

What happens if Oregon caps private health care costs?

Oregon sets a limit on how much health care costs for government programs should go up — 3.4%. But almost half of Oregonians get their health care on the private market. The state may now try to put the same limit on private health care.

The math is inexorable. Most Oregonians do have health care. The costs, though, keep going up faster than incomes. Gov. Kate Brown summed it up: “Per capita health care costs in Oregon are growing faster than the national average, and

too many families who have insurance can’t use it due to out-of-pocket costs.” It would be irresponsible for Oregon’s legislators to not try something. So how does Oregon do something? The Legislature gets a full plan next

week. Basic pieces of it include:

- 1) Limit the cost creep to 3.4%.
- 2) Gather up data to better understand why costs rise.
- 3) Ramp up value-based payments for care. That’s not a new effort. Medical payment systems have conventionally relied on fee-for-service, volume-driven models. The push has been on to incentivize payments based on cost, outcomes and quality.
- 4) Monitor for unintended consequences.

Are you afraid of what this might mean for Oregon health care? Will eq-

uity of access to care improve? Well, there is good reason to wonder. There’s also a great deal of uncertainty about what the penalty might be if payers or provider organizations exceed the cap. The committee documents refer to “a meaningful financial penalty” and “escalating” penalties if transgressions continue year after year. There is language suggesting the size of the organization would be taken into account and other relevant circumstances, such as what an organization did to improve.

Oregon legislators did already approve a state tax on companies that taxes them even if they do not make a profit — the corporate activity tax. Are we to expect they will show more flexibility to health care organizations? Or will the penalties become a de facto means of driving private health care organizations under to be replaced by a government system? Similar health cost cap programs have had some success in controlling costs, such as in Massachusetts. What will this Legislature cook up for Oregon?

Editorials reflect the views of The Bulletin’s editorial board, Publisher Heidi Wright, Editor Gerry O’Brien and Editorial Page Editor Richard Coe. They are written by Richard Coe.

My Nickel’s Worth

Fact check it first

I suggest that Larry Nelson (“My Nickel’s Worth” Jan. 14) refer to PolitiFact.com or other fact-based political websites to correct his impression that The Bulletin “... censor(s) all things negative to the Democratic Party.” In checking facts, The Bulletin and the majority of its readers have discovered that the items referred to by Mr. Nelson — i.e. “Eric Swalwell’s interaction with a Chinese spy” and “Joe Biden’s alleged involvement with his son’s collusion with the Chinese Communist Party” — are no longer newsworthy topics as 1) Swalwell has clarified his years-ago contact with a Chinese fundraiser who went by the name “Fang Fang,” and 2) thorough investigations have uncovered no evidence that Joe Biden orchestrated/benefited from his son’s business activities in China. Hunter Biden’s activities were found to not influence Obama administration policies toward China.

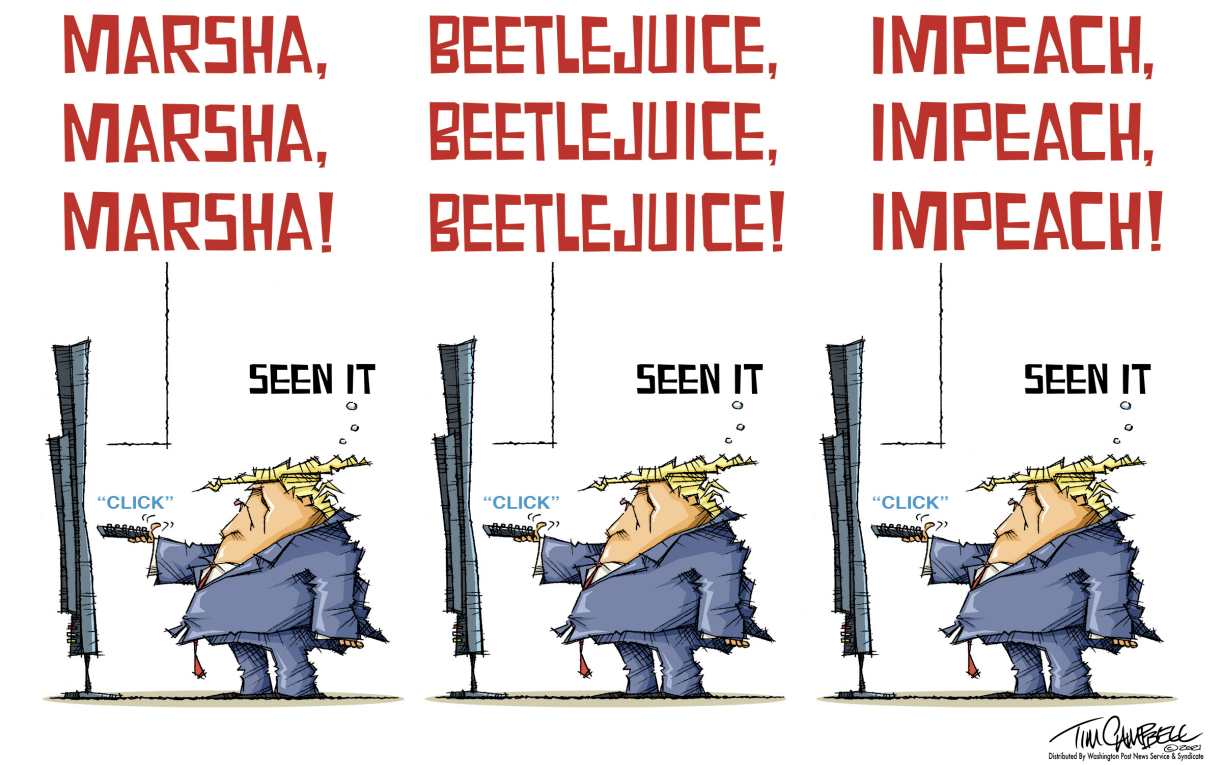
Given these facts, there is no reason for The Bulletin or any other media outlet to mention, at this time, Eric Swalwell’s alleged Chinese connection or Joe Biden’s alleged involvement (directly or indirectly) with the Chinese Communist Party. I urge Mr. Nelson and all media consumers to do ample fact checking before making unfounded accusations. At this time in the history of our country, we must all be hyper-alert to the power of our words and the possibility that our words may plant toxic seeds in the minds of some.

—Patricia Cooke, Bend

More relief payments

I write to ask every resident of Central Oregon, all of Oregon, for that matter, to tell their congressional representatives to support direct relief payments as proposed by President-elect Biden. However, we should stipulate that the payments be targeted to those who are unemployed and facing evictions.

Many of us in Bend and Central Oregon are not in need of such help. We are comfortable in retirement or are



working. Money should be directed to those persons and families who are suffering from lack of income. It may be a bit more work to sort the recipients, but the result will be better for the people and our economy.

I don’t fear that people will not go back to work because of a “handout.” When the virus is conquered folks will gladly return to work to be with their colleagues and community members.

—Joette Storm, Bend

Impeached twice

Trump said at a rally in 2020 that if he lost the election, “I may have to leave the country.” Now, maybe we can hope that he will leave the country because he is the first president to be impeached twice. And he lost the popular vote twice. If the Senate would have finished the impeachment of Trump the first time, it would have saved our country from the experience of Jan. 6. Now, the

Senate gets a second chance to finish his second impeachment and rid our country of Trump once and for all, stop him from running again in 2024, take away all the perks of being an ex-president because he never was a real president. If Pence would have invoked the 25th Amendment to remove Trump from office, the House wouldn’t have had to go through with the impeachment. Even with Trump followers chanting “Hang Pence,” Pence couldn’t do it. Unbelievable!

Trump will go down in history for inciting the violence, along with his son, Giuliani and others at the rally. They all need to be charged with insurrection that caused deaths at the Capitol and threaten Congress. Trump came out and lied about causing the riot but he encouraged them to march to the Capitol much like a mafia boss, and his cult followers did it. He just can’t stop telling lies because he’s been lying to us for the last four years, and he’s going out telling

us one of his biggest. He claimed the rioters were not his followers, but they had MAGA hats and Trump flags. We need to get him out of the office today before he attempts to pardon himself and his family. Don’t they realize by accepting pardons, they are admitting guilt? The whole family has gotten richer since he’s been in office, much off the American taxpayer.

I can’t wait for Jan. 20 when America will be “Great Again” with a real president with years of public service experience and replace the reality TV, self-centered, unqualified man we have had in office for four years that has dragged America through the gutter. Trump has never been my president!

—Sue Ooten, Madras

Listen to medical professionals

I think it is important that as a news source, it is important to spread reliable and productive news. Far too often, I see big-name news sites pub-

lish misleading and sometimes wrong information about the COVID-19 crisis. I believe that people should be getting the most accurate and latest news from trained professionals such as doctors, physicians, caregivers, etc. rather than politicians. Having more stories and interviews with these trained professionals gives us more accurate and science-based understanding of the COVID virus rather than having someone in a suit tell us what he/she/they/them thinks about the topic. So as a member of the community, I would suggest that your business starts to focus on stories told by those in the medical field who have a better understanding of the pandemic. That way more useful information is given to the people and we can grow as an educated community. I hope this letter provides useful insight to how one of the common folk here wants to receive their information.

—Dalton Payfer-Lockling, Bend

Hang in there, Cliff

After reading The Bulletin My Nickel’s Worth the last few days, it seems that a bunch of Johnny Come Lately Democrats to Central Oregon have had a get-together and decided that everyone needs to comply with their mindset. They forget that Cliff Benz was elected as a Republican not a lockstep Democrat like the rest of Oregon’s delegation; the man is capable of thinking for himself and voting with his conscience as he sees fit.

It seems to have snapped the elastic in their skivvies that he didn’t fall in line with the Democrat vindictive line of thought that prevails nowadays. One must have pity on them, I guess, as they are forgetful or just being hypocrites as the Democrats have protested the election results the last three Republican-won elections.

Hang in there, Cliff, and do your own thinking. You will have your hands full with the Democrats in control of the White House and the House of Representatives and a tied Senate with a most liberal VP as tie breaker.

—Don Fraley, Bend

Letters policy

Guest columns

How to submit

We welcome your letters. Letters should be limited to one issue, contain no more than 250 words and include the writer’s signature, phone number and address for verification. We edit letters for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We reject poetry, personal attacks, form letters, letters submitted elsewhere and those appropriate for other sections of The Bulletin. Writers are limited to one letter or guest column every 30 days.

Your submissions should be between 550 and 650 words; they must be signed; and they must include the writer’s phone number and address for verification. We edit submissions for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We reject those submitted elsewhere. Locally submitted columns alternate with national columnists and commentaries. Writers are limited to one letter or guest column every 30 days.

Please address your submission to either My Nickel’s Worth or Guest Column and mail, fax or email it to The Bulletin. Email submissions are preferred.

Email: letters@bendbulletin.com Fax: 541-385-5804

Write: My Nickel’s Worth/Guest Column
P.O. Box 6020, Bend, OR 97708

A community vision for restored rivers in Central Oregon

BY KATE FITZPATRICK

Diverting water from streams in the Deschutes Basin, beginning in the 19th century, made farming viable in Central Oregon and helped establish the communities that exist today.

However, this legal use of water impacted the health of our rivers and critical fish and wildlife habitats that had provided for indigenous peoples from time immemorial.

While complex and rigid rules have long-governed water management, the Deschutes River Conservancy (DRC) has been at the center of efforts since 1996 to innovate and develop successful cooperative approaches to meet river and community needs. Founded by the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, environmental and irrigation interests, the DRC is celebrating its 25th year restoring stream-flow and water quality through consensus building and collaboration.

Imagine the following summer scenes:

- Whychus Creek turning into a dry creek bed.
 - The Middle Deschutes downstream of Bend running at 5% of its natural flow.
 - Tumalo Creek running dry.
 - The Crooked River at Smith Rock with only a warm rivulet of water flowing past.
- These were the conditions in place when the DRC began its work.
- To date, we’ve leveraged partnerships to restore more than 208 cubic feet per second (or 93,356 gallons per minute) instream, supporting fish and wildlife habitat, and farmers.
- Opportunities and funding are now lining up to restore flows in the Upper Deschutes—the river upstream from Bend to Wickiup Dam. Local irrigation districts are piping leaky irrigation canals. The DRC is expanding complementary on-farm efficiency and water marketing programs. On-farm efficiency programs incentivize tighter water management by piping smaller private canals and upgrading

irrigation systems. The DRC’s water marketing program builds off our successful instream leasing program to make it easier for water users in irrigation districts with more access to water to share with districts facing scarcity.

Integrating infrastructure upgrades, on farm efficiencies and water markets will restore streamflows in the most expedient and equitable way. It allows more flexibility for water rights holders, increases water security for those who need it and restores critical flow to the river and species.

An important milestone was reached this month when the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service finalized the Deschutes Basin Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP). The HCP is a



Fitzpatrick

plan initiated by eight local irrigation districts and the City of Prineville to help them meet water needs while enhancing fish and wildlife habitat for threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. The plan establishes minimum instream flows in key river reaches for the next 30 years and commits to complementary conservation measures, including habitat restoration work and additional instream water leasing.

The HCP provides an important foundation for our aspirational goals. The plan establishes—for the first time—significant and meaningful flow commitments in the Upper Deschutes River. These actions will benefit Oregon spotted frog and redband trout by restoring function to a river that has long been degraded by extreme flow fluctuations. The DRC is committed to working with the irrigation districts to meet these flow targets as quickly and cost-effectively as possible. The HCP also supports our continued work in Whychus Creek

and the Crooked River to support reintroduced summer steelhead.

There is adequate water to meet our needs if we work together to move and manage water smarter. This is going to take all parties working together to collectively achieve results. We encourage you to get involved. Visit the DRC website, www.deschutesriver.org, learn about the HCP, get in touch to understand our goals and vision for our watershed for all living things.

As the DRC’s new executive director, I am honored to draw on the vision of the organization’s founders who brought our community together to solve difficult water issues. I am committed to accelerating the impact of our work through partnership and innovation. With continued success, the Deschutes story will inspire other communities in the west struggling to balance water by unifying, instead of dividing, our communities.

■ Kate Fitzpatrick is executive director of the Deschutes River Conservancy.