

CLINIC: Insurance utilization rate plummeted from 163 to 73 percent

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"Your problem is really two-fold," she told her husband. "You need education, but you also need people to be motivated. They need to have skin in the game."

Why not bring health care in house? Hire a doctor to examine employees and a nurse to shepherd them as they make healthy changes. Charge \$75 per month for a previously free program, then waive fees depending on participation in a wellness program. It was an intriguing idea.

Nerenberg hired Rhonda's employer, Dr. Russell Harrison, to provide in-house medical care. He, or physician's assistant Erika Acuna, come once a week to an exam room set up in the building. Nerenberg convinced his nurse/nutritionist wife to accept the job of counseling and cajoling the workers on their path to better health.

She meets with each employee to set up a health plan checks in quarterly. She meets with workers whenever they have questions.

Fast forward 17 months and the change is stunning. The company's insurance utilization rate plummeted from 163 percent to 73 percent. Billy Nerenberg said the workers are healthier and more productive. Aetna currently provides health insurance for Cayuse, but other insurance companies have also indicated interest.

"We are now a very desirable company to work with," he said.

Employee Richard Retig admits he was slow to embrace the program, but eventually went all in. The 56-year-old took medication for type 2 diabetes, drank multiple cans of soda each day and fought a losing battle with the scales. His energy was low and his blood sugar level seemed to be on an elevator ride to the penthouse.

"It was going up and up and up," Retig said.

When Dr. Harrison recommended insulin for the diabetes, it jolted Retig.

"Employees tell me their lives were saved. Cancer was spotted. Diabetics are no longer on medication."

— **Billy Nerenberg**, Cayuse Technologies CEO

He met with Rhonda to formulate a plan to improve his health. He traded soda for water, stopped eating carbohydrates and started consuming more vegetables. His blood sugar dropped dramatically, forestalling the need for insulin. He lost 39 pounds in two months and says he now has energy to spare.

"In the morning, I pop up out of bed," Retig said.

Jackie Lindsay is another success story. Before the program, Lindsay struggled with borderline diabetes, chronic migraines, allergies, asthma and stomach problems. After a liver detox and dietary changes, her blood sugar fell and her other problems faded.

"My energy levels are crazy high," she said. "Before, I lay around the house on weekends, sleeping until 10 or 11. Now, I can't sleep past 8."

Another employee was on the verge of being terminated for repeatedly falling asleep at his desk. To eliminate physical reasons, Billy Nerenberg sent him to Rhonda. The employee's blood sugar level was dangerously high, but with medical intervention, he is now productive and healthy. Success stories abound, say the Nerenbergs.

"Putting the program into place was a financial leap of faith, but the leap has really paid off," Rhonda said.

The nurse, who had reluctantly agreed to get the program going and stay for a year, is now 17 months in with no plans on going anywhere. She is sticking around "because I love to see the positive changes in the employees' lives."

Dr. Harrison likes the continuity of the program.

"There's the aspect of doing wellness instead of trying to fix a problem," he said. "It has been good for the patients. It's a little different than mainstream

medicine."

Several things are critical to reducing the employee's \$75 monthly premium. Someone who doesn't smoke saves \$25.

Other ways to save are establishing a relationship with Dr. Harrison or other primary care physician, addressing a disease or problem that is impacting their health and doing something to improve it, getting a colonoscopy or seeing a dentist or eye doctor.

Rhonda encourages physical activity and gives away activity trackers to those who ask for them.

The results of this health care experiment has surprised the Nerenbergs.

"Employees tell me their lives were saved," Billy said. "Cancer was spotted. Diabetics are no longer on medication."

Employees have shed more than 1,000 pounds in total. In addition, the company now offers increased health insurance benefits not just to employees, but to family members.

One of the perks is time saved in dealing with health problems.

Employees can meet with Nerenberg immediately. She can refill prescriptions, draw blood for labwork and give immunizations and strep tests, among other things.

"Rhonda will text them when the doctor is ready," Billy said. "It takes 45 seconds to walk over. They are back to work in 20 minutes."

The CEO is still stunned by how well the program is working. Health insurance costs are down and productivity is up. Employees are healthier.

"When you see people's lives change, it's just amazing," he said.

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Reports say Mueller probe now examining possible obstruction

By **JAKE PEARSON** and **MARY CLARE JALONICK**
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The special counsel appointed to investigate Russian influence in the 2016 presidential campaign is now examining whether President Donald Trump tried to obstruct justice, *The Washington Post* reported Wednesday evening.

Accusations of obstruction arose last month when Trump fired FBI Director James Comey. Comey testified in a Senate hearing last week that he believed he was fired "because of the Russia investigation."

Comey also testified he had told Trump he was not under investigation.

The Post and *The New York Times* both reported that Mueller was seeking interviews with three Trump administration officials who weren't involved in Trump's campaign: Dan Coats, the director of national intelligence; Michael Rogers, the head of the National Security Agency; and Richard Ledgett, the former NSA deputy director.

Mark Corallo, a spokesman for Trump's personal lawyer, responded Wednesday evening to the *Post* report by saying: "The

FBI leak of information regarding the president is outrageous, inexcusable and illegal."

The Post report cited anonymous sources who were briefed on requests made by investigators. It was not known whether the FBI was the source of the information.

Mueller met Wednesday with the leaders of the Senate Intelligence Committee in an effort to ensure their investigations don't conflict.

The leaders of the Senate Intelligence committee said in a statement issued Wednesday that they "look forward to future engagements" with Robert Mueller.

Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Richard Burr, R-N.C., and Sen. Mark Warner of Virginia, the panel's top Democrat, didn't provide any other details regarding the meeting. An aide familiar with the meeting said it was held to discuss the investigations, including ways that the parallel inquiries don't interfere with one another. The aide spoke on condition of anonymity because the meeting was private.

The meeting comes a day after lawmakers questioned Justice Department

officials about the probe and Mueller's independence, and after a friend of Trump said the White House was considering firing Mueller.

Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, who appointed Mueller last month, testified Tuesday he has seen no evidence of good cause to fire Mueller.

Also Wednesday, Senate Judiciary Chairman Charles Grassley said his panel will investigate the removal of former FBI Director James Comey and "any alleged improper partisan interference in law enforcement investigations."

Grassley announced the investigation in a letter to California Sen. Dianne Feinstein, the panel's top Democrat. Grassley's office said the letter is in response to a recent letter from Feinstein requesting that the committee seek details from senior FBI leadership about Comey's interactions with President Donald Trump before he was fired.

The letter said the investigation will also probe Comey's testimony that Loretta Lynch, as President Barack Obama's attorney general, had directed him to describe an FBI probe into Hillary Clinton's email practices as merely a "matter" and to avoid calling it an investigation.

RAINBOW: Gathering could attract between 10,000 and 25,000 people

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anywhere in Oregon that has a national forest," he said. "Spring Council is usually within an hour or two drive of the best site or two that people have located while scouting."

The Forest Service's main concern with the influx of such a large group of people are the effects on natural resources, public safety and the impact on the community, said Mike Stearly, public affairs specialist for the Malheur National Forest. He estimated the gathering could attract between 10,000 and 25,000 people.

The Rainbow gathering will be managed by a federal incident management team with law enforcement officers and advisers. The team will be similar to those dispatched for wildfires and will work with local law enforcement and the community, according to Stearly.

Stearly said the Forest Service requires groups larger than 75 people to acquire a special use permit.

The *Montana Standard* newspaper reported the total cost for the U.S. Forest Service relating to a Rainbow Family gathering near Jackson, Montana, in 2013 was \$573,361. Roughly \$400,000 of that was spent on law enforcement.

During the 1997 gathering on the Ochoco National Forest in Crook County, garbage disposal, increased traffic and low levels of fecal coliform and giardia present in streams used as water sources were concerns. There were reports of overdoses, drug and alcohol charges and a recovered stolen vehicle.

Local artist and Prairie City resident David Seacord, who has attended these gatherings in the past, said there could be both benefits and drawbacks to having the gathering in the area.

"Any community that has a gathering in the area is going to be benefited economically," Seacord said.

However, like many events, he said the gathering could attract undesirable elements. As a whole, he said, the event was peaceful and respectful, but sometimes opportunists will take advantage of a free, public event that welcomes everyone.

The gathering is made possible entirely through volunteers who build from scratch the infrastructure to support tens of thousands of people and then entirely remove it, according to Seacord.

"They are committed to leaving land in impeccable condition, and they have a history of that being acknowledged," he said.

He said people unsure about the gathering should see what it is like for themselves before passing judgment.

REACH: Will begin serving sack lunches, hot dinners to teenagers in a few weeks

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"There's just not a lot of communication in terms of organization," he said.

Rather than reinvent the wheel, Jackson said REACH will act as a facilitator in addition to offering its own services.

For instance, if a pregnant teen finds her way to REACH, volunteers would point her to Pregnancy Care Services for baby supplies. Or if a teen is struggling with drug abuse, REACH could help connect them with a drug counselor at Pendleton High School.

At the outset, Jackson said REACH will help run two programs — a twice-a-week meal program and police mentor program, both at the rec center.

In a few weeks, Jackson said REACH will begin serving sack lunches and hot dinners to teenagers in partnership with the Community Action Program of East Central Oregon.

Coming in the fall, Jackson said REACH will revive a program called TRACK — Teaching Research and Critical Skills to Keep Youth Engaged in Learning — in conjunction with the Pendleton Police Department.

As a part of the program, TRACK participants will be required to meet with police personnel on a regular basis to create a research project on a topic of their own choosing. Before funding dried up for the program, Jackson said TRACK had a record of success with students who were struggling with behavior or academics in school.

In addition to the city and the police department, REACH lists several Christian organizations among its community partners, including the Pendleton First Church of God and Young



Staff photo by E.J. Harris
A group of girls fly down a slip-and-slide on Wednesday during a First Church of God and REACH Pendleton event at Rice-Blakey Park in Pendleton.

"If we're ever struggling to fit everybody in, that's a good problem to have."

— **Robb Corbett**, Pendleton city manager on space at the rec center

Life, a nondenominational youth Christian ministry with a chapter in Pendleton.

Pregnancy Care Services promotes "a Christian view that affirms the sanctity of human life," according to its website.

Jackson said REACH "is not afraid to cross those boundaries" if it means giving youth more access to services, but REACH itself is a stand-alone organization without a religious affiliation.

If REACH is going to establish trust with youth, Jackson said the organization needs a consistent location to call home. The Pendleton Recreation Center would fit its needs, but the move created new concerns that the center's existing users would be crowded out.

At a May 16 city council

meeting, Pendleton resident Joe Engum said there were worries that REACH would force out the yoga class in the rec center's Foundation Room.

In an interview, City Manager Robb Corbett said no programs would be eliminated from the recreation center due to REACH'S tenancy.

Corbett said the city will primarily house REACH in the gym and will handle scheduling conflicts as they arise.

Corbett said there has already been a conflict between a gymnastics class and REACH, but they were able to move the gymnastics class into a room at the Vert.

If REACH's demand for time and space exceed the supply, Corbett said the city would deal with it accordingly. He also said the organization would begin paying for the space at the end of the year, though he wasn't sure what the rate would be.

"If we're ever struggling to fit everybody in, that's a good problem to have," he said.

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WALDEN: Oregon donors provided less than half of Walden's individual contributions

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Peter DeFazio, \$126,078; U.S. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici, \$104,987, and U.S. Rep. Earl Blumenauer, \$25,502.

Walden's second committee — the Walden Victory Fund — reported contributions of \$129,500. That included a \$50,000 contribution from Jay Graham, a wealthy Texas oilman.

The Walden for Congress reports show donors from far Eastern Oregon provided a fraction of the \$261,823 he raised from individuals or businesses. In Umatilla County, Roger Bounds, a retired Hermiston banker and father of Walden's chief of staff Lorissa Bounds, donated \$500; Eva Swain, president of Swain Subaru in Hermiston, \$500; and Charles Johnston, a retired doctor from Pilot Rock, \$300.

Overall, the reports show Oregon donors provided less than half of Walden's individual contributions.

Political action committees, representing everything from dermatologists to garbage collectors, were Walden's most potent source of campaign money. In all, Walden reported getting \$527,292 from the political committees with just one — the PGE PAC — based in Oregon. The National Cattlemen's

Beef Association PAC gave \$6,000.

The Democratic Party of Oregon in a statement to the *Enterprise* said Walden "has an ongoing history of voting for special interests."

The party, which hasn't fielded a competitive candidate against Walden in recent elections, said he "is continuing to receive big donations from the special interests he has been catering to instead of his constituents — most notably the healthcare and telecom industries."

The reports show the cost of running for Congress, where Walden has served since 1998. His committee spent \$183,000 in the first three months of this year on expenses that included staff, printing, and political consultants. He also transferred \$150,000 to the Republican National Congressional Committee, the House group focused on electing Republicans to Congress. Walden chaired the group until last fall.

The report showed some fund-raising work for Walden took place in luxury settings.

In February, his campaign spent \$6,370 on travel and fund-raising expenses at the St. Regis Deer Valley, a five-star resort outside Park City, Utah. The following month Walden's committee spent \$6,341 for a fund-raising event at BLT

Prime, a Washington steak house operating in President Trump's hotel, the Trump International. The campaign also listed a \$3,000 travel expense at Skamania Lodge — roughly a half hour from Walden's home in Hood River.

The Walden Victory Fund, a separate political committee, listed a \$6,000 expense in February for "event site rental" of the Allison Inn and Spa in Newberg, which describes itself as a "wine country resort."

Marta Simons of Hood River, treasurer for Walden for Congress, didn't return two telephone messages and Lisa Lisker, the Washington-based treasurer for the Walden Victory Fund, said she couldn't answer questions. Justin Discigil, Walden's spokesman, asked for written questions but responded with a general statement without answering them.

Discigil said the campaign money is "used judiciously to support Greg's campaign" and that Walden's supporters understand his role trying to elect Republicans.

"Greg's supporters also understand the only thing they receive in return for their contribution is a 'thank you.'" Discigil said.

The East Oregonian contributed to this report.