

**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.

## Cutting Medicare: Prelude or paranoia?

Despite President Trump's "no touch" promise regarding Medicare, the GOP's recently passed tax cuts — and resulting predicted deficits — build in significant threats of immediate major reductions to Medicare.

Currently, 57 million enrollees and families are at risk of program cuts of \$25 billion just for 2018, and more than \$250 billion through 2027.

The potential impact to Medicare, and many other federal programs, results from the projected \$1.5 trillion deficit size increase. Large deficits over a five- or 10-year period automatically trigger a mandatory "sequestration" process that shrinks federal program spending across wide parts of the federal budget to cover or "match" the new deficit amounts.

Such spending "sequestration" is decreed by a statutory process known as "Pay-Go." The first statutory "Pay-Go" version originated in 1990. The Bush tax cuts of 2003, passed after the "Pay-Go" process, lapsed in 2002, with the current "Pay-Go" process being reestablished in 2007.

To avoid Pay-Go spending sequestrations, Congress may take specific steps to avoid or "waive" them. Such waivers require a majority of the House and a Senate 60-vote supermajority. To date, the GOP has demonstrated no such efforts — with the remaining time to do that running extremely short.

According to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO), if Congress fails to provide express waiver of Pay-Go before the session ends this month, other federal officials "would be required to issue a 'sequestration' order within 15 days of the end of the session of Congress to reduce federal spending in fiscal year 2018."

For 2018 alone, that amounts to \$136 billion dollars in federal spending reductions.

Such fee cuts disproportionately impact rural areas having sizeable Medicare populations, but which lack multiple health facilities or many providers.

Providers leave or close. This last Friday, until the last moment for appeasing hold-out Republican Senators was at hand, GOP leaders had avoided discussion of Medicare. They then issued the following joint statement: "...Critics of tax reform are claiming the legislation would

which Medicare is prevented from doing — easily provides a 30 percent price discount, paying Medicare's sequestered amount of \$25 billion.

Raising the Medicare age from 65 to 67 only makes the Medicare "risk pool" more expensive per capita to operate. As one Portland physician recently said to me, "Once Americans join Medicare, they get access to the great healthcare they couldn't afford while they were young."

As David Certner, legislative counsel for AARP just stated in voicing concern for the tax bill impacts on Medicare: "We create these large deficits and ... pressure for cuts to Medicare ... and everything will be on the table..."

Or perhaps he should have said "dart board" — One hopes that game will not be held behind closed doors and without a single committee hearing.

If the earlier tax cut process was a prelude to more behind-the-scenes "structural changes," and the broader issue of making America healthier again, the public will need to be vigilant.

*(Rand Dawson is a Siltcoos resident with long interest in health care reform. He is a retired litigation attorney who also represented insurance companies.)*

### GUEST VIEWPOINT

By RAND DAWSON  
RETIRED INSURANCE LITIGATION ATTORNEY

Authority to determine whether sequestration is required (and how to make the necessary cuts) rests solely with President Trump's Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

But the Pay-Go process exempts certain federal programs. Medicare program cuts are limited to 4 percent annually, which amount to \$25 billion a year.

Direct individual Medicare benefits are exempt from sequestration.

This leaves \$25 billion of other potential necessary Medicare program cuts. These could possibly include reduction in fee payment to providers, such as hospitals and physicians. New 4 percent fee cuts would follow a reduction of 2 percent, implemented in 2013, by Congress.

lead to massive, across-the-board spending cuts in vital programs — including a 4 percent reduction in Medicare — due to the Pay-Go law enacted in 2010. This will not happen ..."

However, no other details were provided.

But something will happen. Pay-Go requires a decision before December's end, and the GOP faithful are staking out positions. Last Wednesday, Republican Sen. Mark Rubio (Fla.) stated, "We have to ... institut[e] structural changes to ... Medicare for the future."

Will the pharmaceutical industry accept "structural changes" to Medicare Part D drug programs that account for \$90 billion in annual payments? Negotiating drugs — such as the V.A. does and

## Postal Service Reform Act and Medicare

Most people get mail every day, Monday through Saturday. But what happens when the mail comes later than we expect?

We found out a few years ago, when the Postmaster General had to take away overnight First-Class and Periodicals mail from most of the nation. That caused a problem for a lot of consumers and businesses. Now, we may be facing a new slowdown if something isn't done by Congress very soon.

Who needs the mail when we have the Internet now?

In addition to mail being the backbone for about \$1.3 trillion in jobs, products and services, there is the personal impact of mail in our lives. Many people count on the mail for medicines. A missed or delayed dosage can mean a trip to the hospital.

Small businesses count on the day's mail to bring in cash from customers. A few days' delay can mean a trip to the bank for a loan. Loans cost money and put pressure on the business to raise prices.

And lets face it: Some things just can't be emailed. It is hard to send your grandkid's birthday cake overnight by the Internet.

Some farm supply houses use the mail to deliver small animals quickly.

What about legal documents that have to arrive by certified mail? Also, many newspapers, particularly in small towns and rural communities, rely on the mail for delivery to their readers. Newspapers delivered by mail that is delayed can mean public events and sales coupons

arrive too late.

We are at another crunch point. The United States Postal Service (USPS) has a \$57 billion deficiency on its balance sheet, most of it caused by Congress. Fixing it may require the Postmaster General to close more post offices and mail sorting plants, eliminate mail-hauling truck routes and ground the airmail.

That could mean slowing down or reducing mail services even further.

The USPS last received a major overhaul by Congress

buy postage cannot afford big increases and will simply find alternatives if the rates are raised too much; at the same time, consumers cannot afford to pay more for slower mail.

And the USPS wants to protect jobs for its workers.

Keep in mind that the USPS is not supported by tax dollars, but by postage revenue.

And no tax-payer money should be needed unless Congress lets the system deteriorate further.

There is a better choice. A bill was sent to House

these retirees their benefits anyway.

It is just that this group has chosen a different benefit for themselves, which they were allowed to do. Now it is time for them to follow the practice of most private sector workers and draw their earned benefits from Medicare instead.

Commercial mailers would have to accept a small postage increase to pay most of the additional cost to Medicare. But the benefits to the federal budget and to USPS would be substantial.

Overall, the federal deficit would be \$6 billion less if the bill passes.

And the USPS would save about \$30 billion over 10 years. The rest of its red ink would have to be balanced through new efficiencies, and many steps have already been taken to find those — without creating slower or reduced mail services.

All that needs to happen is for House Speaker Paul Ryan to put the bill up for a successful vote before it is too late.

For anyone concerned about losing more mail service, particularly in rural America, the way to protect it is to contact your state Representatives and voice your support for HR 756.

Visit [Congress.www.house.gov](http://Congress.www.house.gov), where you can leave a message for your state Representatives in support of this important bill.

*(Matthew Paxton IV is publisher of The News-Gazette in Lexington, Va., and President of the National Newspaper Association)*

### GUEST VIEWPOINT

By MATTHEW PAXTON IV  
PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL NEWSPAPER ASSOCIATION

in 2006. The following year, Steve Jobs appeared on a stage with a new gadget called an iPhone.

Since then, Congress and the Postmaster General have been grappling with the tough problem of collecting enough postage for a system that must reach an ever increasing number of mailing addresses in America, but with less mail — and postage revenue — to pay for the service.

So far, Congress has done nothing but tinker.

This is nothing new. Since the birth of the nation, Congress has bogged down many times in finding resources for this essential economic backbone — and a service actually included within the U.S. Constitution.

The choices are tough, and Congress is never good at tough choices. Businesses that

Ways and Means Committee last March by the House committee responsible for overseeing the USPS. The bill, HR 756, is now sponsored by Republican Rep. Mark Meadows of North Carolina, and three Democrats: Reps. Elijah Cummings of Maryland; Gerald Connolly of Virginia; and Stephen Lynch of Massachusetts.

All are experts on postal matters. That this group, who agree on little else, could come up with a solution together says a lot about this bill.

However, the proposed legislation would require about 77,000 retired postal workers who currently draw benefits from a federal benefits health fund to use Medicare instead.

Medicare taxes were already paid for these workers; the Medicare fund owes

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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 only be published at the discretion of the editor.

#### POLITICAL/ELECTION LETTERS:

Election-related letters must address pertinent or timely issues of interest to our readers at-large.

Letters must 1) Not be a part of letter-writing campaigns on behalf of (or by) candidates; 2) Ensure any information about a candidate is accurate, fair and not from second-hand knowledge or hearsay; and 3) explain the reasons to support candidates based on personal experience and perspective rather than partisanship and campaign-style rhetoric.

Candidates themselves may not use the letters to the editor column to outline their views and platforms or to ask for votes; this 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 letter that doesn't follow the above criteria.

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