

**Cottage Grove Sentinel**  
116 N. Sixth St.  
Cottage Grove, Ore. 97424

# 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.

"I never considered a difference of opinion in politics, in religion, in philosophy, as cause for withdrawing from a friend." —Thomas Jefferson (1800)



## Washington still asking the wrong healthcare questions



in healthcare systems — with The Commonwealth Fund naming us dead last among the top 11 industrialized countries for overall healthcare dollar-for-dollar.

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

The reason? Billing specialists are

\$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?

### From the Managing Editor's Desk

Ned Hickson

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 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,

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 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

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 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 as much about how to pay more but about how to pay less.



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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.

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