugs by their players. If the owners want to test their players and prohibit those who use certain drugs from playing, fine. Let them penalize those who break the rules, even kick them out of the game.

But that does not mean Congress or the Executive Branch should try to turn this into a public policy issue, much less a crime. It was ridiculous for President Bush to include steroid use by professional athletes as one of his priority concerns in his 2004 State of the Union address and even more outrageous for Congress to hold hearings on the subject.

The sheer hypocrisy is staggering. We are a drug- and performance enhancing-obsessed culture. Americans spend billions each year on drugs to make us look better and perform stronger. I wonder how many members of Congress have taken Viagra or had Botox injections — and the latter, which is a form of botulinum, one of the most deadly toxins on earth, has been linked to several deaths. Yet these politicians want to criminalize the behavior of athletes who do roughly the equivalent. Is America really a better country because Marion Jones is in jail and Barry Bonds may be headed there?

I don't know if Roger Clemens was entirely truthful at last week's hearings, but I strenuously object to my tax dollars being used by Congress to grill him under oath. And I will be outraged if one penny is spent trying to prove he perjured himself. We have better things to do with our limited resources, and Congress certainly has more important issues to deal with. No wonder Congress is held in such low esteem by Americans, with barely over 20 percent approval ratings.

We are a nation at war. We have a Social Security and Medicare crisis looming. We have a tax system that rewards borrowing instead of saving or investing. Our education system is failing, despite exponential growth in federal funding over the last several decades. We have an immigration system that stifles economic growth and encourages lawlessness. These are the issues Americans want addressed, not more investigations into whether athletes are using performance enhancing drugs.

Linda Chavez is the author of "An Unlikely Conservative: The Transformation of an Ex-Liberal" and a columnist with Creators Syndicate.

From the Bible

"Make me know Thy ways, O Lord;
Teach me Thy paths.
For Thou art the God of my salvation;
For Thee I wait all the day."

Psalm 25:4-5

Hillary Clinton's personal agenda

Hillary Clinton has been called everything from the wicked witch of the west to the Anti-Christ, and I would be the first to agree she belongs in there somewhere. If one could get inside her head and crawl around a little, you would find a mindset that places her somewhere between Joan of Arc and Katherine the Great; a mindset that places her, in her view, on a higher intellectual, professional and social plain than the rest of us unwashed mortals.

Make no mistake about it, in spite of all the on-camera baby kissing, crowd smoozing and group hugs, Hillary Clinton has nothing but contempt for folks like you and me. We are only insignificant little speed bumps to be gotten around, run over, hoodwinked and coned into believing all the fiction spewed by the liberal national media to the contrary. All of Hillary Clinton's accomplishments, if you can call them that, point to this very attitude.

Her every move is calculated to facilitate her per-

sonal agenda of obtaining power over the government and with that, power over every citizen of this country. To this end, her first action once in the White House via Bill was to assemble a cabal of like-minded individuals, paid with our tax dollars, to engineer a take-over of one-seventh of the U.S. economy.

This portion of our economy was represented by our freedom of choice, free enterprise health-care system. She would have had it replaced by a government-run, single-payer system that would have placed untold strain on our resources and economy.

Her further adventures consisted of Travelgate, the U.S. attorney firings, the placing of her cronies in po-

sitions at the Department of Justice and the Attorney General's office. She stood by her man through Monica Lewinsky and the impeachment process, fully aware that if they impeached Uncle Bill they impeached her, too.

If this weren't enough, she and her husband looted the White House and Air Force One of everything that wasn't tied down after they left office, only to be obliged to return most of the swag by the General Accounting Office. There is a name for that kind of activity, isn't there?

If you would like to learn more of the shenanigans of this deadly duo, I would recommend Christopher Andersen's book, "American Evita." It will make your skin crawl as well as justify why Hillary Clinton scares me and should do the same for every citizen. What's your opinion?

Pete Dennis
Adamsville

Send us your opinion.
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letters@lampasasdispatchrecord.com