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Distractions in the face of tragedy

While millions of American citizens suffer without power and communication, millions of other American citizens are debating protests by players, coaches and owners of National Football League teams.

As Puerto Rico's 3 million people cope with the devastation that Hurricane Maria visited upon the island last week, President Trump attacks people—who play a game for a living—for being unpatriotic by taking a knee during the National Anthem played before football games. The president said he would visit Puerto Rico next week.

Why is the suffering that Puerto Ricans are going through any different than what Texans or Floridians or Louisianers suffered after Harvey and Irma? The country opened its wallets for those states, held telethons that raised millions of dollars, yet, our territory in the Caribbean is left twisting in the wind.

Many things have gone topsy turvy in America over the past 18 months. It's no wonder that we latch onto a secondary story as if it were a matter of life and country. Football players protesting in the way they see best is not on the same scale as millions of Americans suffering from a natural disaster or the fact that in the face of a rising economy, many American still feel unsettled and uncertain of their future.

This is especially true when the United States is conducting a war of words with North Korea. Does turning a protest by a sports team into a major controversy seem paramount compared to threats that our planes might be blown out of the sky even if it is only near North Korean air space? Who wants to get

on a plan heading to Asia now?

Americans have been rocked and jostled by events from the Great Recession, to home foreclosures, health care expenses, a constant war in Afghanistan, fears of terrorism, a divisive presidential election and Tweets from the victor. We want a break from wave after wave of bad news we can do nothing about—it is only natural we will respond to the things we can understand.

Some think that football players who take a knee during the Anthem are protesting America. In reality, the protests began as a response to police shootings of African-Americans. The president tweeted that they were protesting the American flag and should be fired. That's how situations become full blown controversies.

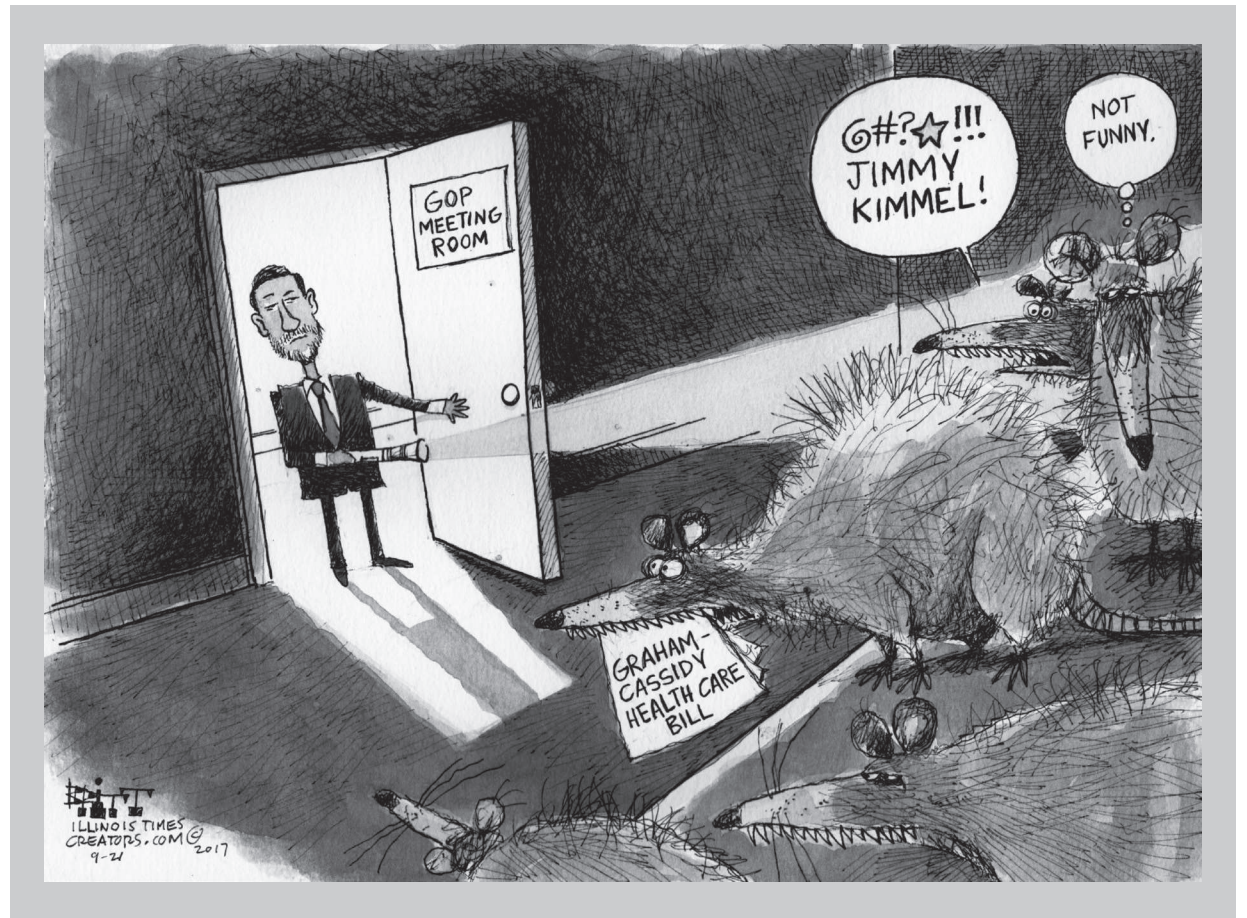
All this comes down to two words: respect and dignity. All citizens should respect our nation's flag. The flag represents the freedom to protest what we disagree with. We should all strive to maintain the dignity of all other people. A person who does not share your beliefs is not the enemy, they are a person worthy of respect and dignity who does not agree with you.

Americans are free to protest the protest, but what could really show that we are all part of one nation, indivisible, is to reach out to our fellow Americans. Puerto Ricans deserve the respect of their fellow Americans more than that they need financial and infrastructure help.

Turn the energy of trivial protests to helping people in dire need. We would do nothing less for Americans in our own backyard.

—LAZ

our opinion



Can we avoid a health care horror?

By E.J. DIONNE JR.

It is difficult to decide which is the worst aspect of the Republicans' latest try at repealing Obamacare: the irresponsibility, the cruelty or the lies.

There is only one reason the Senate is even considering a vote this week on the catastrophically flawed proposal from Sens. Lindsey Graham and Bill Cassidy. The GOP base wants repeal. So never mind what happens to Americans with modest incomes who have cancer, diabetes or heart trouble. Politics matters more than giving serious thought to a bill that would upend one-sixth of our economy.

It has been two months since the last repeal bill was defeated. Did the GOP's House and Senate majorities use the time to hold hearings on the bill that's being considered? Did they bring in doctors, nurses and insurers to help craft something sensible?

Of course not. They scheduled a quickie, last minute hearing this week for show. Since this vote is all about appearances, who cares about expertise? President Trump and his party want "a win." They're willing to wreak havoc on the insurance markets, state governments and people's lives to get it.

If they had engaged in any serious deliberative process, they would have had to grapple with the views of the bipartisan National Association of Medicaid Directors on Graham-Cassidy's approach of marrying block grants to severe cuts. The association's statement last week called the bill "the largest intergovernmental transfer of financial risk from the federal government to the states in our country's history."

other views

"Any effort of this magnitude," the Medicaid directors added, "needs thorough discussion, examination and analysis, and should not be rushed through without proper deliberation." No kidding.

This was Sen. John McCain's admirable rationale for voting against the last repeal bill. And even though Graham is his best friend in the Senate, he stuck to principle and announced Friday he was voting against this bill, too.

Here's hoping he eased the path for other Republicans to oppose this legislative contraption whose cruelty is obvious. There has always been something deeply wrong about our country's failure to provide health insurance for all our citizens, which every other wealthy industrialized nation does. It's not OK for people to face bankruptcy simply because they are doing everything they can to stay alive. Obamacare was a cautious, market-friendly attempt to make the system a bit kinder.

Since the Republicans launched this year's repeal offensive, many Americans who thought of the Affordable Care Act as a vague sort of failure have heard the compelling stories of those with pre-existing conditions and serious illnesses who are far better off today because of the law. A Washington Post-ABC News poll released Friday showed Americans preferred Obamacare to Graham-Cassidy by 56 percent to 33 percent.

Many who believed Trump and other Republicans when they promised to pass something better than Obamacare now know that this pledge was a sham. What the GOP really wants is to spend a whole lot less government money

helping people get health care. But they can't admit it because it sounds heartless.

So instead, they lie outright about what their bill does. Slate's Jamelle Bouie provided one of the best compendiums of falsehoods being offered on behalf of this bill. Jimmy Kimmel called out Cassidy for failing to live up to what the senator himself called the "the Jimmy Kimmel test." Kimmel described this as a pledge that "no family should be denied medical care, emergency or otherwise, because they can't afford it." Cassidy, Kimmel charged last week, "lied right to my face."

Trump insisted in a tweet: "I would not sign Graham-Cassidy if it did not include coverage of pre-existing conditions. It does!" Actually, it lets states undermine this coverage.

Then there is the much-repeated lie that ACA repeal bills are about giving states and individuals more "choice" in health care. Right, and I have the "choice" of buying a fleet of Rolls-Royces. The bottom line: No money, no choice.

And if Obamacare is so bad, why are Republicans reportedly trying to buy the vote of Sen. Lisa Murkowski with a special provision that would, in effect, allow Alaska to keep the Affordable Care Act pretty much as is? Why not give every state this option by killing Graham-Cassidy altogether?

This week is a testing time. It's a test of whether the movement that successfully defended the ACA this summer can rally once more. And it's a test of a handful of Republicans who claim to take the health care issue seriously. No one who votes for this bill can ever make that claim again.

(Washington Post Writers Group)

Bills already circling capitol

Every few months, all the legislators and lobbyists come back to the Capitol and participate in what is called Legislative Days. We have committee hearings which mostly are informational—we hear from agencies on how they are doing on implementing bills, and sometimes discuss ideas for bills to introduce in the next session.

This week the Veterans and Emergency Preparedness Committee met. We heard from the state forester on how the department did during the recent fire season. The information was incredible to hear and I am so proud of our forestry department. They did a tremendous job fighting the hundreds of fires scattered across our state. From the report, it looks like the fires were managed well on state and private lands, but the ones on the federal lands were the ones that went crazy.

Some of the other issues being heard in the building this week are:

Carbon cap and trade; the Equifax data breach; moving election dates; and, gubernatorial appointments.

Oregon is unique in many ways and one important thing we do that not every state does, is allow for citizens to repeal laws that the legislature has already passed, or put in place laws that the legislature refused to deal with. I think it's indicative of the disconnect of this particular group of legislators that there

are already 32 different petitions being circulated this fall. If you would like to see a full list, you can Google the Oregon Abigail Adams Voter Education Project.

A couple of the petitions garnering the most news coverage and speculation are the petition to repeal SB719 (sometimes called the extreme risk protection order), the petition to repeal a recently instituted tax on hospitals and a petition to prevent a sales tax on groceries. There are multiple petitions around vaccinations, getting big money out of elections and school access. If you have a few minutes, it's fascinating to read about the issues that could be on our ballots in November, 2018.

Switching gears, I don't know about you, but I am excited every time I drive by the Wemart by Winco building that's under construction. I can't wait to have more grocery shopping options in our community. I was honored to host a town hall on the lack of options and had conversations with the Winco team as well as Mayor Cathy Clark—and to the best of my knowledge it may open before the end of the year.

I always enjoy hearing from you, please don't hesitate to drop me a line (900 Court St NE, Salem, OR 97310).

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from the capitol

By BILL POST

Tax cuts won't create booming economy

By GENE H. MCINTYRE

Americans of modest financial means may want to withhold their cheers over President Trump's latest declaration, the one where he wants to reduce the corporate tax rate from 35 to 15 percent. It's an urban myth that a former U.S. president said, "What's good for General Motors is good for America," but it just as well be ascribed to President Trump as he, personally, and his wealthy pals, are those who enthusiastically greet this plan and will benefit from it.

But look at the facts in this latest of issues to hit the fan: Trump and company argue that the additional money going into the coffers of U.S. corporations would free up valuable cash for them. Then, these companies could use the money to increase their investments, increase employees' pay and earnings, accelerate corporate hiring and move the economy into greater growth. Additionally, it's argued by Trump, corporations that now deposit trillions overseas to keep from paying U.S. taxes would bring the money home and thereby compete better with rivals from countries with lower tax rates.

Meanwhile, American economists, tax experts and business owners believe that this tax adjustment is unlikely to doubtful what Trump promises. Here are some reasons: (1) Preferring not to hire additional employees, companies may

use much of their savings to buy back their stock or simply increase dividends to their wealthy investors. Many companies have already been able to borrow money at very low rates in order to grow but have not been inclined to add employees; and (2) Corporate tax cuts will provide small overall benefits because the general health of the current American economy is low unemployment at 4.4 percent and remains in a slow steady upward turn where big tax cuts would deliver nothing or next to it.

Two examples from recent corporate tax cuts serve to inform. The state of Kansas, in 2012, exempted thousands of its businesses from corporate taxes and cut individual rates but then faced a devastating revenue shortfall with an anticipated growth that didn't happen, all resulting in public services, including education at all levels, realizing destructive consequences. The Bush administration provided a tax "holiday" in 2004 in hope of bringing profits back to America but later discovered that tax revenues declined while U.S. companies stashed their cash overseas in wait to receive a tax discount.

Currently, those savvy in this matter, including the non-partisan Tax Policy Center, comments that what will happen regarding the Trump plan is that the federal deficit will swell like a bumblebee sting. Those folks tell us that even if all tax

breaks were eliminated, the corporate rate could not drop below 26 percent without sending the deficit further into the stratosphere.

Of course, one of Trump's chief advisors is a guy who's ensconced in the White House. Gary Cohn, very rich, argues for the big corporate tax reduction. He says small businesses would especially benefit. His point is that planned tax cuts on profits would "double" owners' personal income and free them to hire more employees. Full of misinformation, the Cohn doctrine assumes business owners want to increase their payroll rather than enjoy higher profits and personal income.

The ever-shrinking number of Americans still receiving their income from traditional "defined benefit" pensions do not, by the way, receive more money if the stock market rises. And, any argument that proposes corporate tax cuts are a path to benefit the American worker or retiree is now and has always been proven to be the sink hole of the "trickle-down" promise to every U.S. worker myth and the old lump of coal in what's tried-to-be-sold as a Christmas bonus.

(Gene H. McIntyre lives in Keizer.)

guest column

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