

## It's time to disrupt caregiving

By Liz O'Donnell

November is National Family Caregiver's Month, a time to honor and recognize the people who care for aging and ill family members. Honor and recognition are important, but we can't stop there. Caregiving disrupts the lives of the more than 40 million people in this country who are assisting an aging or ill family member. As a result of their caregiving duties, their health, their work, their ability to save for retirement and the quality of care they are able to provide are all impacted. This November we must move beyond honoring and recognizing caregivers. We need to disrupt caregiving.

According to the AARP, the typical caregiver spends 24.4 hours per week providing care. This adds up to an estimated \$470 billion annually in unpaid work. Caregivers also spend an average of \$6,954 in out-of-pocket expenses. These increased costs often coincide with a decrease in salary. Sixty percent of all caregivers say caregiving has negatively impacted their ability to work and as a result they often ask for a position with less responsibility, take a leave of absence or reduce their hours. Some quit altogether, resulting in an average of \$304,000 in lost wages and benefits.

On top of the time and costs, caregiving can take an emotional toll on family members. As if watching a parent decline, renegotiating family roles and responsibilities and balancing a person's need for autonomy and security isn't challenging enough, many family caregivers are called on to perform medical tasks too. More than administering medications, family caregivers are changing catheters, cleaning feeding tubes, washing wounds and giving injections — all with little or no training at all. We like to think medical professionals handle these critical tasks, but that is not reality.

We can start the disruption process by supporting family caregivers at work. While there has been an increase in elder care benefits offered to employees, only 3 percent of organizations polled by the Society for Human Resources Management as part of its 2016 Employee Benefits Survey offered geriatric counseling. Just 2 percent offered on-ramping programs for family members dealing with elder care issues, and just 1 percent offered assisted living assessments. That's not going to cut it. We're becoming smarter as a country about what it takes to retain working mothers and fathers. What about working daughters and sons? Employers should review their benefits today and make sure they have systems in place to support and retain their employees who are juggling eldercare with career.

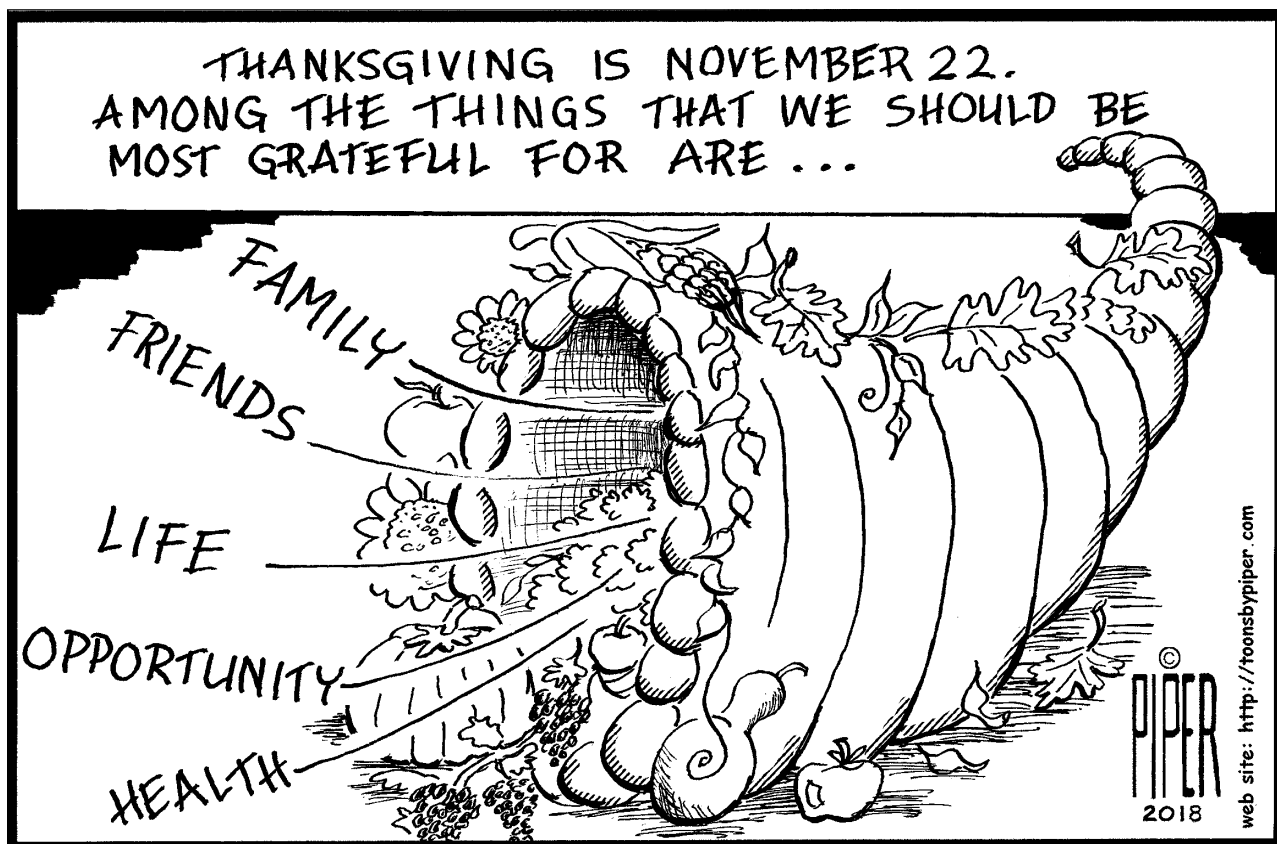
Training family caregivers should be a no-brainer and legislation like the Caregiver Advise, Record, Enable Act helps. Among other things, it provides family caregivers with education and instruction on the medical tasks they need to perform. So far 30 states have signed the act into law. The remaining 20 need to follow suit.

We need to put our best minds to work solving the daily challenges of caregivers and the people for whom they provide care. Organizations like the AARP and Aging 2.0 offer accelerator programs for caregiver-focused startups. We need to direct even more focus and funding toward caregiving-related businesses.

Finally, we must value the work of care — both the paid and the unpaid. The National Domestic Worker's Alliance reports that many paid caregivers are excluded from workplace protections and benefits like minimum wage and paid time off granted under the Fair Labor Standards Act. This has to change. More states need to enact a Domestic Workers Bill of Rights.

How we care for Mom and Dad is not a private family matter. Approximately 10,000 people turn 65 every day in this country, and the AARP predicts that by 2020 there will be a shortage of paid caregivers. As a result, even more unpaid, family caregivers will be called upon to meet that demand. This is going to affect all of us. We must disrupt caregiving, before it disrupts us.

Liz O'Donnell is the Founder of Rent-A-Sister and author of "Mogul, Mom & Maid: The Balancing Act of the Modern Woman." More information is available at [www.WorkingDaughter.com](http://www.WorkingDaughter.com).



## Your views

### Epstein: Disappointed with so-called humanist Democrats

To the Editor:  
I am at a loss to know what to do with certain thoughts and feelings following the midterm elections. I am relieved that my wife and I, as well as tens of millions of other Americans, will not have to fear our Social Security retirement benefits being cut by 25 percent by the Republican Senate and House. With the Democrats taking over the House, we will no longer have to be scared for the next two years. The Democrats will block any Republican attempt to cut our benefits. The same holds true for those who rely on Medicare, Medicaid, food stamps, college student loans and unemployment insurance benefits.

But I am angry, bitter, resentful and disappointed with many of my fellow Democrats who I thought cared about people like me who have low incomes. These affluent Democrats are members of the upper middle class and the upper class, although they don't see themselves as wealthy and well-off. I am angry

at how they scolded me, admonished me and tried to shame me and bully me for the past two years because I did not care much about the "identity politics" and "cultural war" issues that they constantly bashed Donald Trump over. I focused on the bread-and-butter and kitchen-table issues of everyday survival. I focused on protecting the safety-net programs like Social Security.

These financially well-off "liberal/progressive" Democrats thought that I should have been more concerned with the plight of illegal immigrants, for example. I don't understand how they could have been so insensitive to my plight and the plight of millions of us seniors who have to live on Social Security checks of \$1,200 per month.

A good friend who does not earn as much as they do has provided me with the answer: they can well afford to care primarily about the identity politics and cultural war issues and to focus on constantly bashing Trump over them. People like my wife and I can't afford that luxury. We don't have their high yearly incomes. They don't need Social Security. They

never will. It will not affect them if their Social Security checks get cut by 25 percent. Yet I am still surprised and disappointed that these self-proclaimed "humanists" are so insensitive. I expected more empathy and compassion from them.

For the next two years, I will still focus on the bread-and-butter issues that the poor, the near-poor, the lower-middle class and the middle-class struggle with that these affluent Democrats do not.

Stewart B. Epstein  
Retired professor of sociology and social work  
Rochester, NY

### Koza: LHS production huge success

To the Editor:  
The La Grande High School theater production of "How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying" was a huge success.

In this age of video games and action movies with special effects, it was refreshing and reassuring to see this talented group of students involve the audience with a live and lively production.

There weren't just one

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or two fine performances. The entire stage was filled with humor, talent and excellence. The show was beautifully performed and each and every person who acted, danced and sang was a star.

The entire show was a testament to the fine educators, directors and choreographers at La Grande High School. It was highly entertaining from the start to the finish and I thoroughly enjoyed a magical evening.

Zee Koza  
La Grande

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