

OPINION

THE HUTCHINSON NEWS

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EDITORIAL

Health-care costs

The latest government projections on the long-term cost of health care in the U.S. aren't a complete condemnation of the landmark reform legislation, but they do reinforce that it didn't attack the core costs of an expensive medical system.

The federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services last week revised its projections for the nation's total cost of health care over the next decade to an average increase of 6.3 percent a year. That was up from the agency's projection back in February of a 6.1 percent annual increase. Comparing the two, the conclusion is that the health-care reform bill failed to curb longtime steady medical inflation.

This isn't a huge increase, but this legislation was supposed to save money, right? There is an easy explanation: The nation's total health-care bill will increase because more people will be insured. People who might not have gone to the doctor in the past because they weren't insured now will have coverage.

What is still unknown is the savings specifically to the people who already were insured. Will the costs of their care go down because the overall cost is spread around more insureds and when

the insured population isn't picking up the tab for the charity care of providers? No analysis has been done comparing the cost per insured person before and after the health-care reform bill provisions are in place.

Surely some number-crunchers in Washington can run the traps on this, but it probably will take some years of experience to know the true effects of this massive and complicated legislation.

We have a good hunch that the health-care law isn't going to result in much lower bills when people go to the doctor, have a procedure or stay in the hospital. That is because the health-care system is essentially unchanged structurally. Generally, the incentives built in to encourage waste and excessive profit-making will remain.

The bill will insure more Americans - 93 percent will have health insurance by 2019, up from 84 percent this year - and the value of that should not be downplayed. But health-care reform also was supposed to drive down costs, or at least stop the rapid inflation of the last 20 years.

That work remains undone in Congress. It is what should be Congress' follow-up focus, no matter which party commands leadership in Congress next year.

READER OPINIONS FROM HUTCHNEWS.COM

• I wonder why some people couldn't see through (this) when this was first introduced. I believe there were some saying that there was no way this bill would lower health care costs, but the wonderful Democrats just had to do all they could to cram this bill at us. And I believe The Hutchinson News was in favor of the bill.

• The problem in health care is

high cost, not lack of insurance. People cannot afford insurance because high health care costs keep insurance costs up. One of the reasons for the high cost of insurance is that people go to the doctor more often with minor ailments that don't really require a doctor's care.

• This is the administration of unintended consequences.

WESTERN FRONT

Protect water

Sunflower Electric is requesting water-use permits for its new proposed coal-fired plant here in western Kansas. I hope that Joshua Svaty, Kansas secretary of agriculture, will deny such permits. He should be aware of a serious problem with the depletion of groundwater here in western Kansas, and action is needed to preserve what water resources we have left.

In 1950, at my farmstead it was 50-foot to water. Last year, it was 137 feet to water. That water well hits shale at 170 feet, so I only have 33 feet of water left for the future. I stopped using irrigation water from my three irrigation wells on my farm here in Scott County in about 1992.

There are other people who live in Scott County who have told me they only have 10 to 13 feet of water left in their household wells. I know of a family whose farmhouse well went dry and they searched for a mile around their home and could not find water for a new well. They ended up having to move and sell their farmstead. There are families here who have had to go several miles from their home to find water and drill a well and pump that water back to their home because we do not have rural water districts.

Our western Kansas legislators have continued to advocate for Sunflower's proposed coal-fired plant. It seems that the only thing they want to deny is abortions. But what in fact they are doing is aborting future generations from living on the great High Plains of western Kansas by allowing the water to be depleted from the aquifer.

Svaty has the opportunity to

stand up for those of us here now and for future generations in rural western Kansas who need to have each precious drop of water conserved and preserved for the future life in western Kansas.

ROBERT V. MULCH
Scott City

Marriage fraud

As the market in marriage fraud grows unabated, Kansans are increasingly targeted by dishonest foreign nationals who marry American citizens to gain entry into the United States. Primarily from Asian, Latin and Eastern European countries these people will use any means necessary to escape abject poverty and social deprivation, including the destruction of your reputation and financial well-being.

Aided and abetted by attorneys who specialize in calculated character assassination and myriad well-intentioned church and social organizations, a silent atrocity is being perpetrated against innocent Americans who have naively married a foreign national.

Without hesitation, your home, job and standing in the community will be sacrificed in order to maintain their visa status. Your rights as an American citizen have become secondary in the new world order of political correctness.

Are all such marriages fraudulent? Of course not, but if you are marrying a foreign national beware, you are placing yourself in a high-risk category.

GREGORY BONTRAGER
Hutchinson

JOIN THE DISCUSSION

The News encourages readers to share their opinions on this page and offers a number of ways to do so:

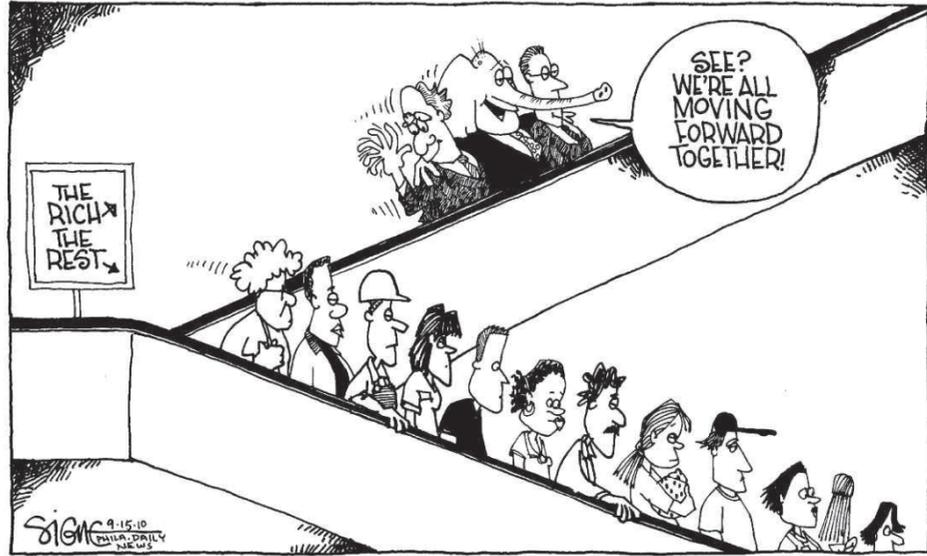
(1) Write a letter to the Western Front on any topic. Send to The News at 300 W. Second Ave., Hutchinson, KS, 67504-0190; fax to (620) 662-4186 or e-mail to westernfront@hutchnews.com.

Letters should be limited to 500 words. Poems, consumer complaints, business testimonials and group-written letters will not be accepted. Please sign your name and provide your address

and a phone number so we may call to verify the letter. We strive to publish letters within one week of verification.

Western Front letters are subject to editing for space considerations and libel concerns.

(2) Respond directly to a newspaper editorial by joining our online opinions blog. Go to www.hutchnews.com/editorialblogs and comment on any of our latest posts. A selection of constructive comments may be excerpted to go with opinions that are published in a later print edition of The News.



COLUMNISTS

Cost of military conflicts a drain on taxpayers

Community columnist



Tom Arnhold

Members of the tea party are opposed to wasteful government spending. I agree wholeheartedly. Then, why isn't the tea party livid about the wasteful spending going on in Iraq and Afghanistan? They should be marching in the streets protesting against the way our government has wasted money, human lives and equipment in these two wars that have accomplished little.

In Iraq, American companies such as Brown and Root have ripped off U.S. taxpayers by making obscene profits. They have contracts that guarantee them profits. The sad fact is that Brown and Root is not the only company that has been paid millions and perhaps billions of dollars for questionable projects.

Many projects in Iraq are unfinished and over budget. Recently, the Los Angeles Times had an excellent article on wasteful products in Iraq. U.S. taxpayers have funded \$343 million in health clinics in Iraq. Most of these are functioning, but think of what the \$343 million would have done to help build additional medical and dental schools in the United States.

In 2004, Laura Bush announced that a new 94-bed hospital for children would be built in Basra, Iraq. It was to be completed by 2005 and would cost \$37 million. It is still unfinished and \$171 million is the projected cost, of which \$110 million has been footed by American tax dollars. So why is there no protest by government watchdogs who abhor wasteful spending?

In Khan Bani Saad, Iraq, the U.S. has now abandoned a prison it began building, but only after spending \$40 million. Apparently, the Iraqis told U.S. officials they did not need or want the prison, but the U.S. plowed ahead. Now, the prison sits uncompleted, a waste of your money and mine. The U.S. government failed

American taxpayers and Iraqis in Fallujah, Iraq. A wastewater treatment plant was to be built to serve 24,000 households at a cost of \$32.5 million. It will now cost \$107 million and will serve 4,300 households. The real question is why is this occurring and why don't we read articles about people going to jail for committing fraud and waste?

The United States budgeted \$59 billion to reconstruct Iraq. After seven years of combat in Iraq, the country is still in turmoil. Every week there are bombings that kill dozens of Iraqi people. Yet we still have 50,000 soldiers there, at a cost of billions of dollars per year. It doesn't make a lot of sense, does it?

Despite the mistakes our government has made in Iraq, it seems bound and determined to make the same mistakes in Afghanistan. The government has allocated \$30 billion to rebuild Afghanistan, and the waste and fraud continues. Like in Iraq, there is poor planning, little oversight and plenty of greed in Afghanistan. What is un-American and down right criminal is the way American companies have profited at U.S. taxpayers' expense.

Another problem in Afghanistan is the astonishing amount of money that has been lining the pockets of corrupt Afghan officials. Ron Paul, the darling of the tea party members, has decried the wasteful spending in Afghanistan. He notes it costs an astonishing \$1 million per year to field a soldier in Afghanistan. He correctly states

that by trying to help poor people in Afghanistan, we are hurting poor people in America. Now the president of Afghanistan has the gall to request foreign countries (including the United States) to quit investigating Afghan officials who are accused of corruption and misusing our tax dollars.

Each year we give Pakistan \$1 billion in foreign aid. Compared to the billions we are spending in Iraq and Afghanistan, that is a drop in the bucket. Despite that \$1 billion, the Pakistanis do little to get rid of the Taliban in the region of their country that borders Afghanistan. The United States should simply tell the Pakistan government that if it does not get rid of the Taliban and other terrorists, no more aid will come from the United States. We want to sanction Iran for developing nuclear capabilities but take no action against Pakistan, which has nuclear capabilities and harbors terrorists.

The cost of Iraq and Afghanistan will not end when the final troops leave. More than 5,700 service members have been killed with more than 32,000 officially wounded. For years, the families of injured service members and the Veteran's Administration will bear the cost. We sent our young people in harm's way, but the VA often has difficulty hiring doctors and nurses to care for the soldiers due to the wages they pay. Many VA facilities are under-funded, and it is our veterans who suffer.

The tea party members are correct when they point out that our children and grandchildren are going to have to repay the national debt. We need to reduce spending where reduced spending does not hurt Americans, and one way to do that is to get out of two long, costly and unnecessary wars.

Tom Arnhold is a longtime Hutchinson resident and attorney. E-mail: TArnhold@kslawyer.net.

The bottom of the barrel

NEW YORK - Of course I knew it all along. President Barack Obama is a Kenyan anti-colonialist and that's why he doesn't get us. He's a ticked-off African.

So goes the latest in Obama-theory, originated by the usually rational conservative thinker Dinesh D'Souza and endorsed by none other than Newt Gingrich, Republican anarchist and one-time speaker of the House of Representatives.

Cue soundtrack to "Twilight Zone." Or "Psycho." Or, I dunno, Tarzan summoning an elephant stampee to quash yet another pestilential imperial invasion.

What's next? Obama is an extra-terrestrial pod deposited on Planet Earth to occupy a human shell, and get elected leader of the free world so that he can lull the population into complacent dependency in advance of a full invasion of body snatchers?

D'Souza's theory, which appeared in a Forbes magazine article, was an attempt to understand Obama's failure to relate to mainstream America. This is not a unique obsession. We all take different routes in trying to solve the riddle of the sphinx. Of course, the operating premise is that Obama doesn't "get us" only to the extent that his policies are in discord with what we believe he should be doing.

How come Obama and his cronies insist on advancing a set of policies with which a majority of Americans disagree? D'Souza - and apparently Gingrich - sees a



Kathleen Parker

genetic disconnect driving the president. Obama, son of a Kenyan intellectual (or goat herder, depending on the narrative du jour), absorbed the anti-colonial imperative. Never mind that his father left him when he was 2 and then saw him only once more when Obama was 10. In this Republican revenge fantasy, the American president is meting out delayed justice to the ignorant offspring of European oppressors.

D'Souza found sustenance for his proposition in Obama's 2009 support for oil drilling off the coast of Brazil, but not in America. Hmhmhm.

"Obama believes that the West uses a disproportionate share of the world's energy resources, so he wants neocolonial America to have less and the former colonized countries to have more," wrote D'Souza.

But of course, affirmed Gingrich. How perfectly clear: The Export-Import Bank of the United States gave preliminary approval for a \$2 billion loan to Brazil's state oil company, Petrobras. Voila - Kenyan retribution at work.

Except that at the time of the approval, just shortly after Obama took office, the bank's board was

fitted with five George W. Bush appointees. As reported by Slate and the myth-busting Snopes, such approvals are generally to encourage purchases of U.S. goods from Petrobras. And, alas, the \$2 billion was mostly private money.

Who knows what tricks the summer heat plays on the human mind, but fevered theories have enjoyed a fertile reception this season. I have theories of my own, of course, though none quite so exotic. In rehearsal for our upcoming CNN show, "ParkerSpitzer," co-anchor Eliot Spitzer and I interviewed two psychiatrists to help explain why Obama can't seem to connect with the American people.

Their take: He likes relating to people on positives - hope and change - but can't relate to anger. He steers clear of negatives. This probably has far more to do with the adaptations he made as a child navigating a disruptive childhood than with any anti-colonial sentiments he might have absorbed while wondering where his father was.

We may never get to the bottom of Barack Obama, but we are fast getting to the bottom of the barrel in trying to sort things out. The last thing Republicans need as they approach a winning season is to be routing around in the ancient histories of black vs. white on the African continent.

It's the time to move on, gentlemen. There's nothing here of any benefit, whatsoever.

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Doonesbury

