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OUR VIEW

The drama of politics

We don't often comment on national news in this space. We're a long way from Washington, and what happens there often doesn't trickle out our way for many moons.

But it's a fascinating to spy on the beltway every once in a while, and perhaps there has been no better time to do so than this week. The U.S. Senate is debating health care — a monumental issue in the lives of every American — and its future remains dramatically in doubt.

Political buffs everywhere have found themselves glued to C-SPAN, reading every newspaper they can find, brushing up on Senate rules, and watching how representatives from both sides of the aisle try to frame the issue and move the debate. Guilty as charged here on the *EO* editorial board — we've been tuned to the C-SPAN livestream nonstop.

Along the way we've brushed up on the definition of reconciliation, the Byrd Rule, "regular order," filibustering and the old parliamentarian — the umpire of the Senate, who calls balls and strikes when it comes to protocol.

Politics is often a dreadfully dull affair — little more than working on budgets and spreadsheets while following the arcane rules of the parliamentary body.

But not at this moment. This week, Republicans are trying to hold their slim majority together with

spit and glue, Democrats united in opposition but powerless to stop legislation on their own, and then there's a wild card president who has taken little interest in crafting legislation but has a keen interest in ripping apart those who "lose."

If that isn't enough, you have John McCain flying in, fresh off a brain cancer diagnosis, to vote and debate, and also excoriate his fellow senators for their lack of action for the good of the American people.

It's high drama and heady stuff. But to really understand what the heck is going on, you'll first need to dive headlong into some nonfiction.

If the rules of the Senate spark your interest, and you want to make heads or tails of the minutiae, check out "The U.S. Senate: Fundamentals of American Government" by Tom Daschle, former Democratic Senator from South Dakota. For a historical perspective, "The American Senate: An Insider's History," by Neil MacNeill is worth a read. And if you really want to get into the weeds, "Congressional Deskbook: The Practical and Comprehensive Guide to Congress" is a must-read for every new DC staffer trying to orient themselves to America's most powerful deliberative body.

And a "body" is a good way to look at the Senate. Right now it's split almost down the middle and you can see how everything works.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of publisher Kathryn Brown, managing editor Daniel Wattenburger, and opinion page editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

OTHER VIEWS

National parks should be affordable — especially for seniors

The Baker City Herald

The National Park Service turned 100 last year, and the venerable agency has not aged particularly well.

Park Service officials estimate that the backlog of deferred maintenance at the 417 sites they manage would cost about \$11.6 billion.

That's close to four times more money than Congress gives the agency each year.

Critics say President Trump's proposed budget would worsen the Park Service's fiscal woes but in one important sense that's not accurate.

Although Trump does propose an overall cut in the agency's budget for the fiscal year that starts Oct. 1, the president's proposal actually calls for the government to spend \$33.3 million more for construction, planning and deferred maintenance in national parks.

And yet, starting Aug. 28, the federal government will boost the cost from \$10 to \$80 for the lifetime pass people age 62 or older can buy to gain free admission to national parks as well as other recreation sites managed by federal agencies such as the Forest Service and BLM.

We understand that the government hasn't increased the cost of the senior pass since 1994.

And we appreciate that people who either fail to lock in their \$10 bargain before Aug. 28, or who don't turn 62 until after that date, can buy annual passes for \$20 for each of the next four years, and then convert the pass to a lifetime pass for no extra cost.

But \$70 is still \$70.

And we're skeptical that the benefits the Park Service will realize from the 7-fold price hike will even come close to offsetting the financial penalty it imposes on people, some of whom have fixed incomes.

Certainly Social Security payments aren't rising 700 percent.

And it happens that the first \$10 million the Park Service collects each

year from senior pass sales is deposited in an endowment that might, or might not, be used to actually improve national parks. According to the agency itself, that money must be spent "on projects and activities approved by the Secretary of Interior to further the mission and purpose of the National Park Service." That's generic enough a description to include activities other than fixing trails or building new restrooms, to be sure.

Nor is there any guarantee that the rest of the money from senior pass sales, beyond that initial \$10 million annually, will do tangible work in national parks. Every dollar in excess of \$10 million goes to the National Park

Centennial Challenge Fund, which can also be used for a variety of projects but also, crucially, requires at least a one-to-one match by non-federal donations.

Federal officials estimate the new, more expensive passes will generate \$35 million to \$40 million annually.

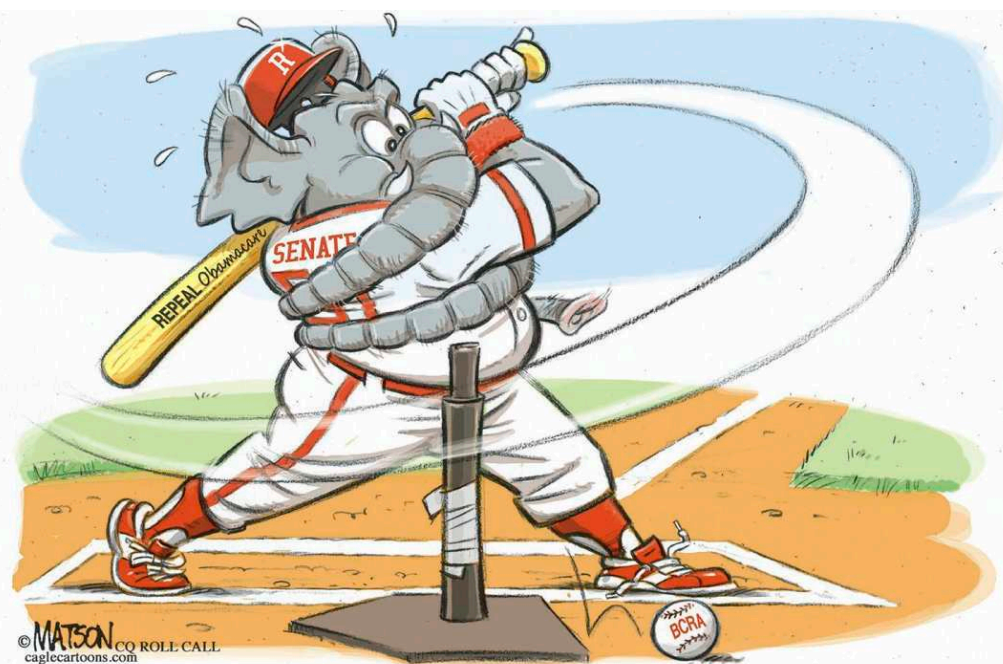
The bottom line here is that the people who will have to shell out \$70 more for a federal pass might never benefit directly from those additional dollars.

The situation is potentially different locally, however.

Although there are no national parks in Baker County, both the BLM and the Forest Service also sell senior passes. The key difference is that when those agencies sell passes locally — at, say, the BLM's Oregon Trail Interpretive Center — at least 80 percent of the money is spent on projects at the site where the pass was sold.

Nonetheless, we can't imagine how the \$70 increase in the senior pass fee can reasonably be deemed a bargain for anybody who buys one. At least people who buy one at the Interpretive Center are more likely to see an actual effect than if they plunk down their dollars at, say, Yosemite or Yellowstone.

In the meantime, we urge anybody who will turn 62 before Aug. 28 to buy their \$10 lifetime pass as soon as possible.



SWING AND A MOTION TO PROCEED

OTHER VIEWS

Why are Republicans trouncing Democrats in fundraising?

The Republican president has a job approval rating around 40 percent. The GOP has an unfavorability rating around 56 percent. And Republicans trail Democrats by nine points in an average of "generic ballot" polls.

All of which makes it notable that the Republican National Committee is trouncing the Democratic National Committee when it comes to raising money, especially from small donors.

The numbers are striking. In June, the RNC raised \$13.5 million to the DNC's \$5.5 million.

For 2017 so far, the RNC has raised \$75.4 million to the DNC's \$38.2 million.

The RNC started the year with \$25.3 million in cash-on-hand. Now it has \$44.7 million. The DNC started the year with \$10.5 in cash-on-hand. Now, that has fallen to \$7.5 million.

As of June 30, the RNC reported \$0 in debt. The DNC reported \$3.3 million in debt.

A look inside the numbers is even worse for the DNC.

Looking at collections from small donors — that is, those who contributed less than \$200 — the RNC raised \$10.5 million in the months of May and June. The DNC raised \$5.3 million from small donors in the same time period.

The RNC's money total is a record — more than was raised in any previous non-presidential election year. That is true for June, and for all of 2017 as well. The \$75.4 million raised this year compares to \$55.4 million for the same period in 2015; to \$51.2 million for the same period in 2014; to \$41.1 million for the same period in 2013, and so on going back.

"It's definitely a reflection of support for President Trump," said RNC spokesman Ryan Mahoney. "Our small-dollar donors are giving at a record pace because they believe the RNC is supporting President Trump, and they like that."

The obvious reason for the Democrats' troubles is that they lost the White House, the House and the Senate last year. Now, the party appears to have a particularly bad hangover. One data point: In 2013, after Republicans lost their second presidential election in a row and many believed the party faced years in the electoral wilderness, the RNC still raised more money in the January-June period, \$41.1 million, than the \$38.2 million the Democrats have raised so far this year.

There is much discussion about the intensity of Democratic opposition to President Trump, and indeed Democrats showed a lot of fundraising enthusiasm in the losing Georgia



BYRON YORK
Comment

congressional race that turned into a referendum on the president. But the fact is, the passions behind The Resistance have not, or have not yet, turned into support for the main vehicle of opposition to Trump, the Democratic Party.

Democrats have simply not gotten over the Hillary-Bernie split that plagued the party last year. And they have not decided what they will be in the future. Remember, this is a party that won the White House in 2008 and 2012 on the strength of the Obama coalition of minorities, young people, and the college educated — the

group political journalist Ron Brownstein calls the "coalition of the ascendant."

It's not an exaggeration to say that many believed demographics favored them so heavily that they were virtually guaranteed Democratic victories in the years ahead. And then the Trump victory reminded them that there are still a lot of working-class voters in the country who aren't necessarily natural

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Democrats.

This week, Democrats led by Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi rolled out a new agenda, which they call "A Better Deal," which is designed to appeal to those disaffected voters. And not a minute too soon. When a recent ABC-Washington Post poll asked, "Do you think the Democratic Party currently stands for something, or just stands against Trump?" — just 37 percent said the party stands for something, while 52 percent said it just stands against Trump, and 11 percent had no opinion.

So now Democrats have a huge job in front of them. And it is unclear whether Tom Perez, the Hillary Clinton-backed candidate who won the DNC chairmanship in a divisive battle with Rep. Keith Ellison earlier this year, is the man to do it. Last month, in explaining another dismal fundraising period for the Democrats, Perez distanced himself from the problem. "I got here on March 1," Perez told MSNBC, "and I was the first to say it, we've got a lot of rebuilding to do."

The new fundraising numbers don't predict what will happen in 2018. But they do say what is happening now. And that is, in spite of his problems there is enough support for Trump in the Republican base to set new small-donor fundraising records, while Democrats have yet another measure of the work that lies ahead.

Byron York is chief political correspondent for The Washington Examiner.

YOUR VIEWS

Affordable Care Act repeal would hurt rural Oregonians

As a lung doctor, I spend a lot of time hearing about what it's like when you can't breathe. If you can't breathe, you can't work. If your kids can't breathe, they can't go to school, and someone has to miss work to stay home. That's dollars out of the family budget.

My patients from rural Oregon suffer a great deal from respiratory diseases, whether from high pollen counts and wildfires outdoors to woodstoves or tobacco smoke indoors. Unfortunately, all of these illnesses are treated with avoidance (which can be hard) as well as inhalers. Ask anyone you know who needs an inhaler, and he or she will tell you that there aren't any generics, and the co-pays can be very high. They are almost impossible for the average family to buy out-of-pocket. If you end up in the ER or hospital, things can be even more expensive.

People die from diseases like lung cancer more in rural areas, stage for stage, likely due to difficulties accessing care. These problems are similar for almost every medical problem, from heart disease to diabetes. The Affordable Care Act helped provide more access to medications and care across our state, especially in rural Oregon. The benefits were biggest for many of our rural hospitals,

which had been providing a great deal of uncompensated care prior to the expansion of Oregon Medicaid and the individual insurance market. Hospitals were stabilized and Oregon added over 20,000 healthcare jobs after the ACA.

It has also allowed for innovation in healthcare, trying to expand telemedicine services further into rural areas to help chip away at those differences in health outcomes based on location.

Where you live shouldn't determine the quality of your family's healthcare, and it is impossible to have a healthy economy without healthy people. The recent House and Senate bills, as well as any repeal of the ACA without a viable replacement, would be devastating to rural Oregon. It would cause the loss of medication and health coverage for many as well as the loss of healthcare jobs. Rural hospitals and clinics may be closed or scaled back.

The Affordable Care Act was not perfect, but it was a good starting point. It needs to be built upon and strengthened, potentially by increasing subsidies, adding an affordable public option or expanding Medicaid or Medicare eligibility, not by destroying all the progress that has been made.

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LETTERS POLICY

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