

Unfair drug pricing killing us

With Senator Ron Wyden coming to Enterprise this Friday to hold a town hall meeting, it's an opportunity to engage him on the topic of prescription drug pricing, which is holding all of America hostage, regardless of anyone's contrary claim that America may finally be getting a handle on health care costs. The unfortunate truth is that we really aren't gaining such control.

EDITORIAL
The voice of the Chieftain

In the past, Wyden has been a major player in the area of Medicare reform. Joseph resident Jean Falbo penned the following argument about fixing our prescription medicine problem. Our thanks to her: —RCR

Inequities in the cost of medicine are flagrantly unfair. For example, Medicaid, which serves low income people, and the Department of Veterans Affairs use their purchasing power to good advantage to get their medications at a more reasonable price than that paid for the same drugs being used by Medicare patients. A recent study showed that these agencies were able to get the 10 most prescribed drugs at costs nearly 50% less than Medicare.

People who transfer from Medicaid to Medicare can find themselves suddenly paying more in co-pays for the exact same medication they were taking previously. Why is this so? Because elected officials, of both parties, signed off on restricting Medicare from bargaining with Big Pharma for the best deal for Americans!

You may shop for a health care plan, but depending on what it offers and the price it costs, you may pay nothing or you may find that only a small portion of your costs are paid. You can, and this is particularly true for cancer drugs, find yourself with out-of-pocket costs of up to 11-14 thousand dollars a month!

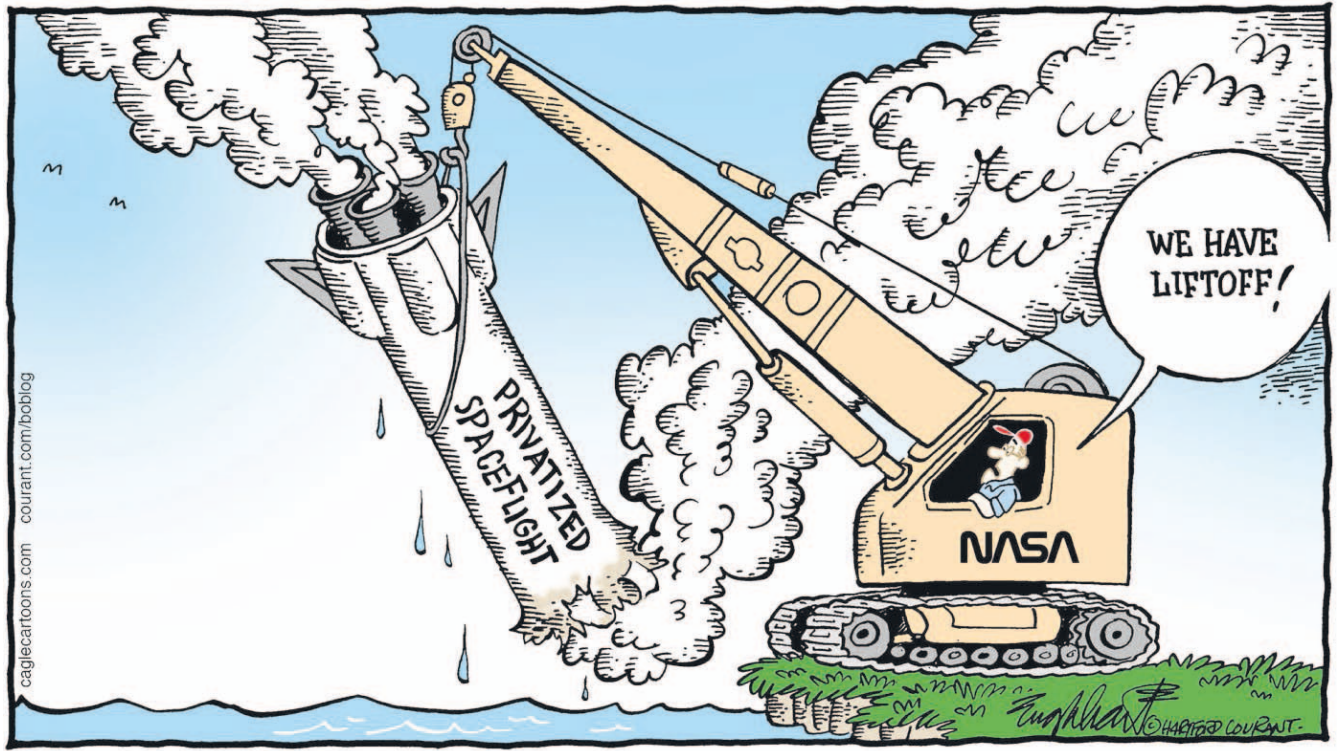
Major manufacturers of drugs in our country rarely limit their distribution to the United States. They are multinational corporations and one glaring inequity is that the very same product is often very much cheaper in Canada and Mexico. Very well, why not reimport those cheaper medicines back into the US? Because our elected officials made it illegal to reimport drugs from another country!

With the costs of medicine in the United States being the highest in the world, it is no wonder that many Americans are buying online to get a bargain. It is possible, in concert with your doctor identifying your needs and dosages, to work through registered international pharmacies. However, shopping online requires a personal risk assessment. You may get scammed.

It doesn't have to be this way. There has been a steady drum beat of proposed legislation and broken promises to end prohibitions against negotiations to use the buying power of Medicare, a huge market, to reduce the cost of health care. Legislation to address the issue always gets stalled in committee; never reaching the floor of Congress for debate. President Obama promised in his 2008 campaign to work towards reducing costs of drugs. He has asked Congress to act on the matter, but he has hardly used the power of his office to champion it.

Why all the law-making to oppose market competition and negotiation? Why the inaction? I am of the opinion that it demonstrates the persuasive power of Big Pharma to lobby a sky's-the-limit price on their product. The industry always points to the high costs of research, of testing and of bringing a product to market. That is true, but why does the same product cost different prices in different countries? If delivering a product is the main objective, why are many drug makers' advertising budgets bigger than their research budgets?

The Constitution guarantees us the right to "Life..." But all too many people have to choose between food or medicine, and what you give up with either choice is likely to ruin your health.



Our talent is tattering jeans

Happy b-day, America. I'm going to write your name so big with sparklers when it gets dark on the 4th. It's gonna be so cool. Then I'm going to light some of those black snakes that just turn from a lump into a line of ash. Not sure why I like those. They're kind of the reverse of fireworks.

America, I've got a story for you. You know how people are always like, America — yeah, apple pie, hot dogs and bald eagles ... well, I think we can put blue jeans in that category too for things that are very American. Used to be all about the Levi's. Then there's Wranglers and so forth. Carhartts also have a devoted fan club, and for good reason — they're a solid pant, America. Them double-front logger versions are just the thing for working on stuff.

You better sit down for this, America. If you ask me, it doesn't bode real well for the state of the union. Or humanity. I just heard a story about a Wallowa County guy, Patrick Baird, who was down in Los Ange-



AND FURTHERMORE

Jon Rombach

les visiting a friend and at a get-together some stranger walked up and asked, "Who does your Carhartts?"

Patrick replied, "What?" The stranger repeated it. "Who does your Carhartts? They're great." Patrick had to admit he did not understand the words coming out of the person's mouth. So get this. After it was explained, here's what Patrick learned. Down in Los Angeles, apparently it's a real thing to buy a new pair of Carhartts, then pay somebody to break them in for you and make them look old and abused. I'm told a grinder is one of the tools used.

Patrick explained to the person that he bought the pants four years ago and, well, just did stuff while wearing them. Chores.

Cutting firewood. Camping. Wearing them when he works as a river guide. This tale of authentic, genuine pants-aging was met with effusive admiration and another round of compliments on his distressed dungarees.

I mean, sure. It was Los Angeles. If something like this had to happen it was going to be LA or New York. But ... c'mon. At first I laughed when I heard about sending your pants out for a beating. That was followed by icy discomfort and suddenly I knew what it must have been like to be appalled with that Elvis Presley fellow and his provocative dancing. Kids these days and their crazy antics.

The good news is, Wallowa County can probably set up a lively export pipeline by shipping however many pairs of genuinely tattered jeans we have here over to the city folks.

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That river project near Hwy 82

GUEST COLUMN

Jeff Oveson

It's come to my attention that concerns have been expressed about the latest fish habitat/river restoration project taking place on the 6 Ranch, a couple of miles west of Enterprise on the south side of Highway 82. My intention is to both answer questions as well as promote public awareness about this endeavor with this brief column.

The project currently being constructed is designed to enhance habitat, primarily for spring Chinook salmon and summer steelhead, as well as all other aquatic species native to the Wallowa River. While these fish may not strike a chord for everyone, I hope this editorial will help provide understanding as to why others care and how it affects you.

In 1980, the US Congress passed the Northwest Power Act, a law that in its simplest terms, requires Bonneville Power Administration, Bureau of Reclamation, and the Army Corps of Engineers (the action agencies who built, own, and manage the dams on the Snake and Columbia Rivers) to mitigate for the negative effects the dams have on Endangered Species Act-listed salmon and steelhead. The undesirable impact of the dams on

fish populations, particularly those anadromous species (salmon, steelhead and lamprey) who must pass over or through the dams on their juvenile migration to the ocean and again on their return trip to their natal rivers to spawn, is unmistakable.

Why should that matter to you? When you turn on anything from a computer to an irrigation pump, you will be using electricity purchased through one of the action agencies (in Wallowa County, most of the electricity comes through Pacific Power, distributed energy bought from Bonneville Power). What we tend to forget is the Pacific Northwest enjoys the cheapest electricity in the country, thanks largely to the action agencies' construction and operation of the dams on the Snake and Columbia Rivers. In fact, despite the use of rate payer dollars funding habitat restoration, on average Oregon pays half the price per kilowatt hour of New York and Connecticut. The Northwest Power Act created an equa-

tion: if you're going to continue to generate and distribute cheap electricity, you must create a process whereby the loss at the dams is offset by the enhancement of habitat in Snake and Columbia River tributaries.

Many decades ago, the 6 Ranch was the site of a publicly-funded project to channelize the river against the nearby hillside, a common practice for the time to alleviate flooding in the valley. This type of stream modification was formerly a popular course of action, repeated throughout the Grande Ronde and Wallowa watersheds, and certainly aligned with values of that era. Flash forward to present, where the 6 Ranch project is using mitigation funds to benefit native fish, the ranch itself, employ contractors, and ultimately invest a large chunk of change in the local economy. This project is a prime example of restoration which landowners can rarely achieve on their own, and demonstrates the value in using local direction to spend public funds in a way which aligns with the priorities of residents.

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Ombudsman involved at WVSL

GUEST COLUMN

Todd Steele and David Berger

The Long-Term Care Ombudsman (LTCO) program provides advocacy services for residents in residential care facilities under the federal Older Americans Act, and Oregon law. Broadly, the program has two vital functions: direct advocacy services to residents and systemic advocacy efforts on behalf of all residents.

Recently, three Wallowa Valley Senior Living (WVSL) residents received Involuntary Move Out Notices claiming their needs had exceeded the care provided. The residents filed complaints with the Ombudsman program stating they did not agree that the needs of these residents had increased, that their needs did not exceed the level of care provided under the facility license, and that they had been promised they could stay in the facility for the remainder of their lives.

Other community members contacted our office stating the facility had been built with local taxpayer funds and they were led to believe that it was done so to insure local seniors would not have to move to other locales to receive LTC ser-

vices. WVSL is owned by Wallowa Valley Health Care District and is managed by Artegan, LLC. Recent Letters to the Editor and high turnout for the Health Care District board meeting, illustrates much public concern for county seniors and a need to clarify what services will be provided by WVSL moving forward.

The Ombudsman program, in representing resident interests, had three specific areas of concern. The first was to assist those residents who had been asked to move from their home in exercising their right to appeal the notice at a hearing. Each individual's situation was addressed separately and presented in an informal conference held with the resident's representative, the DHS Licensor, the facility, and the Ombudsman. The Move Out Notices were rescinded and thankfully these residents remain in their homes.

The second concern is the lack of clarity surrounding residents who had resided in the old nursing home and when exactly someone would have to move out of the facility as their care needs increased. In May 2014, we posed questions to Artegan on behalf of residents and family members. At that time, Artegan stated they would exhaust every option to keep residents in their home as long as possible. Furthermore, Artegan stated they expected and anticipated a higher level of care provided by WVSL versus other assisted living communities.

Finally, they said they would work with regulators to meet higher needs to keep county seniors close to families and in the county they call home. A community discussion must occur to clarify the situation, publicly, disseminate the results, and set a course for whatever is decided.

The third area of concern is a lack of services normally available to support residents outside nursing facilities, either

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Sheriff upholding Constitution

To the Editor:

There was a letter to the editor on June 17th with a theme that the Sheriff does not have the authority to make a judgment on whether to enforce a particular law, in this case whether to enforce a recently passed UNCONSTITUTIONAL gun law!

Sadly the author has it all wrong as it is unconstitutional. The Sheriff takes an oath to Uphold the Constitution of the United States. All law enforcement officers as well as those in the military take the same oath ... I took that oath during my entrance into the military and was

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

proud to have the privilege.

Instead of being critical of the Sheriff the letter writer should be thanking him because he is honoring the greatest law of the land and one of our most basic rights. I applaud Sheriff Rogers for having the courage to refuse to enforce a horrible and stupid law ... If we were to wait for the idiots to erase this bill that was so foolishly rushed into law it could

take forever.

I read an article that Lane County passed a resolution to not honor this pathetic legislation and also many or all other County Sheriff's are refusing to enforce it.

Every hunter, gun owner and collector should be thanking God we have a Sheriff that is honoring his oath of office and cares for those whom he represents. There should be so many letters pouring in to Editor, Rob Ruth that he will have to hire a Sherpa guide just to find his office!

Stormy Burns USN (Ret'd)
Joseph

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