

Siuslaw News
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Opinion

'New normal' not productive for healthcare reform

Should Americans care that a select group of Senators, behind closed doors, is gearing up a complex override of the current Affordable Care Act (ACA)?

GOP leadership plans a Senate vote before a July 4 recess while withholding colleagues and public from access to the draft's details. The "reform" will be introduced directly to the Senate floor without prior benefit of any committee hearings or witnesses. Once on the Senate floor, amendment proposals can have up to one minute each.

In 2010, it's been said that Obamacare was forced through the Senate on an up-down vote with no chance to read it, let alone amend it. However, facts show multiple Senate committees, over a year, held three months of open public hearings. Republicans directly obtained more than 160 amendments. Media had great access as

committees revamped witness ideas or critiques.

This is not the current case with the "closed door" proposal for the re-vamped ACA.

For example, the needed nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) analysis of financial impacts is missing.

A CBO analysis in May of the earlier House repeal package was critical in giving pause to — and then stopping — Senate consideration and ratification. Analysis projected 23 million Americans losing coverage by 2026.

House Speaker Ryan described the CBO evaluation as "great," but GOP governors were a primary force preventing Senate ratification of Ryan's bill.

One CBO provision stated: "People who are less healthy (including those with pre-existing or newly acquired medical conditions) would ultimately be unable to purchase comprehensive non-

GUEST VIEWPOINT
By RAND DAWSON
RETIRED CONSUMER AND INSURANCE COMPANY ATTORNEY

group health insurance at premiums comparable to those under current law, if they could purchase it at all."

Trudy Lieberman, Health Desk editor with the Columbia Journalism Review, voiced similar concerns, predicting "more than \$800 billion in Medicaid cuts and loss of coverage for millions reached under Medicaid expansion; selective premium increases, particularly for poorer, older Americans."

House staffers from the Joint Committee on Taxation itself joined with CBO, producing a joint May report, supporting the figures.

Even the conservative National Review noted the predicament, which contrasted President Trump's promises to "take care of every-

body," and "make no cuts to Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid."

Beyond cutting financing for Medicaid or Medicare, proposals will offer states significant ways to change premium pricing or underwriting. That means older Medicare-age customers may be charged five times more than younger customers. In 2026, the CBO estimated that some 64-year-olds, making \$27,000, could possibly pay \$14,400 more in premiums.

This June 13, Chief Actuary for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services released its report, "Estimated Financial Effect of the American Health Care Act (AHCA) of 2017."

In response, law professor and healthcare writer Timothy

Just described premium impacts for those insured through the Exchanges this way:

"The Actuary's report estimates that the AHCA would reduce gross premiums in the individual market by 13 percent below current law estimates by 2026, but net premiums after reduced premium tax credits would increase by 5 percent — and cost sharing would increase by 61 percent."

"Cost sharing" includes deductibles, co-insurance, co-payments and out-of-pocket limits.

These are significant details.

As Maine Republican Sen. Susan Collins said, "Details really matter when you're talking about healthcare reform."

Reviews of the last seen version of the AHCA suggested coverages could shrink if states opt to "waive" various complex rules concerning

essential benefits or pre-existing conditions.

What significant details will be overlooked or missed in this case?

Medicare Trust Fund life being shortened? Long-term care support for seniors curtailed? Will short breaks in coverage allow 30 percent premium hikes or elimination from Medicaid benefits?

An open discussion on real underlying issues looks to rein in healthcare costs and improve value and efficiency.

Do we want real details coming through open doors — or more slogans and political opiods?

Rand Dawson is local Siltcoos resident and a retired Alaska trial attorney with interest in health care reform, who also represented consumers and various insurance companies

LETTERS

HELPING HANDS HELPS MORE THAN HOMELESS

I would like to clarify a few things about Helping Hands Coalition. I have been a volunteer for more than 15 months and presently cook on Wednesdays.

Florence Planning Commissioner Titmus states that handouts are discouraged for the homeless and he is correct in that they need other services. However, the homeless are a small percentage of our clients. We do get "travelers," folks that are passing through and stop for one or maybe two meals before moving on, mostly in the summer months.

But mostly we see men and women developmentally disabled, suffering from chronic illnesses that prevent them from working; young people earning minimum wage as well

as seniors struggling financially; and food stamp recipients, especially towards the end of the month.

We also see families with young children who are new in town and trying to get on their feet.

Many clients are regulars whom we get to know well and some come in just for company and someone to talk to.

All of the volunteers are very aware that we have to be super good neighbors and work hard to ensure we keep our surroundings clean and well maintained.

As to parking, there are rarely more than two or three volunteers' cars and few if any clients' cars.

Please give us the chance to keep helping those who depend on us.

— Liz Earnshaw
Florence

BROWN NEEDS TO STEP UP FOR ENVIRONMENT

People tell me that Gov. Kate Brown is an environmentalist, but I don't see it. Seems like when it comes to timber and other extractive interests, she just rolls over.

While Gov. Brown touts she's "committed" to the Paris Agreement goals, it seems she can't say "No" to the Pacific Connector Gas Pipeline in Southern Oregon, or the Jordan Cove LNG terminal in Coos Bay.

We almost lost the Elliott State Forest because of her dithering last year. Then, new Secretary of State Richardson joined the State Land Board, almost putting the kibosh on the whole thing — with new Treasurer Tobias Read also in favor of selling.

Thankfully, better heads prevailed.

Gov. Brown has shown no interest in pushing for a strong Cap and Reinvest bill to limit the big air polluters in Oregon. Her much balleyhood "Coal to Clean" bill won't do much until 2030.

The toxic aerial spraying of pesticides across timberlands and citizens doesn't appear to bother her, either.

I read the papers daily. I never see anything directly from Gov. Brown to her Oregon constituents

What exactly does she stand for? When will Oregonians find out? Will Oregon ever begin comprehensive climate change work?

Or most importantly, will she step up to make it happen?

— Robin Bloomgarden
Eugene

TRUMP'S TRICKLE DOWN PLAN WON'T TRICKLE FAR ENOUGH

Guthrie Wilson's letter to the editor (June 6) defended the president and suggests we let him do his job. I'm afraid if we let him do the job the way he wants, he will destroy freedom of the press and erode our civil rights. I disagree with most of President Trump's ideas for what he believes will make America "great again." I'm not even sure what that means because, in my opinion, America has always been great.

The rules and regulations that President Trump is in the process of rolling back are rules and regulations that keep Americans safe from drinking poisoned water and breathing noxious air. The repeal of these regulations will allow corporations to ruin our land, air and water, while saving corporations billions of dollars.

Little, if any, of the savings he's predicting will trickle down to the average American. Comparatively few new jobs will be created in the coal industry since many jobs are going to automation.

No sick leave, workers' comp claims, etc. And with the repeal and replacement of the ACA, many of us will lose Medicaid and Medicare will be privatized. As a result,

many won't be able to afford the services and prescriptions they need — quite possibly to cover symptoms from the poisoning caused by corporate polluters.

In all sincerity, I doubt very much that Trump is a genius. If he were, he would know what he *doesn't* know. Instead of filling his cabinet with corporate billionaire buddies and hard right science deniers blind to global warming, he would have filled his cabinet with people knowledgeable about the position they were heading — and know the politics of how to get things done within the framework of the Constitution.

Personally, I don't want my government run like his family business; I want it run like a real government instead of a graft-filled banana republic.

Contrary to popular belief, much of President Trump's campaign was funded by Super PACs backed by billionaire friends. There were lots of special interests funding him.

He did not "self-fund."

Granted, I watch a lot of CNN and ABC nightly news. I also tune in to MSNBC (very left leaning) and FOX (very right leaning).

But if you only watch one of these stations exclusively, you are getting a very one-sided story indeed.

— Marybeth Marenco
Florence

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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, or letters from outside our readership area will not be published.

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