

OPINION

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Dying Because of Inadequate Medicine

Elderly deserve quality care

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

An elderly person should be able to spend time with their families and enjoy life in a way they couldn't when they were younger and working full time. They certainly should not be worried whether or not the medical care they receive will, at best, cause an adverse reaction that was completely avoidable or, in a worst case scenario, kill them.

Unfortunately, that is the reality for Medicare recipients around this country: in a recently released study, it was reported that, in just one month, a projected 15,000 hospitalized Medicare patients died because they received less than quality care.

Around 40 million Americans receive Medicare, a federally funded program that provides health insurance coverage to people aged 65 or over. The Department of Health and Human Services Inspector General's new report has revealed that there is an alarmingly high risk for medical malpractice within the program.

According to the study, 1 in 7 Medicare patients who are hospitalized are harmed by -- and ultimately die because of -- medical treatment they receive.

Common causes of these deaths include improper use of blood thinning medications, respiratory failure from over sedation or inadequate insulin management. Another 1 in 7 patients experienced temporary harm, but the error was discovered in reversed just in time to save their lives.

There are no words to convey how frightening this news is, not just for Medicare recipients, but also

for their families.

When someone is hospitalized, they tend to focus on their recovery. With this news, patients and their families are left to question whether or not the treatment they receive will do more harm than good. Of course, there is also a societal cost: taxpayers spend more than \$4 billion each year because additional treatments

or longer hospital stays are needed to fix medical mistakes that should never have happened.

It is clear that there needs to be a federally funded look into the way hospitals perceive and care for Medicare patients. Their safety measures need to be examined and, when necessary, changed immediately. If there are best practices for treatment, they should be implemented.

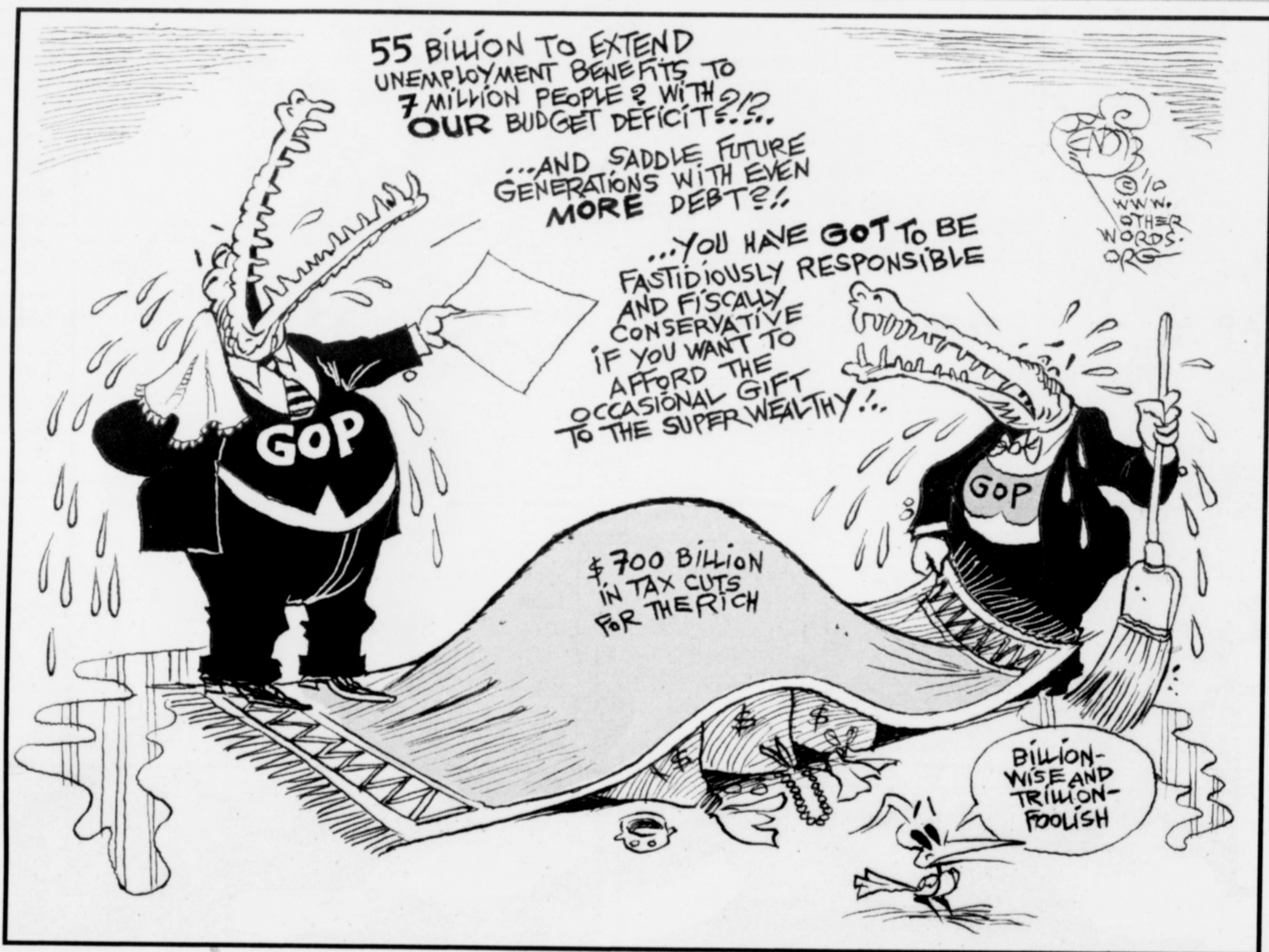
Unbelievably, Congress is considering cuts to the Medicare, so such an investigation is unlikely. And, with fewer dollars to provide services, more preventable deaths are to be expected.

The elderly are among the most vulnerable members of our society and, as a collective, we should work to keep them safe from harm.

Call or write your elected officials

and demand that they not only vote to keep Medicare funding intact, but also ask that they earmark additional funds to ensure that, when they are hospitalized, our elderly receive quality treatment at quality hospitals.

Judge Greg Mathis is a former Michigan District Court judge and current syndicated television show judge.



Climate Change's Human Tragedy

Make progress by spending less on the military

BY MIRIAM PEMBERTON

As deserts expand and droughts persist, desperate people begin fighting over the water that remains. Elsewhere, rising sea levels create mass migrations. These portraits of human tragedy caused by climate change have become environmental security threats that the U.S. military now worries about.



The U.S. military is taking steps to reduce its own greenhouse gas emissions. Since it produces more emissions than any other institution on the planet, this is good news. But is it enough?

In a word, no.

If climate change is the major security threat the military says it is, no amount of military greening will be enough to reverse it. Only wholesale measures to curb emissions across our own economy -- and the world's -- will do the job. Where will the money come from?

Here's one big part of the answer: if arresting climate change

is a national security imperative, then we need to devote a substantial portion of our security dollars to that purpose.

How are we doing so far? I have measured the balance of what the federal government spends on its military forces and on climate change since 2008. The climate change budget has more than doubled since then, from \$7 to \$18 billion. During the same period, military spending has also risen, though at a slower rate: from \$696 to \$739 billion.

As a result, we've cut the gap between them in half. We spent \$94 on the military for every dollar

we spent on the climate in 2008. We'll spend at a ratio of \$41 to \$1 in 2011.

Obviously, this is progress. But check out what's happening in China, our primary global competitor. It spends about one-sixth as much on its military as the United States. It invests twice as much in clean energy technology. So its spending balance works out to somewhere between \$2 and \$3 on its military to every dollar it spends on climate.

And China is on track to become the world leader in both solar and wind technology by next year.

So our 41-to-1 balance looks good

compared to where we were, but terrible compared to our main global competitor. The extreme tilt in our budget toward military spending is leaving us way behind in two of the major growth markets of the global economy.

For the sake of our economic health and competitiveness, then, as well as for the sake of our security, we need to tilt the other way. The balance between what we spend on traditional military tools and on climate needs to look a lot more like China's.

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