

# EAST OREGONIAN

Founded October 16, 1875

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## OUR VIEW

# Health care takes all hands on deck

Health care has been top of the American mind for decades, as the price of medical care in the country has skyrocketed and outcomes here fell well behind other first-world countries.

Little progress has been made. Entrenched interests — politics, Big Pharma, insurance companies, lawyers, the American Medical Association, government bureaucracy, etc., etc., — has helped keep costs on a constant rise. And the gap between us and other rich countries has only grown wider when it comes to life expectancy, infant mortality rates, access to care and more.

We must say, of course, that the American health care system can be the best in the world, if you can afford the best. But if we want more Americans to live longer, healthier, better lives, then how do we make the health care system work better for more Americans?

If you can answer that question, please run for president.

For all of us who don't have the answer, let's first take a brief view of the lay of the land. The Affordable Care Act (aka Obamacare) took a shot at improving the system when it was passed in 2008. It consisted of hundreds of pages of rules and programs and acronyms and pilot projects, but at its heart was a simple concept: the rich and healthy would pay more to allow the poor and sick to have health insurance. That's fine and good, and some would argue a noble effort that does the most good without unfairly punishing those who can't afford it. Others would argue it is an unfair system — government sticking its messy hands into the free market, personal decision-making and the plain old luck that affects the trajectory of life in the land of the free.

Either way you see it, the ACA did not tackle the cost of care in America. And even though more Americans have health insurance, many cannot afford the subsidized premiums nor pay their share of the health care they receive, even when using their government-mandated insurance. In those arenas, the ACA has not helped consumers. It has, however, helped the millions of sick Americans with pre-existing conditions get coverage, which increased the cost in the system more than many projected, including the insurance companies.

Republicans have loudly railed against the law over the last decade, and their win last November gave them the White House and the ability to make their mark on American health care. So far, they've had a troubling health care bill pass the House, a similar bill hit a sticking point in the Senate, and have not found enough votes to even muster a straight-forward repeal of Obamacare, which would put much of the pre-2008 rules back in place.

We're not at the precipice of an apocalypse, however, and the hyperbole from both political parties moves us farther away, not closer to a solution.

Some Republicans called Obamacare the "worst law in our history," which is patently absurd. The ACA was a rather conservative approach to making a big change

in the way many Americans access care. But on the other hand, Democrats are accusing Republicans of sending millions of Americans to an early grave by proposing their own changes, which return tax cuts to the rich and attempt to give poor and middle-class Americans tax-free alternatives to paying for their coverage and care.

There is broad support for upgrading and improving health care in America, despite the pessimism and death threats from our political parties.

Even many Republicans have come around to the idea of "Medicare for all," a more palatable way to describe a more socialized medical system. Many Democrats

are OK with wholesale changes to the Affordable Care Act, and realize that may include scrapping Obama's signature achievement in order to enact something better.

How to do that is terribly complex, and risky. Many politicians have tried and failed to do something about it, and others tiptoe around and wait for others to take on the heavy lift.

It's even more delicate in rural America, where many doctors and hospitals and clinics are surviving on razor thin margins, and depend heavily on government programs like Medicaid.

American health care is a mangled mess of entrenched interests, and at the heart of it the complicated science that is modern medicine. Keeping people healthy and alive is something that cannot be done in a vacuum, and the country's health care structure must somehow be both strong and flexible.

Voters and politicians must own up to the fact that this country is spending much too much money on it — nearly 20 percent of our entire economy — and we're not getting acceptable results. Give the ACA credit where it's due, but own up to the fact that there are significant problems with it that need fixing, right now.

Americans are a wonderful, weird group of humans. We're risk takers, we drink too much and eat way too much, and we drive our cars too far and too fast and we have too many guns around and we don't sleep enough and we ingest tobacco and red meat too darn often. All of those things make us less healthy, but more free.

We're also varied demographically and culturally and we live dramatically different lives in urban Chicago or rural Montana, as a multi-billionaire in Manhattan or homeless on the streets of San Francisco. This makes a national health care system even more complicated than a country like Sweden or Denmark, which have the best health care systems and quality of life.

It will take all hands on deck to improve health outcomes: A more efficient, smarter government system. Better choices from Americans, from our diets to showing up to our annual checkups. Doctors who keep cost in mind. From Washington, D.C., we should demand debate that rises above partisanship and frames health care as the critically important, immensely complex issue it is.

**Citizens should demand a honest health care debate that rises above partisanship.**



## OTHER VIEWS

# The phone is smart, but where's the big idea?

I used a smartphone GPS to find my way through the cobblestoned maze of Geneva's Old Town, in search of a handmade machine that changed the world more than any other invention. Near a 13th-century cathedral in this Swiss city on the shores of a lovely lake, I found what I was looking for: a Gutenberg printing press.

"This was the internet of its day — at least as influential as the iPhone," said Gabriel de Montmollin, director of the Museum of the Reformation, toying with the replica of Johann Gutenberg's great invention. It used to take four monks, laboring in a scriptorium with quills over calfskin, up to a year to produce a single book.

With the advance in movable type in 15th-century Europe, one press could crank out 3,000 pages a day. Before long, average people could travel to places that used to be unknown to them — with maps! Medical information passed more freely and quickly, diminishing the sway of quacks. And you could find your own way to God, or a way out of believing in God, with access to formerly forbidden thoughts.

The printing press offered the prospect that tyrants would never be able to kill a book or suppress an idea. Gutenberg's brainchild broke the monopoly that clerics had on scripture. And later, stirred by pamphlets from a version of that same press, the American colonies rose up against a king and gave birth to a nation.

So, a question in the summer of this 10th anniversary of the iPhone: has the device that is perhaps the most revolutionary of all time given us a single magnificent idea? Nearly every advancement of the written word through new technology has also advanced humankind.

Sure, you can say the iPhone changed everything. By putting the world's recorded knowledge in the palm of a hand, it revolutionized work, dining, travel and socializing. It made us more narcissistic — here's more of me doing cool stuff! — and it unleashed an army of awful trolls. We no longer have the patience to sit through a baseball game without that reach to the pocket. And one more casualty of Apple selling more than a billion phones in a decade's time: daydreaming has become a lost art.

Still, for all of that, I'm still waiting to see if the iPhone can do what the printing press did for religion and democracy. This year is also the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther posting his 95 theses against the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church; the Geneva museum makes a strong case that the printing press opened more minds than anything else.

The museum's exhibition — "Print! The First Pages of a Revolution" — quotes Luther as saying that the press was "the greatest



**TIMOTHY EGAN**  
Comment

and most extraordinary act of Divine Grace." As a renegade Catholic monk, Luther might never have seen his writings find their way out of a monastery. But through Gutenberg's democratizing machine, about 300,000 copies of Luther's provocations were circulated between 1517 and 1520. Christianity would never be the same.

Similarly, it's hard to imagine the French or American revolutions without those enlightened voices in print.

In the beginning of the written word, about 5,000 years ago, people scrawled information on clay. Their messages were sometimes bawdy, more often banal. The Greeks gave us humor, tragedy and poetry. Scrolls of papyrus were portable; Roman commanders used them as the equivalent of paperbacks, tucked into pockets.

"On the Nature of Things," a poem from the Roman philosopher Lucretius in the first century

B.C., was one of the most "dangerously radical" things ever written, Stephen Greenblatt argued in his book "The Swerve." Rediscovered and then printed in the early stages of the Renaissance on Gutenberg's press, the poetic celebration of the good life overturned much of Europe's dour medieval mindset.

Count Magna Carta, one of the founding documents in the evolution of free societies, and Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales," which popularized English vernacular, among the highlights of the thousand years or so when books were made by hand-cramped scribes, or printed from wooden blocks.

Not long after Steve Jobs introduced his iPhone, he said the bound book was probably headed for history's attic. Not so fast. After a period of rapid growth in e-books, something closer to the medium for Chaucer's volumes has made a great comeback.

The hope of the iPhone, and the internet in general, was that it would free people in closed societies. But the failure of the Arab Spring, and the continued suppression of ideas in North Korea, China and Iran, has not borne that out. And it's beyond pathetic that the leader of the free world uses his phone to insult women, or send out bizarre videos of him beating up imaginary reporters.

The iPhone is still young. It has certainly been "one of the most important, world-changing and successful products in history," as Apple CEO Tim Cook said. But I'm not sure if the world changed for the better with the iPhone — as it did with the printing press — or merely changed.

*Timothy Egan has served as Pacific Northwest correspondent and a national enterprise reporter for The New York Times.*

**Can the iPhone do what the printing press did for religion and democracy?**

## YOUR VIEWS

### Untruthful president cannot allow any criticism of himself

This letter is my take on our free press, President Trump and his associates.

President Trump has had six months to prove himself worthy of the high office he holds. As Commander in Chief he has handed off the leadership to the military generals, given them carte blanche to do as they will. This is one of many missteps.

These six months have been the most chaotic in recorded history. The chaos is made worse by the daily tweets attacking people unjustly. Many members of our free press — CNN, MSNBC, NBC, CBS and many others — have been viciously attacked. It seems to have a bias against women, particularly journalists.

He cannot seem to allow any criticism of himself or his administration even though it is factual. This is speaking truth to power, an essential process that keeps our democracy alive and well. I have found reporters to be truthful in their stories and articles.

I followed the fact-checking of almost

450 statements made by President Trump to be untruthful. Apparently this is his mode of conduct in business, TV shows and now the presidency. Trust is so important in this high office; we the people depend on our elected officials to be dependable, truthful and transparent.

He has appointed a commission to request voter information — names, addresses, birth dates, last four digits of Social Security numbers, what party he or she belongs to and how he or she cast their vote. Oregon's Secretary of State, Dennis Richardson, is complying with some of these requests. Many states are protecting their citizens by denying, as they should, any and all possible illegally given information.

I am incensed at these requests. Under the guise of checking for voter fraud, these requests are happening now. We have not had any voter fraud. This is wrong and I question the motives behind the requests. We are all at risk when this kind of personal information is revealed. I ask, for what purpose really?

**Jan Beitel**  
Umatilla

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