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OUR VIEW

AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite

House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Rep. Greg Walden, R-Ore., joined at right by Rep. John Yarmuth, D-Ky., ranking member of the Budget Committee, makes a point as the House Rules Committee meets to shape the final version of the Republican health care bill before it goes to the floor for debate and a vote.

Ramming new health plan into law a mistake

Congress' proposed alternative to Obamacare would not force anyone off the Oregon Health Plan. Let's be clear about that.

But let's be equally clear: Hundreds of thousands of Oregonians could lose their health insurance.

That contradiction exists because the so-called American Health Care Act is not health care reform. It is financial reform, or at least change. The plan put forth by congressional Republicans and the Trump administration would slash federal spending on health care, shifting much of that responsibility to the states.

Still, it's disingenuous for Republicans to say no one would be kicked off Medicaid, or for Democrats to say millions of Americans would be, as if those outcomes were guaranteed. As with the health plan's predecessor — the Affordable Care Act, or Obamacare — no one knows precisely what will happen.

The question for Congress and the American people comes down to how much our government should spend on health coverage for low- and moderate-income Americans.

If states have the money — which few, if any, will — they could continue serving all their Medicaid recipients. In Oregon, where most Medicaid coverage is through the Oregon Health Plan, that could cost the state an additional \$2.6 billion over five years. That is why state officials say as many as 375,000 people could lose Oregon Health Plan coverage by 2023.

Democratic Gov.

Kate Brown said last week that the number of uninsured Oregonians would triple, from the current 5 percent of the population to 15 percent. That is because of bureaucratic hurdles imposed by the American Health Care Act, as well as reduced subsidies and Oregon's inability to cover the increased costs.

The Republican plan would repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, which had little to do with health-care reform either. The reform was in insurance coverage, although Oregon was able to improve care while reducing price hikes. The key was the establishment of coordinated care organizations, whose collaborative model of overall health care reduced emergency room visits and hospital admissions. On the other hand, Cover Oregon was an expensive fiasco, and it is still costing Oregon money.

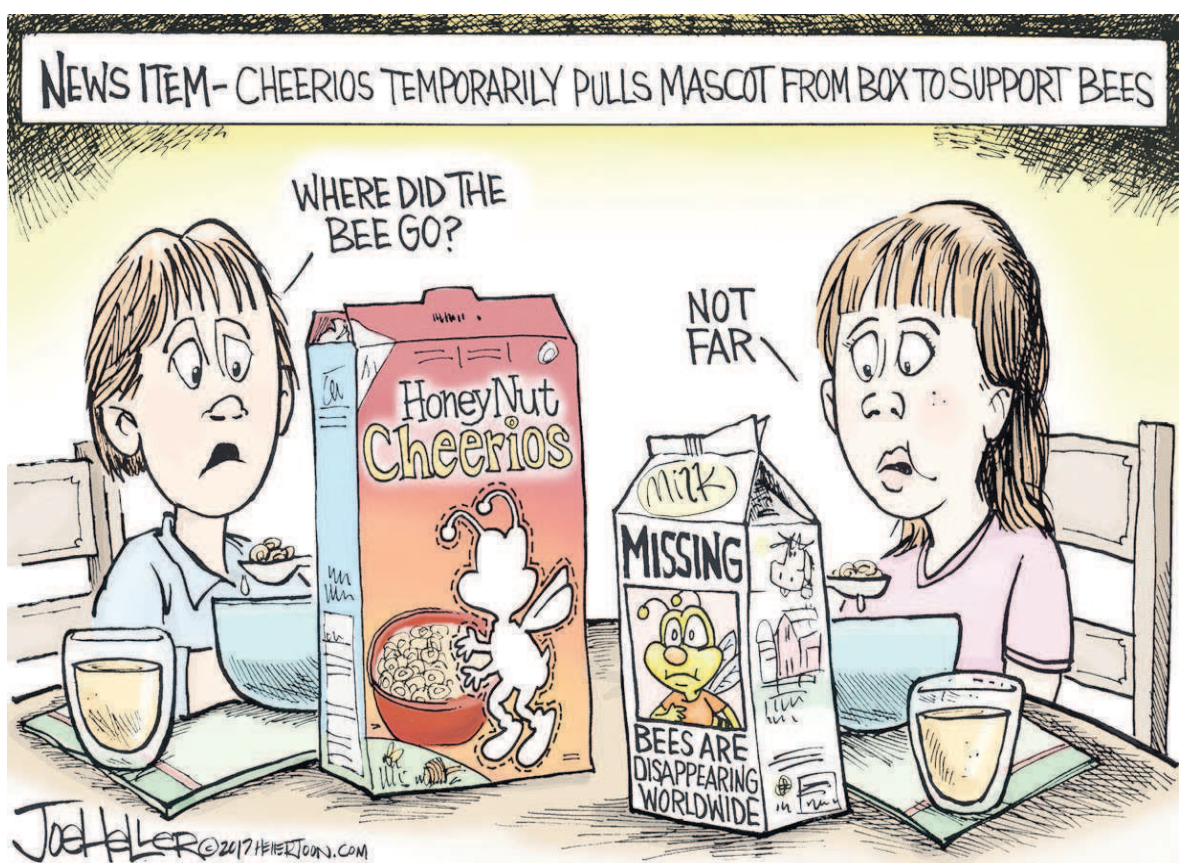
The Affordable Care Act and the new congressional plan share other similarities — unfortunate ones, starting with lack of clarity at the outset.

Changes in the American Health Care Act are likely because the current proposal appears to please no one. Conservatives in the Republican congressional majority contend the plan remains too much like Obamacare. Minority Democrats complain that it undoes Obamacare's good points.

Unfortunately, congressional Republicans appear ready to follow the Democrats' bad example and ram their health-finance plan down the throats of the opposition. That strategy resulted in the Affordable Care Act we currently have — a mix of flaws, successes and uncertainties.

A Republican plan that follows a similar unilateral approach will yield a similar outcome.

The Affordable Care Act and the new congressional plan share other similarities — unfortunate ones, starting with lack of clarity at the outset.



Tweeting toward oblivion

By FRANK BRUNI

New York Times News Service

Donald Trump faces a stark choice. He can tweet, or he can govern.

He can indulge his persecution complex, firing off missives that compare Barack Obama to Joseph McCarthy and U.S. intelligence officers to Nazis, or he can recognize it as a gateway to disgrace and irrelevance.

He can make his presidency about his own viscera, or he can make it about the country's welfare. He can do what feels cathartic in the moment, or he can do what's constructive in the long run. He can dabble in bright colors and shiny objects, or he can deal in durable truths.

I'm focusing on Twitter because it teases out his worst traits. It's the theater for vainglorious, vindictive, impulsive Trump, and it was the realm in which he made the wild accusations that Obama had wiretapped Trump Tower. On Monday, James Comey debunked those charges, certifying them as the gaseous fulminations we more or less knew they were.

And through much of Tuesday, Trump's personal Twitter account essentially went dark. There was nothing from the hours around dawn, which is when he typically visits with his darkest vapors. There was only anodyne stuff later on: a shout-out to the scientists at NASA, a salute to U.S. farmers.

Either someone in his orbit convinced him, at least briefly, of the damage he was doing and the miserable situation he's in, or Trump himself summoned some wisdom and restraint. He must be capable of that. Can he continue it?

It could be argued that every presidency is a tug of war between private demons and the public interest, between the commander in chief's indulgence of his own psychological needs and his attentiveness to the hard work of America. With Trump it's a furiously pitched battle, and the demons are way out ahead.

One of them hasn't received the attention it warrants. With all our condemnations of Trump the bully, we've overlooked Trump the bullied, which is the version more likely to bring him down. I mean the Trump who's hellbent on believing that he's up against ruthless enemies; the Trump who must amplify every stride by casting it as a triumph over formidable odds; the Trump who's throwing a pity party for himself the likes of which few of his predecessors ever attempted.

His election somehow brought this Trump to the fore. In a paradox as strange as everything else about him, victory played handmaiden to a feeling of victimization: his own

and the country's.

It's precisely that feeling — "a sense of persecution bordering on faith," as Glenn Thrush and Maggie Haberman wrote in *The Times* on Monday — that brought about the wiretapping tweets.

— you have an obvious investment in calling such surveys rigged and wrong, as Trump is still doing.

But other whimpering is absurdly conceived and needlessly divisive. During Angela Merkel's visit to Washington last week, he ranted about an unjust trade imbalance between Germany and the United States, crediting Germany with smarter negotiators. But there are no such negotiators. We trade not specifically with Germany but with the European Union as a whole.

It's possible that he doesn't know that. It's also possible that he chose to disregard a detail that would have complicated and maybe nullified his complaint. Why let the facts get in the way of a tantrum that he then transferred to Twitter, where he belittled that Germany owed money for its defense to the United States and NATO?

It's funny: Comey's testimony Monday made clear that someone does have a right to feel put upon. That someone is Hillary Clinton. He stressed how "hated" she was by Vladimir Putin. He also confirmed that before Election Day, intelligence officers were looking into whether Putin and the Russians were meddling in the election because of that hatred. At the time Comey said nothing about that, even as he announced that the FBI was taking a fresh look at newly discovered Clinton emails.

Trump is no victim. He's the luckiest man alive — or has been, until now.

But his allies "have begun to wonder if his need for self-expression, often on social media, will exceed his instinct for self-preservation," Thrush and Haberman wrote. He can vent his emotions or exercise his responsibilities. The decision belongs to him, the consequences to all of us.



AP Photo/Alexander Zemlianichenko

People walk past a caricature of President Donald Trump on sale in a shopping mall in Moscow, Russia, on Wednesday. President Donald Trump's former campaign chairman, Paul Manafort, secretly worked for a Russian billionaire to advance the interests of Russian President Vladimir Putin a decade ago and proposed an ambitious political strategy to undermine anti-Russian opposition across former Soviet republics, *The Associated Press* has learned.

It's the theater for vainglorious, vindictive, impulsive Trump, and it was the realm in which he made the wild accusations that Obama had wiretapped Trump Tower.

But it has also brought about many other ill-advised tweets and ill-considered public statements, enveloping Trump in a foul air of grievance. If it's not the Mexicans taking advantage of him and of us, it's the Australians or the Germans or the Chinese. Take your pick.

The "deep state" is out to get him. The leaks are a plot against him.

Sometimes his mewling has an obvious prompt. When your approval ratings have sunk as low as his — a recent Gallup tracking poll showed that only 37 percent of Americans were pleased with his performance

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Letters written in response to

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