

Health care takes all hands on deck

Health care has been top of the American mind for decades, as the price of medical care in the country has skyrocketed and outcomes here fell well behind other first-world countries.

Little progress has been made. Entrenched interests — politics, Big Pharma, insurance companies, lawyers, the American Medical Association, government bureaucracy, etc., etc. — has helped keep costs on a constant rise. And the gap between us and other rich countries has only grown wider when it comes to life expectancy, infant mortality rates, access to care and more.

We must say, of course, that the American health care system can be the best in the world, if you can afford the best. But if we want more Americans to live longer, healthier, better lives, then how do we make the health care system work better for more Americans?

If you can answer that question, please run for president.

For all of us who don't have the answer, let's first take a brief view of the lay of the land. The Affordable Care Act (aka Obamacare) took a shot at improving the system when it was passed in 2008. It consisted of hundreds of pages of rules and programs and acronyms and pilot projects, but at its heart was a simple concept: the rich and healthy would pay more to allow the poor and sick to have health insurance. That's fine and good, and some would argue a noble effort that does the most good without unfairly punishing those who can't afford it. Others would argue it is an unfair system — government sticking its messy hands into the free market, personal decision-making and the plain old luck that affects the trajectory of life in the land of the free.

Either way you see it, the ACA did not tackle the cost of care in America. And even though more Americans have health insurance, many cannot afford the subsidized premiums nor pay their share of the health care they receive, even when using their government-mandated insurance. In those arenas, the ACA has not helped consumers. It has, however, helped the millions of sick Americans with pre-existing conditions get coverage, which increased the cost in the system more than many projected, including the insurance companies.

Republicans have loudly railed against the law over the last decade, and their win last November gave them the White House and the ability to make their mark on American health care. So far, they've had a troubling health care bill pass the House, a similar bill hit a sticking point in the Senate, and have not found enough votes to even muster a straight-forward repeal of Obamacare, which would put much of the pre-2008 rules back in place.

We're not at the precipice of an apocalypse, however, and the hyperbole from both political parties moves us farther away, not closer to a solution.

Some Republicans called Obamacare the "worst law in our history," which is patently absurd. The ACA was a rather

conservative approach to making a big change in the way many Americans access care. But on the other hand, Democrats are accusing Republicans of sending millions of Americans to an early grave by proposing their own changes, which return tax cuts to the rich and attempt to give poor and middle-class Americans tax-free alternatives to paying for their coverage and care.

There is broad support for upgrading and improving health care in America, despite the pessimism and death threats from our political parties.

Even many Republicans have come around to the idea of "Medicare for all," a more palatable way to describe a more socialized medical system. Many Democrats are OK with wholesale changes to the Affordable Care Act, and realize that may include scrapping Obama's signature achievement in order to enact something better.

How to do that is terribly complex, and risky. Many politicians have tried and failed to do something about it, and others tiptoe around and wait for others to take on the heavy lift.

It's even more delicate in rural America, where many doctors and hospitals and clinics are surviving on razor thin margins, and depend heavily on government programs like Medicaid.

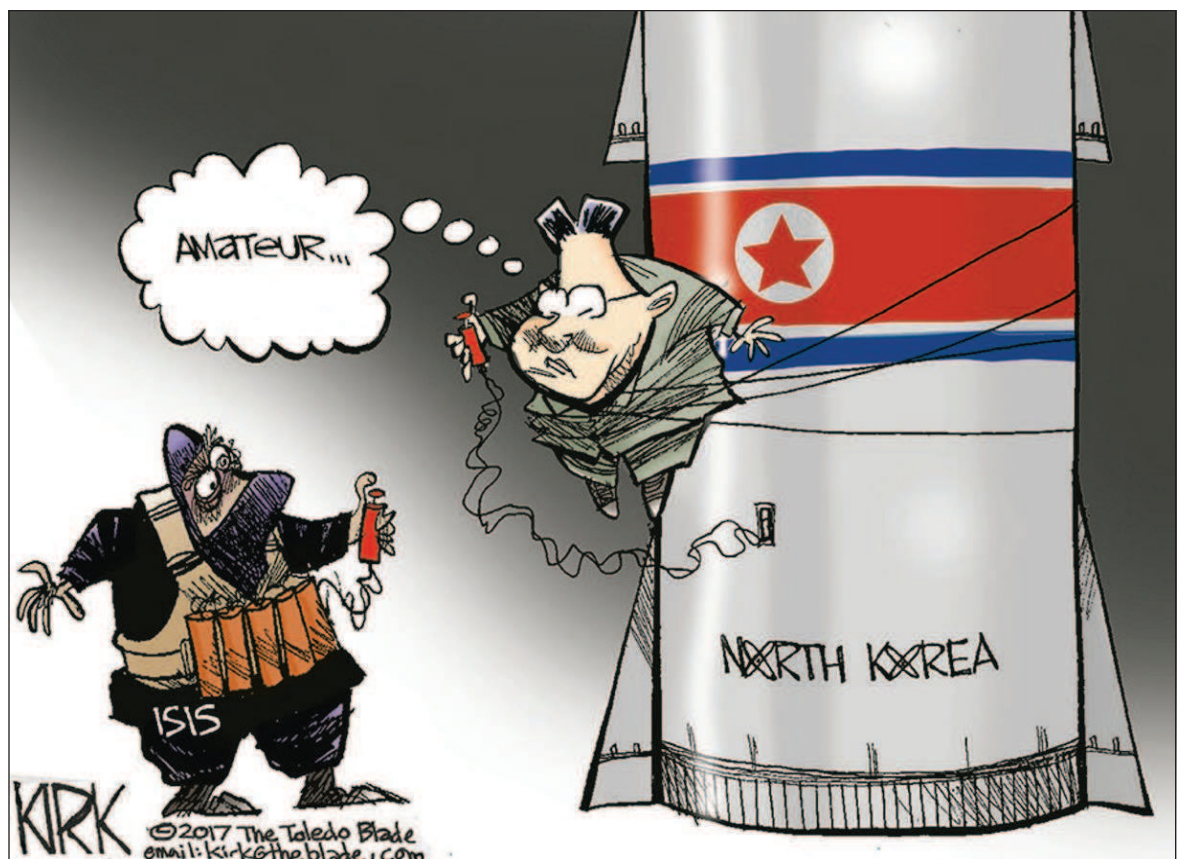
American health care is a mangled mess of entrenched interests, and at the heart of it the complicated science that is modern medicine. Keeping people healthy and alive is something that cannot be done in a vacuum, and the country's health care structure must somehow be both strong and flexible.

Voters and politicians must own up to the fact that this country is spending much too much money on it — nearly 20 percent of our entire economy — and we're not getting acceptable results. Give the ACA credit where it's due, but own up to the fact that there are significant problems with it that need fixing, right now.

Americans are a wonderful, weird group of humans. We're risk takers, we drink too much and eat way too much, and we drive our cars too far and too fast and we have too many guns around and we don't sleep enough and we ingest tobacco and red meat too darn often. All of those things make us less healthy, but more free.

We're also varied demographically and culturally and we live dramatically different lives in urban Chicago or rural Montana, as a multi-billionaire in Manhattan or homeless on the streets of San Francisco. This makes a national health care system even more complicated than a country like Sweden or Denmark, which have the best health care systems and quality of life.

It will take all hands on deck to improve health outcomes: A more efficient, smarter government system. Better choices from Americans, from our diets to showing up to our annual checkups. Doctors who keep cost in mind. From Washington, D.C, we should demand debate that rises above partisanship and frames health care as the critically important, immensely complex issue it is.



Sights and sounds of the Rainbow

By George Plaven
EO Media Group

Welcome home.

The colorful sign marks the entrance into the 2017 Rainbow Gathering at Flagtail Meadow, on the Malheur National Forest south of John Day. I make my way along the dry, dusty trail past groups of people lounging in the shade to beat the high afternoon heat. Clothes, at this point, are optional, and a few folks have chosen to go au naturale.

More than 11,000 members of the Rainbow Family of Living Light have arrived to participate in the annual gathering. With a notebook tucked in my back pocket, I decided to pay a visit July 2 alongside Tim Trainor, East Oregonian deputy managing editor, in an effort to better understand the essence of Rainbow living.

Neither of us knew quite what to expect, and we pledged to go in with open minds. Regardless of the environmental impacts on the land — and the Forest Service has made it abundantly clear there will be impacts to the ecosystem — we simply had to witness this gathering for ourselves.

Immediately, we were struck by how expansive the gathering truly is, hiking from one camp to the next with names like "Jesus Kitchen" and "Granola Funk Theater." Maps were posted around the entrance, along with general guidelines for things like trash cleanup, sanitation and avoiding sensitive habitat.

Perhaps the biggest challenge we faced was finding a place to park. There is no parking allowed on Forest Road 24, which leads into Flagtail Meadow, and making good on numerous warnings, we saw tow trucks hauling several vehicles away.

Finally, we pulled into a designated lot in a grassy field off the road where a group of women waved us into a spot that was just wide enough to fit my Toyota Camry. "Welcome home," they greeted us, and extended an offer of handpicked raspberries. We chatted briefly before starting back down the gravel road toward the main gathering.

The Rainbow Gathering is not authorized by the Forest Service, though the sheer number of participants makes it all but impossible for the agency to stop. Gatherings have been happening since 1972, and they usually culminate on the Fourth of July with a prayer for world peace.

Our first stop was at A-Camp, which was chock-full of vehicles with license plates from California to Vermont. The original Woodstock Festival crossed my mind just as someone began to play Jimi Hendrix on their speakers.

We followed the trail that led deeper into the gathering where I was introduced to Adam, a man in his 50s who needed help carrying his backpack. Adam said he has lung problems, and was struggling with the altitude. He placed the pack in a baby stroller, which I pulled up the hill while he carried a guitar slung around his shoulder.

Along the way, I asked Adam where he is from. "The same place as you," he answered. "From my mother's womb." He claimed he has been on the road since he was a teenager, when he first hitchhiked cross-country from Buffalo, New York, to San Francisco.

We stopped at a place in the shade where Adam decided to rest. He thanked me for the help and gave me a hug. I wished him luck on his trav-

els, to which he replied, "It ain't about luck. It's about love." That line stuck with me for the rest of the day.

It quickly became apparent to both Tim and me that a single afternoon would not be long enough to absorb everything that goes on at the Rainbow Gathering. We caught snippets of different conversations, including a man who said someone had stolen his puppy and another who was looking for someone to give him \$7 so he could go back into town to buy a hamburger. Somewhere in the distance we heard drums and violins, and caught the occasional whiff of marijuana.

Nothing is for sale at the gathering, though there is a row where members can trade and barter with each other. Items that were out on display included everything from orange juice to jewelry to a bottle of unlabeled pills. We never saw a uniformed law enforcement officer inside the gathering, except for along the main Forest Service road.

On our way back down, a steady stream of people continued to file into the gathering, some with wagons full of supplies. The gathering officially wrapped up Friday, and attendance dwindled to 785 by Monday.

Now, we will look ahead to reporting on the damage caused by having 10,000-plus campers in one place at the same time. As for the gathering itself, it is clear there is much for a white-bread journalist like myself to learn about this massive counter-culture experience.

One afternoon was not enough for me to gain that depth of knowledge. But it at least opens the door to a better understanding.

George Plaven is a reporter for the East Oregonian in Pendleton.

GUEST COMMENT

Debriefing the Rainbow Gathering

By Rev. David Seacord
To the Blue Mountain Eagle

So, what just happened here in Grant County? What in tarnation was this Rainbow Gathering? This happening that broke the rules, but was such a powerful force that even the federal government agency in charge openly admitted that it couldn't be stopped. What was this wild, energetic wind that just blew through this county like a two-week-long tornado, and now is all but gone — except, of course, for the cleanup (predicted to be completed, inspected and signed off by the Forest Service before month's end).

Here's my succinct debrief, offered from the viewpoint of an artist who has lived part-time in Grant County since 1967, and who also participated in this and several prior gatherings.

Grant County's "paradise" was just visited by about 13,000 humans sharing a different kind of "hive mind" — a Rainbow mind — a kind of mind that has seldom been openly visible around these parts due to the cultural conservatism long-dominate here. These visitors came from just about everywhere, and from a wide range of social and professional strata --- from surgeon and lawyer

to atheist, anarchist and religious zealot. Their idealized and espoused commonalities include dreams of world peace, self-sufficiency, connection to the earth and respect for all lifeforms. The realities of a "rainbow" element, composed for the most part of homeless and often intoxicated "street people" tarnishes but does not obliterate the ideals. Given the prevalent societal ostracization, that the Gathering allows this "rainbow element" to participate is viewable as a demonstration of the gathering's compassionate toleration of human differences.

In any event, the gathering itself was essentially a huge rendezvous made up of a great many individuals and extended-family-sized groups acting in voluntary cooperation along well-established patterns through a council and consensus process. In one way, it was simply a highly tolerant and festive homecoming of new and old friends. In another way, it was a test run of utopian love, everyone-share-mostly-everything ideals. And in another way, it was also a practice field for demonstrating or learning how to survive by pooling resources — if and when the known social order (often called "Babylon") collapses. Thus, inside the gathering was

one pretty indescribable reality, but encircling the gathering was another reality — that of the Forest Service law enforcement gauntlet looking for any justification to confront attendees with ID checks, searches and citation or arrest nicks. And away from the gathering in our local communities was a third reality — one generally unfamiliar with what was happening (or why), and thus vulnerable to rumors, fears of being overrun, spun government press releases and media articles from various viewpoints.

Perhaps, given enough viewpoints, a whole picture emerges? Perhaps, as many philosophies expound, this actually is a non-accidental universe perfectly designed to maximize soul growth opportunities in an unbelievably synchronized way — one that recognizes the ripeness for growth of every single incarnate being in every moment? Inside of such a view, that the Rainbow Gathering happened here could only be seen as an unexpected gift to all of us to grow from, yes? Certainly it leaves behind a lot of "grist for the mill" to ponder. I pray we seize the opportunity to do that.

The Rev. David Seacord is a fine art painter who lives in Prairie City.



Grant County's Weekly Newspaper

PUBLISHER..... MARISSA WILLIAMS, MARISSA@BMEAGLE.COM
EDITOR..... SEAN HART, EDITOR@BMEAGLE.COM
REPORTER..... RYLAN BOGGS, RYLAN@BMEAGLE.COM
COMMUNITY NEWS..... ANGEL CARPENTER, ANGEL@BMEAGLE.COM
SPORTS..... ANGEL CARPENTER, ANGEL@BMEAGLE.COM
MARKETING REP..... KIM KELL, ADS@BMEAGLE.COM
OFFICE MANAGER..... LINDSAY BULLOCK, OFFICE@BMEAGLE.COM

1 YEAR SUBSCRIPTION RATES

(including online access)
Grant County\$40
Everywhere else in U.S.....\$51
Outside Continental U.S.....\$60
Subscriptions must be paid prior to delivery

Periodicals Postage Paid at John Day and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER
send address changes to:
Blue Mountain Eagle
195 N. Canyon Blvd.
John Day, OR 97845-1187

USPS 226-340

www.facebook.com/MyEagleNews @MyEagleNews