

GOP should learn from Obamacare's failures

Congress' proposed alternative to Obamacare would not force anyone off the Oregon Health Plan. Let's be clear about that.

But let's be equally clear: Hundreds of thousands of Oregonians could lose their health insurance.

That contradiction exists because the so-called American Health Care Act is not health-care reform. It is financial reform, or at least change. The plan put forth by congressional Republicans and the Trump administration would slash federal spending on health care, shifting much of that responsibility to the states.

Still, it's disingenuous for Republicans to say no one would be kicked off Medicaid, or for Democrats to say millions of Americans would be, as if those outcomes were guaranteed. As with the health plan's predecessor — the Affordable Care Act, or Obamacare — no one knows what will happen.

The question for Congress and the American people comes down to how much our government should spend on health coverage for low- and moderate-income Americans.

If states have the money — which few, if any, will — they could continue serving all their Medicaid recipients. In Oregon, where most Medicaid coverage is through the Oregon Health Plan, that could cost the state an additional \$2.6 billion over five years. That is why state officials say as many as 375,000 people could lose Oregon Health Plan coverage by 2023.

Democratic Gov. Kate Brown said last week that the number of uninsured Oregonians would triple, from the current 5 percent of the

population to 15 percent. That is because of bureaucratic hurdles imposed by the American Health Care Act, as well as reduced subsidies and Oregon's inability to cover the increased costs.

The Republican plan would repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, which had little to do with health-care reform either. The reform was in insurance coverage, although Oregon was able to improve care while reducing price hikes. The key was the establishment of coordinated care organizations, whose collaborative model of overall health care reduced emergency room visits and hospital admissions. On the other hand, Cover Oregon was an expensive fiasco, and it is still costing Oregon money.

The Affordable Care Act and the new congressional plan share other similarities — unfortunate ones, starting with lack of clarity at the outset.

Changes in the American Health Care Act are likely because the current proposal appears to please no one. Conservatives in the Republican congressional majority contend the plan remains too much like Obamacare. Minority Democrats complain that it undoes Obamacare's good points.

Unfortunately, congressional Republicans appear ready to follow the Democrats' bad example and ram their health-finance plan down the throats of the opposition. That strategy resulted in the Affordable Care Act we currently have — a mix of flaws, successes and uncertainties.

A Republican plan that follows a similar unilateral approach will yield a similar outcome.



GUEST COMMENT

Aviation and medicine

By Chip Goodman
To the Blue Mountain Eagle

Medical innovation never stops moving and evolving to meet the next challenges. New technology, methods and knowledge constantly advance our ability to help patients get back on their feet and on with their lives. And what many people may not realize is that a lot of this depends on transportation, and aviation in particular.

Aviation helps to transport medicine and supplies, including in times of disaster; it brings patients to treatment and medical facilities; and it helps to transport blood, organs and platelets. It literally connects people to the treatment they need on a daily basis.

Over 7 million Americans rely on artificial knees and hips, and my company, American Medical Concepts, distributes orthopedic and surgical implants across the Northwest, including to Alaska and Hawaii.

As the United States' elderly population increases, more doctors are turning to companies like

mine to learn how to use new implants and techniques to meet this growing demand.

Initially, our sales team had to spend days on the road trying to connect with local doctors and hospitals to teach them about the products and how to use them.

When we started using general aviation in 2000, it greatly helped us grow our business. We could connect with doctors in rural areas on short notice, and we could fly doctors from their practices to our training labs.

In the case of serious accidents, when the closest hospital is not a Tier I trauma center, my company will fly spinal and trauma implants to the hospital, and often, if a patient needs to be moved between hospitals, we volunteer our aircraft for an "angel flight."

In the case of my business, and for a lot of communities throughout Oregon, small aircraft and airports play an integral role in connecting communities to the resources and services we need.

But because it is not always

the biggest airports that we use, it is Congress that governs this system and ensures that communities of all sizes which are important to our national economy and infrastructure remain funded and protected.

But I'm concerned this may not be the case if we privatize our air traffic control system, as some in Washington are now suggesting that we do.

Under this proposal, sweeping decisions about system access, fees, and local airport investments, among many other things, would get made by a private board dominated by the biggest, commercial airline interests. You can guess where that would leave the smallest aircraft and airports.

Oregon has long been known for its independent spirit, and I encourage our leaders to follow that spirit and keep our air transportation system public and overseen by Congress.

Chip Goodman is the CEO and chairman of the Board of American Medical Concepts, a medical technology distributor since 1989.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Which would you cut, defund or change?

To the Editor:

With all the debate going on about the government budget and people clamoring for cuts and changes, I felt it was time to get some perspective on some of what we have going on that "We the People" may want to rethink, as to whether to defund or cut or change.

So here is a short list of some of our expenses and amenities and perks that we fought for and that we all benefit from.

In our quest to defund or cut back or change, which of these would you do that to?

The Constitution (i.e., "We the People"), the Bill of Rights, the Pledge of Allegiance (with liberty and justice for all), separation of church and state, a free and open press?

Abolition, women's suffrage, child labor laws, the right to unionize with collective bargaining?

The New Deal, Social Security?

Medicare, Medicaid, Affordable Care Act (when improved), emergency medical services?

The GI Bill, the U.S. military and all its equal support services?

The Interstate Highway system and infrastructure, street lights and road systems, national parks and U.S. Forest Service, fire and police services, public schools?

Farm subsidies, oil subsidies, corporate subsidies?

Civil rights legislation, the Great Society, the War on Poverty?

Jim Bay
Mt. Vernon

Global anti-poverty programs important

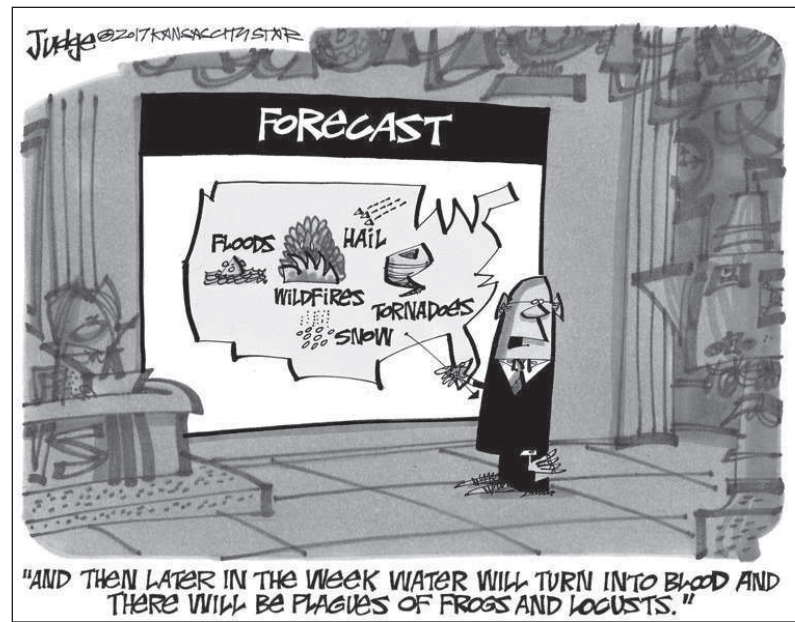
To the Editor:

The White House is proposing drastic cuts to national and global social services and development programs in our national budget. This would be disastrous. This is true in Idaho as well, where many of our most vulnerable citizens,

our children, rely on programs such as SNAP, CHIP, school food programs and Headstart. Currently, millions of kids in the U.S. are able to go to preschool and public school where they get these vital services supported by the U.S. government. Healthy, educated children become healthy, educated adults who can contribute to their communities and economies in a myriad of ways. This benefits all of us. These children are less likely to continue the cycle of poverty, and also less likely to end up in our overburdened prison system.

It's been said that the national budget is a moral document, reflecting our American values and priorities. I strongly urge our representatives to reject any cuts to national and global anti-poverty programs. I believe our country is at its best when we make sure everyone has the foundation for a healthy and promising future.

Janet McClenahan
Boise, Idaho



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