

BULLY PULPIT

Over the rainbow

I often see people post comments when their pets pass away; similar to “Snooky crossed the rainbow bridge” or whatever they say when it happens.

My black lab, Mattie, crossed that bridge Friday after 16 years living in the Taylor household.

Many of our customers at the paper know Mattie; she had such a kind soul that she'd slip into a room without barely a notice – unlike my rescue that announces her presence with a bull-horn.

Mattie came to us at eight-weeks old; a sweet, fuzzy puppy that had an issue walking. At that point in life, I was running so I'd take the pup with me on short jaunts down the drive. After she grew up a bit, the running seemed to strengthen whatever weak muscles she had that caused her run to be kiltered.

When H.A. passed, she became the queen bee and was such a great companion in a house that at times was oppressively quiet.

Time progressed and her affinity for arthritis became more apparent. So, off to doggy chiropractic we went for her to be poked and prodded; it helped, but her sweet disposition showed through.

One thing I could count on was Mattie putting on a million miles trying to follow me through my days; that includes vacuuming, yard work, etc. I realize now that there was something very comforting about having my companion with me through my everyday chores and adventures.

I could never, and will go to my death, understand how people can be cruel to their dogs. Mattie just wanted to love and be loved; she wasn't even mean-dispositioned enough to stand up to dogs that came on my porch and bit her up. She'd cower if I sneezed loud or something banged and scared her.

Well, time progressed and arthritis continued to claim joints. She was on an NSAID non-steroidal anti-inflammatory for quite a while. It seemed to help until it didn't; joints began to seize up and her backbone caused her much pain.

The day came last Friday that I'd dreaded for a couple of years. She still enjoyed swimming and walking with me until about a month ago; at that point, I knew time was close for her.

When she couldn't make it to the chicken coop to check the girls, the appointment for her euthanasia was made. That was super hard; in a way, I wished she'd died in her sleep and made the decision by herself. That did not happen and I had to help her out of her life of pain.

Thank you to Linn County Vet Clinic for being so sweet about my old girl. They see hundreds of pets, yet know how special each one is to their owner.

Mattie accepted death like she took on life, with sweetness and grace. Now, I have memories of my girl; and this week sometime, a paw print. She'll be buried right off my porch where she nightly laid and barked at whatever her old eyes allowed her to see.

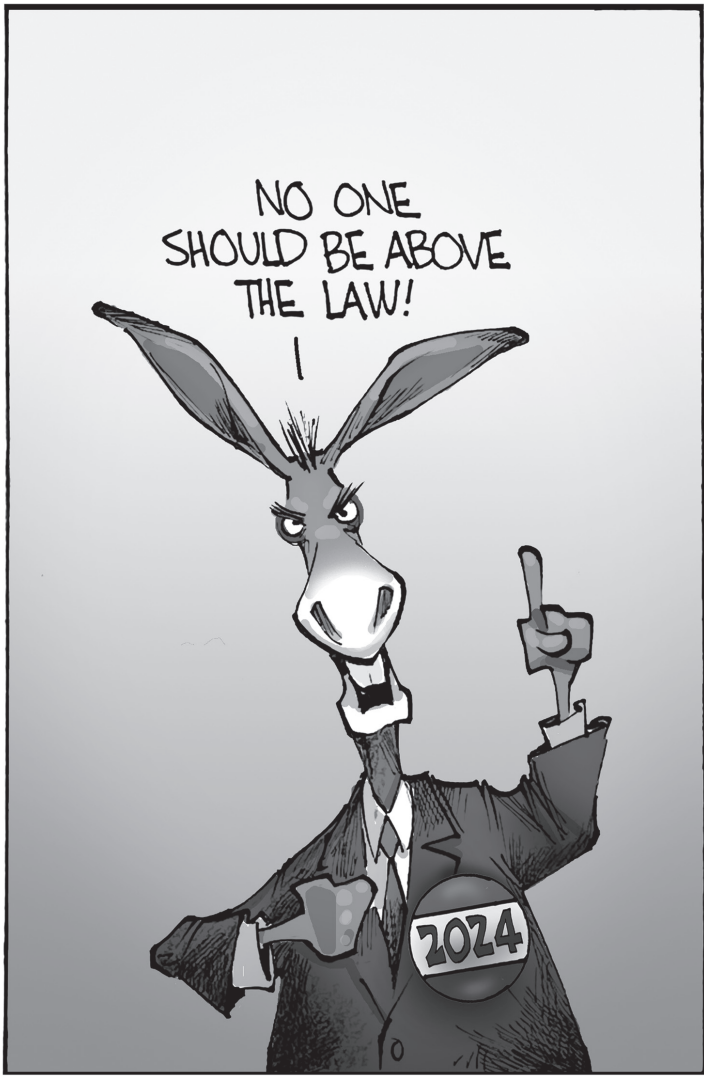
Grief is real for owners of pets; tears still flow and things in the house trigger me. I went to my son's house last weekend to just get away from the memories. In the process, packing food for my Ella dog, I had to unpack pain pills that I carried for Mattie; that, and her food bowl.

Tears and that empty feeling in the center of my body are with me; but Mattie is running with God and no longer bound to a body that wouldn't let her play, romp and enjoy life.

Pets are a blessing to us; when the time comes, they also cause us quite a bit of pain – but, in the end, they are worth it. It's a hard-hearted soul that doesn't enjoy having a wet-nose around to nudge you for a petting.

I'll miss Mattie, she was a great dog.

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Shall we talk about Medicare?

TYRADES! BY DANNY TYREE

When President Lyndon B. Johnson signed Medicare into law on July 30, 1965, did my five-year-old self truly comprehend the personal milestone that I would someday reach?

Nah. My five-year-old self couldn't comprehend that Christmas 1965 would ever arrive, let alone that I would someday have my own brand spanking new Medicare card.

It's right here in my wallet. I really should have it laminated. The same probably goes for my rotator cuff and prostate.

It's sobering to think of all the people who didn't live long enough to receive Medicare coverage, including Elvis, Michael Jackson and my beloved Granny Tyree.

Likewise, pause to realize that every single person who was in the initial batch of Medicare enrollees is now deceased. Before Medicare, 40 percent of seniors had no

health insurance. And now you can't interview any of them about how life-changing Medicare was. (Although, if you have a top-notch Ouija board, they just might reveal who they voted for in the last primary.)

Speaking of Medicare's launch, the program's first recipients were former president Harry S Truman and his wife Bess. In honor of the plain-spoken chief executive from Missouri, I now tell my wife, "If you can't stand the heat...don't crank up the AC, because the money has to go for Medicare premiums!"

Sure, some Americans are dismissive of Medicare's value. This includes the codgers whose daily routine includes smoking four cartons of unfiltered, deep-fried Lucky Strike cigarettes and doing 100 one-handed push-ups until the day that they die peacefully in their sleep. Too bad the peace doesn't always last. ("Is that as fast as you can make this hearse go? Let me get out

and push.")

Some people fuss about the deductibles and co-pays, but it's good to have some skin in the game (even if that skin is flopping in the breeze and dotted with age spots).

I know I derived peace of mind from years of simply filing away my late mother's explanation of benefits (EOB) paperwork. Between Medicare and a medi-gap supplement, her mastectomy, hip surgeries and other expenses were pretty well paid for.

On the negative side, I felt like an eavesdropper as I read between the lines of what the cost-conscious Medicare program was telling healthcare providers through the EOBs. ("You knave! You scoundrel! You want how much for gauze pads? What are they made of –fabric? I say thee nay! Take this pittance and be happy with it. How can you live with yourself? How can you sleep at night? Uh, how can you walk away from a fun job like

this? Wait, don't go!")

I am not entering the world of Medicare with any particular wish list, but some folks with inadequate/ nonexistent medical coverage do save up problems for when they qualify. ("Congratulations. We removed that sack of marbles that has been in your nasal cavity since Stinky McGuire's birthday party. Did you know Stinky's great-granddaughter works in our billing office?")

I pray that various tweaks and innovations can keep Medicare solvent. Some seniors are getting freaked out over dire forecasts, fearing that any cuts may be retroactive. ("Please don't send the repo man for my knee replacement! You'll get it when you pry it from my cold, lifeless fingers. What? The fingers are being repossessed, too? Noooo...don't reinstall the cataracts!")

I'd love to say more, but... the column stops here. Thanks, Harry.

An Independent Nation

Our leaders have been surprisingly expressive in signaling U.S. military support for the defense of Taiwan.

Ironic, considering that official U.S. policy is dubbed "strategic ambiguity," meaning we don't say one way or the other about our defensive intentions for helping the island nation against a

regularly threatened and rehearsed-for Chinese invasion or naval blockade.

Four separate times during his term, however, former President Joe Biden publicly pledged American military help to counter a People's Republic of China assault on Taiwan. As for the Trump 2.0 Pentagon, weeks ago it leaked

(or suffered a leak of) a global defense strategy memo that said preventing a PRC takeover of Taiwan was the "sole pacing scenario" engaging our armed forces.

Surprising unanimity for the two parties in Washington. But has anyone asked what the American people think?

Well, Humanity for Freedom Foundation conducted a poll, released yesterday.*

Informed that "China claims Taiwan as its own territory," 82 percent of respondents agreed that "Taiwan is an independent country." Only 3 percent felt "Taiwan is part of China."

A 58 percent majority favored full U.S. diplomatic recognition for Taiwan. When it comes to American mili-

tary defense, a plurality of 39 percent wanted to continue the status quo of *not saying* ("strategic ambiguity"), while 32 percent of Americans preferred their government make a clear commitment to Taiwan. Only 2 percent supported ending arm sales and adopting a neutral stance.

The above results are thoroughly – and surprisingly – non-partisan, with arch conservatives and far-out progressives finding common ground to defend Asia's freest society against the world's most maniacal totalitarian state.

Could the specter of a future dictated by the Chinese Communist Party be bringing the world closer together?

This is Common Sense. I'm Paul Jacob.

We've let Vlad the Invader win in Ukraine

MAKING SENSE
BY MICHAEL REAGAN

When is Vladimir Putin going to sit down and make peace with Ukraine?

Don't hold your breath. The United States – Donald Trump, really – has been pushing hard for a peace agreement between Russia and Ukraine to end their bloody, World War II-style war.

Only Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy can make peace happen.

But the two leaders each made trouble this week by subverting the negotiations and making President Trump angry.

Zelenskyy blurted out, foolishly, that as part of any deal he would not allow Russia to keep control of the Crimean Peninsula, which it annexed from Ukraine in 2014.

Meanwhile, Putin's military

launched its deadliest bombing attack on the capital city of Kyiv since last July, killing a dozen civilians and wounding 90.

Zelenskyy has made lots of trouble with his public statements, but Putin is the main enemy of peace.

He's the one who started the fighting. He's the invader. He's the one ultimately responsible for a war that's killed hundreds of thousands of soldiers from both sides and thousands of innocent Ukrainian civilians.

But Vlad the Invader has gone relatively unpunished for his war-making. The economic sanctions we've put on his country have created little pain and were easily circumvented.

And anyway, it's not Putin and his ruling elite who are suffering from the high inflation rate and soaring food

SEE INVADER, A3

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- Include writer's name, city and phone number as letters will be verified for authenticity.
- Be 500 words or less.
- Be received by 5 p.m. Monday to appear in that week's edition.
- We reserve the right to print or not print reader's contributions.
- No malicious, slanderous or threatening letters will be allowed.
- Letters with political content will not be accepted the week preceding an election as it does not allow time for a response.

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