

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OTHER VIEWS

Health care guarantee lacking means of delivery

The Eugene Register-Guard

The proposal to invite voters to add a guarantee of universal health care to the Oregon Constitution’s Bill of Rights has died in the Senate. Its demise should be un mourned — even welcomed. In the absence of a firm plan for keeping such a promise, a constitutional right to health care would be either meaningless or a cause of litigation.

The state Constitution’s Bill of Rights contains 46 sections, most of them protecting Oregonians’ civil rights. House Joint Resolution 203 would have added Section 47: “It is the obligation of the state to ensure that every resident of Oregon has access to

cost-effective, medically appropriate and affordable health care as a fundamental right.” Section 47 would differ from those preceding it in that it would commit the state’s government to providing something, rather than limiting the government’s power over citizens.

If HJR 203 had been approved by the Legislature and signed by the governor, a proposal to amend the Constitution by adding Section 47 would have appeared on the November general election ballot. The resolution’s sponsors were encouraged by voters’ approval of Measure 101 last month, which retained financing mechanisms for the state’s Medicaid program, and by the fact that with an expanded Medicaid program

and the increased availability of private insurance under the Affordable Care Act, about 94 percent of Oregonians have health insurance of some kind.

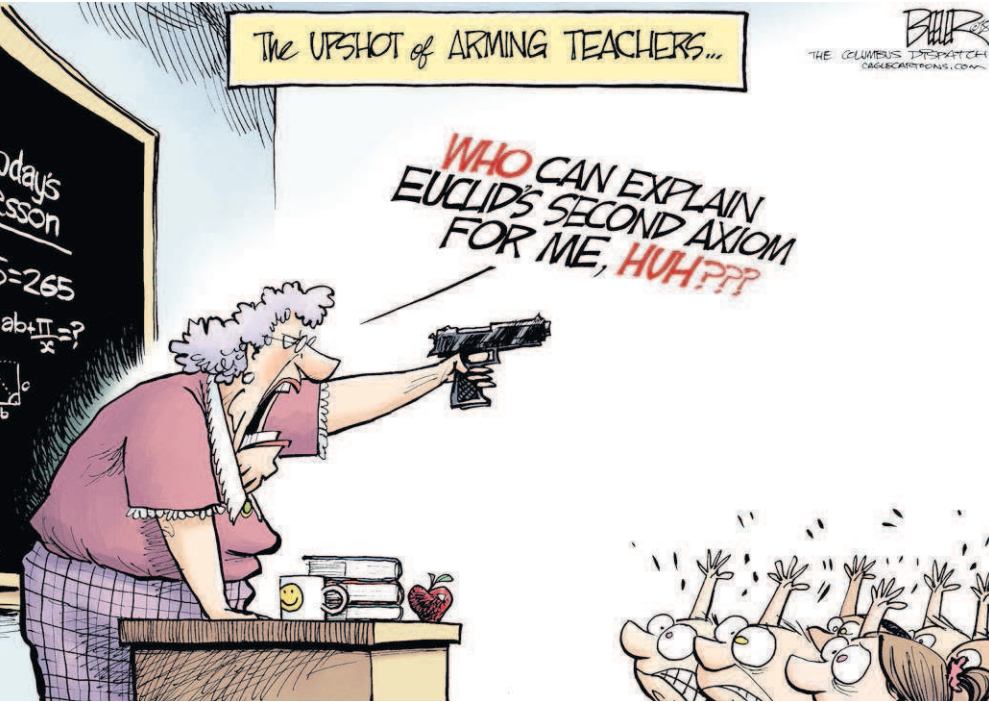
But HJR 203 said nothing about how Oregon will meet the cost of extending health care to that final 6 percent of the population. Nor does it chart a course for continuing to pay the state’s increasing share of the cost of Medicaid. It doesn’t address the Trump administration’s continuing efforts to chip away at the Affordable Care Act, which already are making private insurance more expensive for some people.

Backers of a single-payer health care system, including some supporters of HJR 203, claim that the state could provide health care to everyone at less aggregate



Brent Drinkut/Statesman-Journal via AP, file
In this 2015 file photo, the state senate gathers inside the Senate Chambers at the Oregon Capitol in Salem.

cost than the current patchwork of insurance bureaucracies. They may be right, but even if they are, the first step for Oregon would be to put a solid plan in place. The state should make no promise until it is certain the promise can be kept.



YOUR VIEWS

Combating the opioid crisis

Mike didn’t know anyone in the room. He’d heard of our meeting to discuss opioid abuse on the news and wanted to share his family’s story. His son was injured in a school sporting accident and became addicted to the prescription painkillers provided by his doctor to aid in his recovery. Eventually, his son made the all-too-familiar transition to a cheaper source: heroin. To this day, Mike’s son still struggles with his addiction that began with opioid abuse.

Mike went on to speak about his sister who also suffered from addiction. A nurse, his sister found herself with easier access to pills than most. When coworkers and others caught on, she moved and continued to procure pills. She died as a result of her addiction. Mike came to the meeting — a roundtable I held with law enforcement and medical professionals — in hopes that sharing his stories could help ensure it doesn’t happen to other families.

The opioid crisis has taken a stranglehold on our communities — killing our friends, family members and neighbors, regardless of race, socioeconomic status, geographic location or political affiliation. Fueled by dangerous new chemical versions and illicitly manufactured drugs, this epidemic is spiraling out of control with no end in sight unless we take action.

That is precisely what we are doing at the House Energy and Commerce Committee, of which I serve as chairman: taking action and leading the fight to combat the opioid crisis. The only way we can put an end to this scourge is through an all-hands-on-deck approach to address the root causes of the opioid crisis in our communities.

At roundtables throughout our district — most recently in Hermiston — I’ve met with people like Mike, the victims, families, doctors, treatment advocates and law enforcement officers. These meetings are critical to understanding what is working and what is not, from those on the front lines of this fight in Oregon. It is my top priority as chairman of the Energy and Commerce Committee to take these conversations back to the nation’s capital as we work to advance concrete solutions to put a stop to this deadly epidemic.



GREG WALDEN
Comment

It is my top priority ... to advance concrete solutions to put a stop to the deadly epidemic.

Beginning this week, the Energy and Commerce Committee will kick off hearings to examine legislation aimed at combating the opioid crisis. We will examine proposals to give law enforcement the tools they need to take illicit synthetic drugs, like fentanyl, off our streets.

Fentanyl is so deadly that a piece the size of a grain of salt can kill you, and it has led to a reported 49 deaths in Oregon over the course of two years.

We will look at proposals in the health care space to increase the use of prescription drug monitoring programs, improve care for opioid addiction among pregnant mothers and ensure medical professionals are making fully informed care and treatment decisions when prescribing opioids.

We will put more resources than ever before toward helping our communities combat the epidemic. The committee will look at proposals to better track federal funding, making it easier for local entities to find the money to support their efforts and apply for it. Oregon received more than \$6.5 million to help combat the opioid crisis through the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA) — a groundbreaking law that also originated in the Energy and Commerce Committee — and it is critical that these resources make it to the people on the ground in this fight.

In addition to our legislative push, we are continuing our ongoing investigation into alleged pill dumping in West Virginia, which will have widespread impacts in the fight against opioid abuse in Oregon and throughout the country. This will continue to be part of our multifaceted approach to extinguishing the opioid crisis wherever it exists.

Much more can — and must — be done in order to stop the havoc being wreaked in our communities. The time is now to press on in our fight, to put forth a comprehensive solution that attacks this nationwide epidemic from all angles. That is at the top of my to-do list in Congress.

■

Greg Walden is the U.S. Representative of Oregon’s Second District. This column first appeared in the *La Grande Observer*.

OTHER VIEWS

Trump and Obama: Who is really tougher on Russia?

Recently, President Trump tweeted, “I have been much tougher on Russia than Obama, just look at the facts. Total Fake News!”

The tweet was greeted with incredulity in some press circles. CNN called it “simply false.” “The facts suggest the opposite,” said the *Washington Post*. “Mostly false,” declared Politifact, noting the president’s statement “immediately drew guffaws among media commentators.”

The reaction left some Republican national security and foreign policy hands shaking their heads. How could one add up the actions that Trump has taken on Russia, compare them to Obama, and conclude that Trump was not tougher?

In a text exchange, I asked one GOP lawmaker: If you believe Trump has been tougher on Russia, what is the best evidence? He quickly came back with a list. The U.S. is, he said:

- 1) Bombing Syria, Russia’s main client, and generally unleashing the U.S. military in Syria, including against Russians when necessary.
- 2) Arming Ukraine.
- 3) Browbeating NATO allies to increase defense spending.
- 4) Adding low-yield nukes to our arsenal.
- 5) Starting research and development on an INF non-compliant missile.
- 6) Shutting Russia’s San Francisco consulate.

To clarify some of the less-obvious references, on the “arming Ukraine” front, the lawmaker noted the Trump administration’s decision to supply Ukraine with Javelin anti-tank missiles. (The *Washington Post* called Trump’s decision “a worthy application of the ‘peace through strength’ principle” that will help Vladimir Putin understand that “his aggressions ... will be resisted.”)



BYRON YORK
Comment

Barack Obama could have been tougher, but any evidence that Donald Trump has been tougher than him, no, there is none. The statement is simply false.

Yes, Obama’s December 2016 actions were actual punitive measures. But it’s hard to compare them to the lawmaker’s list of Trump actions — including, for example, U.S. forces killing at least 100 Russian mercenaries in Syria recently — and say Obama was the president who was harder on Russia.

The problem could be that some Trump critics appear to think of Russia only in terms of countering online election interference. They don’t seem to think that real, physical-world actions, like blowing up Russian mercenaries and building new missiles and bombs, constitute a tough policy toward Russia.

It’s an attitude that baffles some Republicans. “Sending Javelins to Ukraine and bombing that Syrian airfield is a bigger deal than virtually anything we could do to the ‘troll factory,’” the GOP lawmaker said, referring to the Russians who created politically divisive Facebook ads and posts during the 2016 election season.

“Reporters live on Twitter and seek validation from it,” the lawmaker continued. “They thus give outsized influence to it over, you know, real ordinance.”

They also, perhaps, give outsized influence to what the president says, or does not say, without weighing it against the administration’s actions. So when Trump refuses to condemn Putin, or give him a mocking nickname, some journalists see that as the president being soft on Russia, even as U.S. munitions hit Russian targets in Syria.

In addition to the real-world stuff of missiles and bombs, other officials say the U.S. is also taking extensive action to counter the kind of Russian activity seen in the 2016 election.

“We have a significant effort,” CIA director Mike Pompeo said in a recent Capitol Hill hearing. “And it is not just our effort. It is a, certainly, all-of-intelligence-community effort — there may be others participating, as well — to do our best to push back against this threat. ... It’s a big, broad effort.”

The problem was that Pompeo could not speak publicly about efforts that are highly classified to keep Russia in the dark about U.S. actions.

“I don’t want to state the obvious, but we don’t tell them what we’re doing,” Rep. Devin Nunes, chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, said in a recent phone conversation. “It’s classified.”

“During the Obama administration, millions and millions of intelligence dollars to combat our adversaries, including Russia, went unspent,” Nunes added. “I can tell you today that Pompeo and others are using all that money.”

That said, there are Republicans who would like to see the Trump administration be tougher still on Russia. Long before the 2016 election, they urged Presidents Bush and Obama to take a harder line against Putin. There is still much that President Trump could do.

But when it comes to comparing Trump and Obama, those Republicans ask that Americans look at the whole picture, and not just a fight over Facebook ads.

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Byron York is chief political correspondent for *The Washington Examiner*.

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