

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 their Government for a redress of grievances.



Letters to the Editor Policy

The Sentinel 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.

Letters that are anonymous, libelous, argumentative, sarcastic or contain accusations that are unsourced or without documentation will not be published.

Letters containing poetry or from outside The Sentinel 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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LETTERS

Think of the big picture

I'm confused: I thought Oregonians love nature and the environment but why is everyone clearcutting their land so much?

I hear that lumber, particularly in Asian markets, is fetching a pretty high price

right now. But what about the animals, plants and trees?

What about the atmosphere your grandchildren will be breathing in?

It is pretty apparent now that we don't live in a bubble anymore. Clearcuts play a direct and indirect role to the forest fire and climate

change crisis we have going now. Not only that, but the lack of carbon storage from all the trees being gone in one swoop tips the scale of carbon sequestration away out of our favor.

The problems around short-term gain at long-term expense are growing worse. It may not look it, but

it affects job security in the long run too.

Not much to do/ work on if the trees keep burning down. I wish people would think of the big picture at the same time they think of immediate needs.

—Kerstin Britz
Cottage Grove

Congress still asking wrong healthcare question



Ned Hickson

While watching the many debates over healthcare in our nation's capitol, I couldn't help but be struck by the irony of knowing that the same people haggling over what health coverage Americans should have access to are the very same people who have complete coverage paid for by taxpayer dollars.

It's no wonder that the real question that members of Congress should be asking has yet to be raised: Why is healthcare so expensive to begin with?

At \$3 trillion a year, the cost of healthcare in the U.S. is nearly twice as much as any 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

News Hour, Cutler gave the example of Duke University Hospital, which has 1,300 billing clerks and only 900 beds.

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

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 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

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

In most countries, government negotiates drug prices with drug makers, which virtually guarantees lower prices. However, when Congress created Medicare Part D, it specifically denied Medicare the right to negotiate drug prices. At the same time, the Veterans Administration and Medicaid aren't under the same restriction and pay the lowest drug prices.

According to Congress's own Budget Office, if Medicare Part D recipients received the same discount as Medicaid recipients, the

federal government would save \$116 billion over the next 10 years.

Imagine the money American taxpayers would save if those on Medicare could benefit from the same Medicaid-negotiated drug prices?

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.

From the Managing Editor's Desk

— Ned Hickson, The Cottage Grove Sentinel

Cottage Grove Sentinel

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