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Measure 101 is not the answer

We salute officials and legislators who endeavor to solve problems, and there are plenty of areas that have issues.

The Oregon legislature passed House Bill 2391 in 2017 that imposes temporary assessments on premiums charged by health insurance companies as well as an assessment on large hospitals to help pay healthcare for Oregon's low-income individuals and families. This month's one-question special election for Measure 101 is asking Oregon residents to vote whether to keep HB 2391 as is or reject it.

The problem is that HB 2391 creates problems also. There is nothing in the bill or the ballot measure that guarantees that money collected is earmarked exclusively for the healthcare costs of Oregon's neediest patients. Money collected could easily be diverted into other areas of government operation—that is not something Oregon voters can knowingly support.

The other glaring problem with Measure 101 is that it is uneven in whom it collects from. Large companies will not be taxed, though large public service organizations—such as public school districts—will.

Measure 101 is trying to smooth over problems in Oregon and on the federal level. Medicaid payments are less than in previous years. One billion fewer Medicaid dollars would flow into Oregon.

Measure 101 is really just a bandage. We think the measure should go down in defeat. We think this will

force the legislature to address Oregon's healthcare and tax issues head on. The measure is flawed. Oregonians are in no mood to approve any new taxes or fees, regardless of what supporters call it.

The state's general operating budget is almost \$40 billion per year and Oregon lawmakers fight over pennies when it comes to funding education and healthcare. What is needed is leadership on taxing and spending issues. Every bit of spending legislation is picked apart by interests—exemptions and waivers become part of a spending package.

Most people would agree that enough money is collected in taxes, fees, licenses and other sources to fund what the people want to fund. At the same time most people are generous and want to watch out for their fellow man. While Measure 101 aims to help pay for the healthcare costs of those less fortunate, a hopscotch taxing scheme is not the answer.

Democrats and Republicans need to act in the name of all their constituents, not the just the financial donors. In politics winning is everything, but in governing quality of life for all is everything. We call on legislators of every ideology and political party to fix the healthcare financing problem at its next session without raising new sources of revenue.

Government's number one job is to protect its citizens. Nothing defines that job more than keeping citizens healthy.

—LAZ

our opinion

It sounds interesting...

After Sunday nights' broadcast of the Golden Globes there was much chatter on Facebook and news sites about the speech Oprah Winfrey gave when she was presented with a lifetime achievement award.

Monday morning dawned with people calling for Oprah to run for president. Her clarion call about a new day on the horizon in which women are treated and paid equal to men and harassment is no longer part of the discourse. She received three standing ovations. Yes, Oprah can speak and she can hold an audience.

But that is not a reason to trip all over ourselves to crown her the next president of the United States. There is a lot to like and admire about one of America's most popular people.

It was 14 months ago the nation

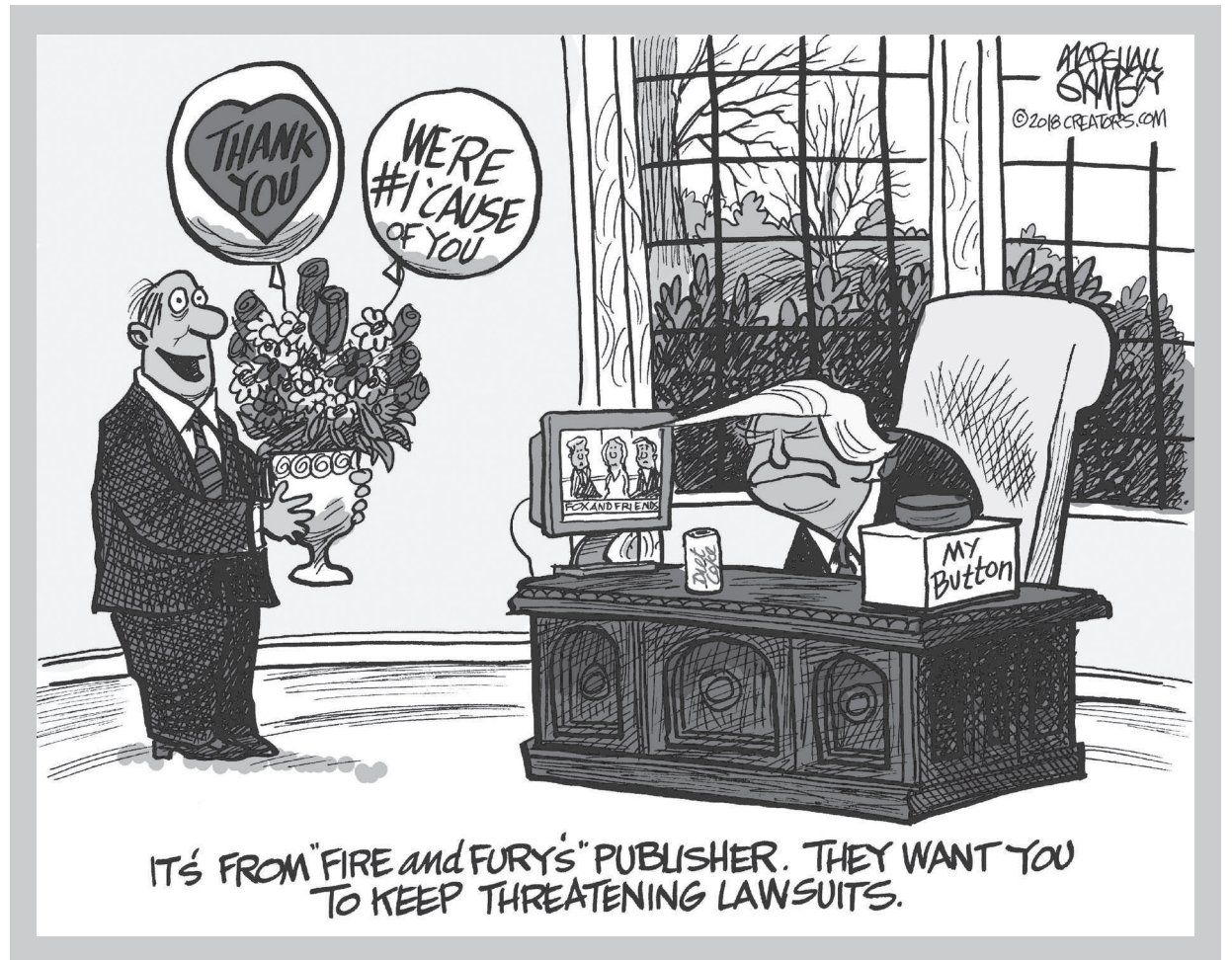
voted in a media star with no political or governmental service experience. Oprah has no governmental experience.

Those hoping for an Oprah candidacy should stop for a few moments and think about where she stands on the major issues. That will be a long moment because aside from her humanitarianism no one knows her position on taxes, infrastructure, North Korea, Russia and other hot topics.

Hopefully the voters of the United States have learned that vetting a candidate's positions is more important than applause lines.

"You get a car and you get a car and you get a car," is lovely and makes a great TV moment but it doesn't show what kind of a president Winfrey would be.

—LAZ



In Iran today, information is ammunition

By MICHAEL GERSON

Though events in Iran are murky, their direction is historic.

The Iranian regime—which has made a project of destabilizing others through terrorism and regional adventurism—has been revealed as deeply unstable. Many Iranian citizens thought that the election of the “moderate” Hassan Rouhani as president would bring more sensible and effective governance. Those hopes have fizzled. Many Iranians thought that the nuclear deal's sanctions relief and unfrozen assets would improve their lives. For the most part, they haven't.

The result—put in terms President Trump would appreciate—has been a broad revolt against the Iranian political establishment. The Iranian government's problem is no longer a matter of performance but of legitimacy. Routine corruption, vicious oppression and economic mismanagement are increasingly seen as essential to the regime itself.

The breadth of this sentiment is what distinguishes the current revolt from the Green Movement of 2009. Instead of mainly involving the upper middle class, discontent has taken root in the lower middle class -- in the labor movement and among the unemployed. Instead of being concentrated in Tehran and a few other cities, current unrest can be found across the country in smaller cities and rural areas. (If it comes to it, this would complicate the imposition of martial law, because the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps would need to be deployed more thinly.)

“In 100 years,” Iranian dissident Mohsen Sazegara told me, “we've never had such a movement all around the country.” The geograph-

ic and demographic scope of the protests is what makes them so remarkable -- and so damaging to the long-term prospects of the regime.

The short-term prospects are a different matter. Those who hope that the Iranian national revolution will succeed in a single, big push -- like the crowd turning against the Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu in Palace Square -- are likely to be disappointed. In most civil resistance movements, the purpose of mass protest is not to overthrow the government directly. It is to convince observers -- and especially elements of the police and army -- that they can turn against the regime without imprisonment or death. Protests act as a signal to potential defectors that their risk is reasonable. If enough people join them, the chance of violence diminishes.

This depends on the protesters rejecting violence themselves. In a study of civil resistance campaigns between 1900 and 2006, researchers Maria Stephan and Erica Chenoweth found that nonviolent efforts succeeded 53 percent of the time, compared with 26 percent for violent campaigns. And nonviolent approaches generally succeeded in less than half the time (an average of about three years). Why this difference? Because violence reduces public participation, which makes defections less likely.

With this in mind, what should America be doing? U.S. policy has generally had two objectives: lengthen the Iranian regime's nuclear timeline and shorten Iran's democratization timeline. Nuclear proliferation isn't particularly good anywhere. But such weapons are far less dangerous in the hands of dem-

ocratic governments. For proof, just compare India to North Korea.

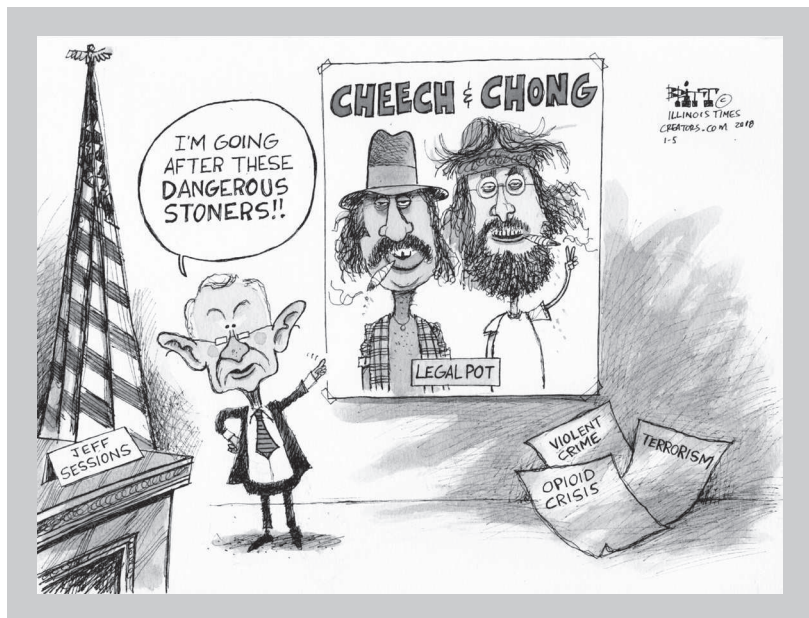
There is significant disagreement on the best way to lengthen the Iranian nuclear timeline. In the 2015 Iran nuclear framework, the Obama administration made huge concessions to buy some delay. But whatever your view on that agreement, the matter at hand is supporting democratic change. And since direct meddling in Iranian affairs by America is toxic, this task requires some creativity.

If the objective is to give the Iranian opposition the time and space to encourage recruits and defections, then the Trump administration needs to increase the cost to the regime of a comprehensive crackdown. This would need to be done in concert with the Europeans, making clear that repression will bring a return to economic isolation and sanctions. An effective U.S. response would also attempt to increase the access of Iranian citizens to the internet and social media -- which is effectively blocked -- through public pressure or (some have suggested) satellite internet access. This would permit the spread of information about the regime -- how about better publicizing the cost of Iranian interventions in Lebanon, Syria and Gaza? -- and reveal regime violence to the world in real time. In a struggle like this one, information is ammunition.

Implicit in all this is something often dismissed and completely undeniable: the strategic value of democracy promotion in a strong foreign policy. Much about the future of the Middle East, and the nature of the nuclear threat, now depends on it.

(Washington Post Writers Group)

other voices



Trump's drug price promises unmet

By GENE H. McINTYRE

President Donald Trump has fulfilled few of his campaign promises. One in mind that he could already have done something about is when he announced well over a year ago that, “I’m going to bring down drug prices. I don’t like what’s happened with drug prices.” In February 2016, he went so far as to promote the idea of the government using its market strength to reduce drug prices.

“I said to myself, wow, let me do some numbers. If we competitively bid drugs in the United States, we can save as much as \$300 billion a year.” That statement was an ambitious one even for Donald Trump, who views himself as a master dealmaker. American drug buyers spent \$450 billion on prescriptions in 2016. Hence, Trump was figuring he could twist drug company arms into huge price cuts.

You may remember that as recent as last October he once again promised to reduce drug prices for Americans. He said at that time, as he did earlier, that drug companies are “frankly getting away with murder” and further that his administration is “going to get prescription drug prices way down.” Recently, Trump was provided help from the National Academy of Sciences (NAC) that gave him a realistic road map to embrace his goal regarding drug prices.

The NAC provided guidance by its report, *Making Medicines Affordable: A National Imperative*.

Appearing in *The Oregonian* last month was a column by David Lazarus who wrote under the title, *A road map to cutting drug prices Trump should follow*.

Having an interest in this subject parallel to my own, Lazarus contacted the White House to inquire when Trump will announce his advocacy for the common sense ideas in the NAC's report and fulfill his vow to make medications more available and affordable. Lazarus reports that he was unable to get a White House answer but instead was directed to what has become a dead end source, the now-nearly defunct and out-of-order U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

So, there's only a dark hole between what have been Trump pledges on drug prices and what's become of his many pledges when he's said he was bound and determined to do something about those deplorable drug prices. The truth is that he's done nothing, period. Meanwhile, as for his promise also to drain the “swamp,” he has nominated a former drug-company executive, Alex Azar, to serve as HHS secretary. Hence, we may see pigs fly before Azar tackles drug prices.

If it's difficult for you to guess

where this matter will go from here, let's recognize what happens if Azar passes muster with Congress and is appointed to secretary of health. You see, while Azar was head of U.S. operations for Eli Lilly & Co., among many outrages, the company more than doubled the price of insulin, a life-saving medication for millions of people with diabetes.

Meanwhile, the pharmaceutical industry is helping Republican members of Congress and has already contributed nearly \$13 million to GOP politicians for 2018 congressional elections. The top recipient, receiving \$313,000, is Republican U.S. Senator Orrin Hatch (R/Utah), a voting member of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions. Hatch promises not to run for re-election; nevertheless, one can be assured that he will help them as long as he's there.

Of note regarding the Trump administration and GOP members of Congress on America's health and human services: they were active in the tax bill to eliminate a provision in the Affordable Care Act that would have retained many Americans with health insurance. However, even though a specific amendment was on the U.S. Senate floor to control drug prices, our “representatives” chose instead to do nothing about what are viewed by many as highway robbery costs: U.S. prescription drug prices.

(Gene H. McIntyre lives in Keizer.)

guest column

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