OPINION

Guest Editorial

Introducing MovieCare

By Peter Pitts

Imagine turning 65 and finding a letter tucked in your mailbox offering unlimited movie tickets for just twenty-five bucks a month. You read through the fine print, and amazingly, the offer isn't a scam. It's a new federal program called "MovieCare."

Not a bad deal. It's estimated that seniors spend between five and six percent of their income on entertainment, and this new program -- funded by the government -- would cover most of those expenses.

In some ways, Medicare Part D provides the same service, albeit for goods more important than movie tickets. Seniors used to spend about 3.2 percent of their total income on drugs. Thanks to Part D, those expenses have plummeted, and 20 million seniors who previously lacked prescription drug coverage now have it.

Not surprisingly, more than eight in ten beneficiaries are pleased with the drug benefit.

If MovieCare were modeled on the Medicare drug benefit, more seniors than ever before would be able to go to the movies, the vast majority of movies would be available, and beneficiaries would likely enjoy the program as much as they enjoy Part D.

But before long, it's also likely that some congressional lawmakers would decide that MovieCare -- despite its enormous popularity -- was costing taxpayers too much because of heartless movie studio bosses.

We'd see speeches vilifying studio moguls and their "massive" profits. We'd see breathless reports of seniors who went to to see Flags of Our Fathers on a Friday night but ended up trapped in a showing of Man of the Year -- the horror!

Mostly, though, we'd hear endless reports about how movies -- even subsidized ones -- cost too much. Naturally, it would be the government's job to do something about it.

Soon enough, some fiery populist in Congress would take center stage, declaring that the government needs to step in to negotiate movie prices. Pundits would write angry columns with headlines like "Lower Movie Prices Now!" and sneeringly refer to anyone who defended industry pricing as a corporate shill.

Others would call for the nation to adopt the VA's program, "VetFlix," which offers lower prices, but only on movies starring Chevy Chaise.

And maybe such negotiations would actually succeed in bringing down ticket costs at first. But with the movie industry's revenues forcibly curtailed, it would become a shell of its former self. And in an effort to contain costs, the wide array of movie choices that made the plan so popular at the start would disappear.

Here's why: The government would only have leverage for a negotiation if it were willing to exclude certain movies from coverage. As such, government negotiations would close off viewing options, sticking beneficiaries with a "movie formulary." We'd have an Office of MovieCare filled with cinematically clueless bureaucrats trying to put together a list of available movies.

Want to see the latest Steven Spielberg film? Tough. MovieCare doesn't cover Spielberg any more.

Want to see this year's Oscar-nominated documentaries? Too bad; they weren't popular enough to demand

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The Carlisle Mercury

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Bond's Broadcast

Today, as I write this, is Monday evening.

Earlier in the day, this morning to be exact, I went to the Nicholas County High School football field to view the deployment ceremony for the local guard detachment heading for Iraq.

I saw plenty of familiar faces out there and I saw strangers who were there for members of the brigade from adjoining counties and from spots clear across Kentucky.

I watched as the parking lot filled up with cars, trucks, motorcycles, and buses.

It was an amazing crowd, all obviously there with a sense of urgency to join in the moment.

The bleachers were nearly full as the end zones each had gatherings of the overflow crowd.

Parade music softly played through the speaker system as the members of the local unit, Battery B, 2nd Battalion, 138th Field Artillery, formed in the end zone.

Members of the unit were standing by platoon, readying for their march down the football field into position for the program.

As each platoon was introduced, the leadership was announced and each group took its place on the field.

The colors were presented by the Pendleton County Jr. R.O.T.C. unit in an extremely professional manner. I am almost certain for these young people this was quite an honor.

As the crowd rose to its feet, the Nicholas County High School band including a member of the guard, played the National Anthem, under the direction of Deb-bie Hale. The crowd stood stoically and there was an air of pride surrounding the football field, while at the same time it was impossible not to feel the static of uncertainty and concern from the audience.

The band also played My Old Kentucky Home, as part of the program.

These brave members of our military are prepared for the battles they may face and are removed from the political right or wrong of this war and are focused only the mission ahead of them.

It is admirable that through their training and dedication to task they can carry forward the banner of their unit, along with the hopes and prayers of those who are left behind.

I can't tell you the range of emotions that went through my mind and heart as this ceremony progressed.

I thought back to World War II when towns gave up throngs of men to the war effort, many going in 1941 and not coming home until the war's end.

Then there was Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm and now this.

It is difficult to comprehend what must go through the minds of the solders and their families as the long year ahead of them unfolds. I know they will be in my prayers.

I wish you God's speed in your mission and safe return to those who love and care for you.

— HB —

It was interesting to see that U.S. Representative Geoff Davis had a representative at the ceremony. J.R. Reed, a friend of mine for nearly 20 years, was on hand to represent the congressman and to deliver a letter to the unit's commander from Representative Davis.

The Congressman could not make the trip, but he did make sure someone from his office was on hand at this very important ceremony for the men and women of our local unit.

I did notice that there was no representative from Gov. Ernie Fletcher's office.

I know as a fact he was invited on at least two occasions to come and represent all of the people of the Commonwealth and to show those deploying to the far reaches of the earth that he cares.

I don't know why he wasn't able to come. It's always so easy to say the schedule wouldn't allow it, however his published public schedule showed no events during the timeframe of the ceremony.

I find this extremely unacceptable.

If this was an every day occurrence I could understand, but this is hopefully only going to happen once in a great while and there's no reason be -- or at least someone from his office -- could not be here.

It is easy to beat a politician during a political year, but there were at least a couple thousand votes on hand at this ceremony, and for those who do go to the polls, maybe, just maybe, they'll remember he couldn't make time to come to Carlisle.

And so, for another week, thanks and thirty.

Veloz Viewpoints

Greetings from Nevada! I hope you all had a great week.

Amy is still having trouble focusing for a long amount of time so I am filling in for her one last time. I expect that she will be healed enough next week be able to continue her column.

We had a follow up appointment with the doctor one week after Amy's surgery.

I was afraid after seeing her eye still blood red that the doctor might not be pleased.

When he examined her eye he said that everything looked to be healing nicely. Her eye definitely didn't look good, but I guess the most important part was the retina that I couldn't see.

Amy followed the doctor's orders very well the entire week after her surgery even though she was very uncomfortable. As I said last week, she had to keep her head down as much as possible so that the air bubble remained at the back of her eye to apply pressure. That position put a lot of strain on her neck muscles, so she spent a majority of her time face down on the couch or recliner.

To add to that discomfort, her eye was getting very itchy as most things do when they heal.

She wanted to rub her eye in hopes of it feeling better but she knew she couldn't. To help stop her urge she just wore the eye patch the hospital had given her as much as possible around the house. The eye patch was mainly to wear while she was sleeping to keep from naturally scratching it, but it came in handy during the day also.

Since the appointment Amy has seemed to be back to normal except for her vision. She is slowly gaining the vision back in her eye, as the bubble keeps getting smaller. The black eye that was forming is now slowly going away also.

This week is the last week of school for me, and Amy agreed that she would be able to handle the babies so I could get back.

She said that she did well on Monday and would be able to handle them the rest of the week.

I was relieved to hear that she was feeling well enough to take care of them because there is a lot of work for me to do at school finishing grades and logging returned textbooks.

On another note, our ever-growing babies are developing very quickly.

They are starting to hold onto toys and getting very strong. Antonio had been trying hard to sit up when he was lying in his chair and we knew he was probably going to be turning over soon.

To our astonishment Amy witnessed him turn over from his back to his tummy on Sunday evening when we were visiting my parents.

Amy had laid Antonio down on his back on a blanket and all of a sudden she gasped loudly while watching him.

My parents, who were sitting on another couch jumped in their seats and immediately thought something was wrong.

When they turned Amy explained that he had turned over onto his stomach.

She ran over to him picked him up and kissed him in astonishment. While all of this was happening I was sadly outside and missed the entire thing, but I am sure he will do it again soon (but it won't be the same of course).

Analise has also done something that Antonio hasn't accomplished yet. She is now able to raise her feet high enough toward her chest to be able to grab onto them.

It is very neat to see and I'm sure the movement will help her accomplish the task of turning over also.

I have to say that I am a proud father and I never knew how it would feel to have children and love them so much until it happened.

I always knew that I wanted to be a dad but didn't know it would happen by getting two at a time.

It has been a lot of work but has been worth it, especially when I see those huge grins smiling back at me.

I have to end by saying that Amy has been a great mother, as I knew she would be.

The twins are very lucky to have such a loving and caring Mom. We are celebrating our 2-year wedding anniversary on June 11 and I wanted to say I love her and Happy Anniversary.

Until next time, make it a great one!

Ben Veloz

Talkin' From The Mountains

National Guard in Iraq leaves State and Nation At Risk

By Dale Graser

Bush's "surge" has hit home. Nicholas County's National Guard unit will leave soon for Iraq. My prayers are with all of the Guard members, their families and loved ones. I admire their courage.

There are two questions, however, that need to be answered. What happens if we have a disaster or terrorist attack here at home? The National Guard is our primary first response force for any problem in America—problems on our soil—not problems overseas. And, are our troops properly equipped for combat?

The National Guard has often been called up for overseas duty in time of war, but never before has the Guard been so used—or maybe we should say used up. A depleted National Guard has left our nation greatly at risk, and might leave our soldiers at greater risk in Iraq.

When Katrina hit, 35 percent of the Louisiana National Guard and 40 percent of the Mississippi Guard were in Iraq. Guard members who could respond did a marvelous job, but the lack of troops and equipment probably cost lives in the Gulf Coast area.

Almost 100 percent of stateside guard units are rated as less than fully ready because of equipment and manpower shortfalls due to the Iraq War.

Most National Guard units have only fifty percent—that's right—half of the equipment they need for disaster response in America. And some 35,000 of the Guard are in Iraq, or on their way.

The National Guard units still in the United States are well trained and competent but without the manpower or the equipment to adequately handle a national emergency.

What if we have another devastating hurricane? What if we have another terrorist attack? Carlisle is small. Perhaps there are enough National Guard units close by to take care of a disaster here. Let's hope so.

So how do we support the local National Guard unit? Not by putting yellow ribbons on our cars. Call or write Congressman Geoff Davis and tell him to stop backing a costly and unpopular war. Tell him to support a plan to bring all the troops home.

Tell Davis we need the National Guard to protect us in America. And don't let him try to convince you that being in Iraq is stopping terrorism in the United States. Give that some deep thought. It is totally irrational: It's baloney!

Bush's invasion of Iraq greatly increased the chances of another terrorist attack in America. It has indeed made the entire world a more dangerous place. Tens of thousands of Arabs have joined terrorist organizations in direct response to our actions in Iraq.

Will the violence get worse if we leave Iraq? How much worse can it get? How long can we pay the price in lives and money?

Bush and his followers claim Iran will control Iraq if we leave. Many experts don't agree that will happen. War hawks claimed that China would control Vietnam and the whole world would fall like dominoes to the Communists if we pulled out of that war. What happened when we left? Vietnam fought a war with China and Communism did not spread across the globe. It failed even in the Soviet Union.

In the last election, a majority of Americans voted for Democrats and sent a clear message that they wanted an exit plan—an way out of Iraq. Not the Fourth District. The Fourth District and a few others chose to re-elect Davis and other Bush supporters. The result? Congress doesn't have the two-thirds majority to override Bush's vetoes of plans to exit Iraq. Thus the Nicholas

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OPINION

Fourth District Report

The Unfair Fairness Doctrine

By Geoff Davis
4th District Congressman

Democrats took control of Congress in January this year after winning majorities in both the House and Senate in the election last fall. Leading Democrats like Senator Byron Dorgan and Congressman Dennis Kucinich have wasted no time since then in calling for major changes in our nation's broadcasting regulations that would effectively end talk radio as we know it.

They are advocating reinstating the fairness doctrine, a regulation first put in place by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in 1949 that required broadcasters to "afford reasonable opportunity for the discussion of conflicting views of public importance." In other words, stations were required to provide balanced time to all sides in any discussion of political or controversial issues. One rationale behind the regulation was the scarcity of media outlets at the time. The FCC did away with the fairness doctrine in 1987 after finally figuring out that the rule discouraged discussion of controversial issues, limited public discourse and violated principles of free speech.

Though the Supreme Court never ruled the regulation unconstitutional, the court concluded in 1974 that the doctrine "inescapably dampens the vigor and limits the variety of public debate" (Miami Herald Publishing Co. v. Tornillo, 418 U.S. 241). In 1984 the court again concluded that the scarcity rationale was flawed and that the rule limited public debate (FCC v. League of Women Voters, 468 U.S. 364).

Today there are tens of thousands of media outlets, countless interest groups, political reports and blogs on the Internet, and nearly limitless sources of information available on every viewpoint. Scarcity is no longer a reason for regulating free speech on public airwaves. Yet, due to the dismal failure of Air America, the liberals' answer to conservative talk radio, and other such attempts to counter the success of conservative media personalities, some in Congress have apparently decided that we need an army of government bureaucrats policing the airwaves and making decisions on behalf of consumers about what is fair and balanced.

While it has not yet been reintroduced in the 110th Congress, the Media Ownership Reform Act of 2005 would have reinstated the fairness doctrine and could be one vehicle supporters of the concept could try to use. The legislation drew 16 co-sponsors in the 109th Congress. Congressman Kucinich now chairs the Domestic Policy Subcommittee of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform and has promised hearings on the issue.

With the exception of National Public Radio (NPR), which is partially supported with taxpayer money, time and again the marketplace has shown that liberal talk radio just does not bring in the ratings that radio stations need to survive. Broadcasters will not tolerate financial losses from unsuccessful programming, nor will they risk violating a rule that could result in legal action against them. Instead, there will be far less political or controversial programming.

One of our most precious liberties in America is freedom of speech. Let's not limit that freedom with more regulation. If you don't like what you hear, change the channel.

Steve's Report

By Steve Scalf

I teach Sunday School to 11 and 12 year olds. This week's lesson was about the Good Samaritan, a man who went out of his way to help a stranger and to be a good neighbor. This Bible story reminded me of two other events from earlier this week.

On Friday, the regional president of Lex Brodie Tires, a DJ from AM 690 – the country music station – and the news crew from KHON television presented an "Above and Beyond" award to a Soldier.

This Soldier had just gotten back from Iraq and was riding in a bus back to his barracks. Right in front of them, a young woman lost control of her vehicle and it slammed into a concrete barricade. This Soldier told the bus driver to pull over and stop. He got out of the bus and ran to the woman's assistance. As the car started burning, he reached in through the window, unlocked the door, unfastened her seatbelt, and pulled her to safety. He treated her for shock and stayed with her until emergency personnel arrived.

When the media learned of this Soldier's selfless service to others, they decided to recognize him with a prominent community award. This got quite a bit of attention on the radio and television in an attempt to inspire others to be a bit more neighborly and to take care of others in need.

This is in contrast to another story I heard this week. After a horrible car accident, the driver of one car hurried over and helped the other driver climb out of his car and assisted him as he limped to the side of the road and took a seat on the ground.

The first driver said, "You don't look so good, buddy. Are you OK?"

The second driver said he wasn't hurt badly, but his nerves were shot. The first driver pulled out a hip flask and said, "Here, take a good shot. It will help you feel better."

The alcohol sent a comforting warmth through the driver's nerves and truly seemed to help. As he felt the calming effects of the alcohol, he noticed the first driver and said, "You're looking pretty rattled yourself. Looks like a few swigs might do you some good, as well," and held out the flask.

"No thanks," said the first driver, "I'll just wait until after the police arrive and smell what you've been drinking."

OK, that last story isn't real – it's just a joke I heard this week. At this point, I'm probably supposed to spell out the comparison of the Soldier's actions to the story of the Good Samaritan and then show the contrast to the behavior of the first driver in the joke. And then I should encourage everyone to be a better neighbor. But I'm pretty sure anyone who reads this column is already smart enough to figure that stuff out for themselves.

Instead, I'm going to lighten things up a little. I've been pretty busy over the past several weeks. I'm at work at 6:30 a.m. and generally don't get home until 12 hours later. And then, more often than not, I'm home only long enough to change clothes and head off to this meeting or that function. At the end of the long day, I have a hard time letting things go. Mentally, I'm often still at work and have a hard time shutting down and getting to sleep.

When I heard that joke this week and chuckled. That's it – no hearty guffaw – just a chuckle. I started thinking about it and couldn't remember the last time I had a good laugh – you know, the kind that nearly makes your sides hurt and leaves your cheeks tired from all that smiling. It's been months.

How sad is that? Those who know me well will tell you that I'm pretty good at goofing off and having fun. Going months without laughing is contrary to my nature. I must have realized my sense of humor was in danger of starving to death, because Cindy noticed a recent trend: no matter how worn out I feel at the end of the day, I'll stay up and watch some silly comedy.

I haven't been terribly picky, either. The more mindless the humor, the better I enjoy it. Cindy wonders how I can watch that stuff. "It's so STUPID!" she complains. She'll refuse to watch, occupying her mind with a good book, instead.

But then I realized: "Stupid" is kind of the point. It's like sending my brain on vacation. I get to sit there, thinking about nothing – for a change – and just laugh.

Just about everything we eat these days has a label on it with Nutrition Facts. Even that box of Jujyfruits I enjoyed while watching my mindless comedies proudly proclaims that it provides absolutely no nutritional value. These labels are important, however, because they give us the ability to make informed choices. Those Otis Spunkmeyer chocolate-chip chocolate muffins are excellent, but each one contains about enough fat to sustain a small community for a week. I still eat them, but I figure if I chase them down with an apple or a carrot stick, I'll be fine.

I could see the benefit of putting a similar label on the side of movies saying how many average servings of laughs are contained in each box. A government agency could even establish a recommended minimum number of laughs the average person needs to maintain good mental health and tell us how many chuckles are contained in each laugh.

But until they come up with these Daily Humor Values, I'm just going to have to learn how to lighten up and have more fun throughout the day.

Signing out from Honolulu
Steve Scalf

****Steve Scalf is a member of the U.S. Military. Reach him at slscalf@msn.com.**

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