

Siuslaw News
P.O. Box 10
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Opinion

The First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.



Congress is still asking the wrong healthcare question

other developed country. In fact, if that \$3 trillion healthcare sector was its own country, it would be the fifth-largest economy in the world according to Consumer Reports.

And even though we are outspending other industrialized countries nearly 2-to-1, the World Health Organization (WHO) recently ranked the U.S. a dismal 37th in healthcare systems — with The Commonwealth Fund naming us dead last among the top 11 industrialized countries for overall healthcare dollar-for-dollar.

In preparing this editorial, I spent time researching the reasons behind healthcare's astronomical costs in this country.

While there are many factors, from defensive medicine practices for avoiding lawsuits, to the "branding" of healthcare providers similar to designer clothing (the bigger

the name, the more money they can demand from insurance companies), the same two cost factors rise to the top of the list:

- Administrative costs.
- Drug costs.
- WHO studies, Consumer Reports and even health economists like David Cutler at

The reason? Billing specialists are needed to determine how to bill the varying requirements of multiple insurers.

Why the need for multiple insurers? Because more and more, single insurers can't cover the rising costs of medical proce-

dures and drug prescriptions, particularly at a time when the median age in America is 40.

One has to wonder why Congress is so opposed to weighing in on controlling the cost of prescription drugs and healthcare as a whole, and what — if any — role those who benefit most from that \$3 trillion industry play in that decision.

As taxpayers, we are America's shareholders —

and Congress is our board of directors. It's time we ask why the board of America, Inc., isn't pursuing a more cost-effective healthcare plan that will guarantee a better return on our investment, which in this case literally puts lives at stake physically and financially.

Rather than bickering over ways to pay for the astronomical costs associated with healthcare and prescription drugs, Congress needs to slow down and address the issue of controlling those costs in the first place.

Establishing affordable healthcare isn't about how to pay more but about how to pay less.

Write Siuslaw News editor Ned Hickson at nhickson@thesiuslawnews.com or P.O. Box 10, Florence, Ore. 97439.

From the Editor's Desk

NED HICKSON

Harvard University agree that those two factors are the driving forces behind skyrocketing healthcare costs.

On average, 25 percent of healthcare dollars go to cover administrative fees. In an interview on the PBS News Hour, Cutler gave the example of Duke University Hospital, which has 1,300 billing clerks and only 900 beds.

Today, the aim of newly appointed EPA head Scott Pruitt is to essentially set back decades of environmental progress. The administration is cutting the EPA budget by at least 25 percent from programs that were passed in a bi-partisan Congress.

Even some Republican members of Congress are objecting to these Draconian-style measures. Pruitt said in the confirmation process that the states, and not the federal government, should regulate environmental policies. But these cuts apparently translate to 35 to 40 percent for the states — and sometimes as much as 100 percent.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) budget is being cut by \$1 billion. These are the experts the public depends on for weather satellites, climate research and coastal management.

Think Gulf oil spill; NOAA was there to manage and direct the clean-up.

LETTERS

A FOOL'S ERRAND

Regarding Rosalie Wells' letter "Tracking the Russian Bear" (March 4).

All governments try to influence voting in other nations. It is nothing new. Obama tried to influence Brexit. The British tried to influence our 1940 elections to get us in the fight against Germany.

They used wiretaps, recruited journalists, invented fake stories and funded pro-British groups — tactics that sound very familiar.

And they were our friends. Ditto by Germany, but for the opposite reasons.

The "Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections" was released by Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) following Obama's request for a review by the Intelligence Community.

Had the election turned out differently, I believe it unlikely there would have been any report — and even more unlikely it would ever see the light of day.

It's high time people realize that segments

of our news have been fake for a very, very long time. If our attention is being pointed in one direction, we are well advised to be looking in the other. Redirecting attention is how politicians, pickpockets and prestidigitators stay in business.

The Russians have far more capability than hacked amateurs like the DNC, Podesta and HRC. If the FBI detected Russian fingerprints, I say we should be looking elsewhere.

In my opinion, Russia pretty much had things their own way during the previous administration. Who benefits more from a conservative U.S. government, Israel or Russia? Expert professionals only leave the clues they want found.

It's a fool's errand to have Congress investigate anything. They are so partisan they can't see an elephant or a donkey in front of their noses. They gave us ObamaCare without a second glance; the Warren Commission stated Oswald acted alone then, 15 years later, concluded a conspiracy to kill JFK.

And don't forget that \$20 trillion debt. Under current workforce demographics, every other child born today owes \$150,000 at birth.

Please write your elected officials in Congress, whether Democrat, Republican or otherwise, and tell them to quit playing politics and work toward healthcare we can afford, as well as a balanced budget, debt reduction and full employment.

*Ian Eales
 Florence*

CLEAR IRONY

There's clear irony in watching members of Congress work diligently to strip the Affordable Care Act (ACA) of anything worthwhile as those very same members of Congress receive the benefits of a well-paying job that includes the best medicine taxpayers can pay for — in the form of Single Payer healthcare.

It's more than ironic, actually. It's criminal.

*Robin Bloomgarden
 Eugene*

DON'T GUT THE EPA

The EPA was established in 1970 by Republican President Richard Nixon to create an umbrella agency for federal research, monitoring, setting standards and enforcing the protection of the environment.

He, at least, had the wisdom to see how important this is in our ever more industrialized world.

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The new administration is riddled with these kinds of catch-22 concerns.

It seems to me that Pruitt's aim is to gut the EPA of any regulatory power and create a "vending machine for industry."

He is first and foremost tied to the oil industry and has shown it by canceling a former request to the fossil fuel industry for information about its methane emissions (a dangerous greenhouse gas).

Without data, it will be difficult to prove the extent of damage on the air we breathe and changes in our climate.

Donald Trump campaigned to protect our air and water. Yet, he eliminated The Clean Water Rule, jeopardizing the streams, rivers, lakes and wetlands that feed the water supplies of 117 million Americans.

Will Big Oil be held accountable for pipeline spills? Will there be any control or

accountability over the toxic chemicals that get into drinking water?

Will we be able to keep our water safe where there are fracking wells?

The Superfund Act is also affected by these cuts. It is critical for the protection of people and neighborhoods that are affected by the toxic releases of the chemical and petroleum industries. The taxes that have been collected from these industries are used to respond directly to threatened releases and to clean up abandoned and hazardous sites.

With de-regulation, where will the money come from, and how will these corporations be held responsible?

It is disturbing to see that agencies, supposedly established for the benefit of all American citizens, are now being run by men whose only desire is to implement their own authoritarian corporate biases.

Those who benefit are the CEOs whose bonuses will insulate them from caring about the rest of us.

*Joann Henderson
 Florence*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR POLICY

The Siuslaw News welcomes letters to the editor as part of a community discussion of issues on the local, state and national level.

Emailed letters are preferred. Handwritten or typed letters must be signed. All letters need to include full name, address and phone number; only name and city will be printed. Letters should be limited to about 300 words. Letters are subject to editing for length, grammar and clarity. Publication of any letter is not guaranteed and depends on space available and the volume of letters received.

Libelous, argumentative and anonymous letters or poetry will not be published.

Write to: editor@thesiuslawnews.com

POLITICAL/ELECTION 'LETTERS' POLICY

Election-related letters must address pertinent or timely issues of interest to our readers at-large. The newspaper does not publish partisan letters that promote or endorse local political candidates based solely on their record, reputation and qualifications; this constitutes paid political advertising.

Candidates themselves may not use the letters to the editor column to outline their views and platforms or to ask for votes. This also constitutes paid political advertising.

As with all letters and advertising content, the newspaper, at the sole discretion of the publisher, general manager and editor, reserves the right to reject any such letter.

The newspaper is particularly sensitive to organized "letter-writing campaigns." The newspaper reserves the right to reject any such letter.

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Siuslaw News

Published every Wednesday and Saturday at 148 Maple St. in Florence, Lane County, Oregon. A member of the National Newspaper Association and Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association. Periodicals postage paid at Florence, Ore. Postmaster, send address changes to: Siuslaw News, P.O. Box 10, Florence, OR 97439; phone 541-997-3441; fax 541-997-7979. All press releases may be sent to PressReleases@TheSiuslawNews.com.

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Wednesday Issue—General news, Monday noon; Budgets, four days prior to publication; Regular classified ads, Monday 1 p.m.; Display ads, Monday noon; Boxed and display classified ads, Friday 5 p.m.
Saturday Issue—General news, Thursday noon; Budgets, two days prior to publication; Regular classified ads, Thursday 1 p.m.; Display ads, Thursday noon; Boxed and display classified ads, Wednesday 5 p.m. Soundings, Tuesday 5 p.m.

NEWSPAPER SUBSCRIPTION RATES:

In Lane County — 1-year subscription, \$71; 10-weeks subscription, \$18; Out of Lane County — 1-year subscription, \$94; 10-weeks subscription, \$24; Out of State — 1-year subscription, \$120; Out of United States — 1-year subscription, \$200; E-Edition Online Only (Anywhere) — 1-year subscription, \$65.

Mail subscription includes E-Edition.

Website and E-Edition: www.TheSiuslawNews.com

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