Opinion



Free Press Viewpoint

Government, heal thy health care

Despite the big push being mounted by the Obama administration, it seems most unlikely that any plan created in Washington will solve the problems of the American health system.

There are too many problems, their causes are far too diverse and the government itself is at the root of so many of them, that the so-called health care crisis does not lend itself to simple solutions.

At the root of the crisis is the federal government, the biggest problem the health care system has. Government has been muddling the health-care system since the 1960s, and the result is a mess.

Where once doctors accepted the responsibility of doing a certain amount of unpaid work, today most insist on being paid by someone. Where once hospitals were considered charities, run by churches, religious orders and local governments, today they are big business, giving allegiance to the bottom line.

Government created this monster by taking over as the insurer for the poor, the needy and the elderly, and by pumping money into the system. Government forced hospitals and health care providers to learn how to play its game.

And when they were hooked on government payments, then Congress and the legislatures realized how much money was going into health care and demanded cuts. That meant paying hospitals and doctors, pharmacists and other providers less than their normal rate, often less than their cost, to "save" the government money.

So who, then, pays the rest of the cost if the taxpayers won't? Why, the people who can afford it, those who pay their own bills and those with private insurance.

Is it any wonder that few can afford either medical insurance or medical care today?

And what about the uninsured, the working poor who can't afford insurance and can't afford to be sick?

No matter what the rules say, the first question they will hear at the emergency room is, "How do you plan to pay for this?

Do you have insurance?" And they know that the hospital or doctor is liable to sue them for the bill, taking whatever little they might have, so they stay home.

The system is broke, yes. And as much as anything, the government made it that way.

While the simple answer would be to get government out of health care and let people figure out their own solutions, it's not that easy.

Four decades of government money and government interference destroyed the old system. Vast increases in medical costs make it nearly impossible for individuals and families to handle their health-care costs without insurance.

And insurance has gotten so expensive that many cannot afford it.

No, whatever is done – if it is to do more than simply make this mess worse – will require careful planning, attention to the details of what will work and what will not work and consideration of nongovernmental solutions, something that gets no play at all today.

Can we expect that from Congress?

The first order is to avoid the impulse to rush, no matter what the White House says.

- Steve Haynes

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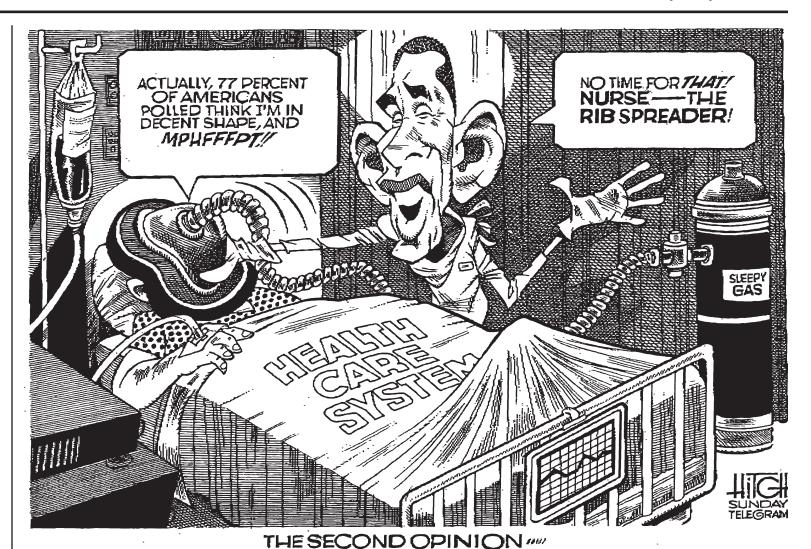
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Birds don't take rainy days off

I'm on vacation in Colorado and it's raining.

Rain is putting a damper on our plans to go hiking in the mountains and have a picnic.

I looked out back and the dog, never an early riser, is sound asleep in her portable dog house. The rain never puts a damper on her — she likes it. But this morning, it's nearly 11 a.m., and she's still snoozing away in the cool, damp morning.

While Steve and I, our daughter Lindsay and her husband Brad are sitting around sipping our umpteenth cup of coffee and reading our books, the raindrops fall gently on the roof, porch and yard.

The rain isn't deterring the birds, however. They are flying from the trees to the feeders and then chasing each other across the yard.

One of the first things I did on arrival at the cabin was to put food in the three hummingbird and two wild-bird feeders.

The first day, we saw little action. Just a few scouts checking out the offerings.

By the second day, the feeders were getting a few more birds and when we sat out on the porch the hum of wings was obvious. The level of sugar water and bird seed started to sink. One hummingbird feeder went dry by the end



of the second day, and I set about making more food — one cup of sugar to three cups water and a few drops of red food coloring. The food color isn't needed to attract the birds; it's so I

can tell when the feeders are empty. I borrowed Brad, who at 5-foot, 10-inches, is the tallest person in this family, to rehang the refilled feeder. Already, the level has gone down an inch or two.

A second feeder is almost dry. I can't see anymore red sugar water, but since the birds are still gathering there and dipping their little beaks into the fake flowers on the sides, I figure there's still some food in the bottom that screws onto the glass cylinder. Still I'd better head for the kitchen to check my sugar supply and warn Brad that his services as hummingbird feeder lifter will be needed soon.

The birds don't seem to mind the rain. If c.haynes @ nwkansas.com

anything, they seem more active this morning darting in and out and arguing over which feeder to use.

One bird has the middle feeder under his absolute control. He sits on his preferred perch and drinks thirstily. If any other hummer approaches any of the other three perches, his tail starts to fan. If the interloper comes closer, he darts off his perch and runs them off.

Since four birds could reasonably feed at each station, this seems to be a bit much, but then I'm no expert on hummingbird psychology. Heck, I'm not even very good with hu-

bird feeders seem to be more accepting of their neighbors. They fill up the six perches on each feeder — well the seed level has now fallen so that only four perches have access to lunch. Looks like it's time to refill those also.

The sparrows and finches out at the wild-

Too bad it's so rainy and there's nothing to do today.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor'West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at

Legal system works together for justice

On March 25, 2008, a criminal out on parole brutally murdered Scott Noel, a farmer in Osborne County. Scott was a husband, a father of three wonderful kids, and beloved in his community. He was executed in his own home with his own gun.

I was honored to lead the law enforcement team on this case and personally prosecute the defendant before an Osborne County jury becoming the first Kansas attorney general to do so in more than 34 years.

I have great respect for our legal system and those who work in it. Dedicated law enforcement officers, judges, attorneys and citizens are required to make our system work. And in this case, I saw all those elements come together to bring justice to a family and a community.



Robert Six

 Attorney General

As attorney general, I have a great responsibility to the people of Kansas, not only as an administrative leader but as someone who works closely with law enforcement to keep our communities safe. To be a good leader, I also need to be ac-

tive in court, setting an example for other attorneys in my office. I can do that by prosecuting criminal cases and arguing before the U.S. Supreme Court on behalf of Kansas farmers, who desperately need water for their crops and livestock.

In Kansas, the attorney general is elected, but I do not believe it should be a political job. It is a law enforcement job. I focus each day on bringing some measure of justice to families like the Noels. I focus on representing the best interests of Kansans and defending our resources.

Whether it is prosecuting criminals, arguing before the Supreme Court or fighting fraud and abuse in state government, I will be working to keep Kansans safe.

Health reform takes cost comparison

To the Editor:

(This letter was addressed to the Kansas congressional delegation.)

Lawmakers must order the Congressional Budget Office to compare the cost of a singlepayer system with the cost of other health reform proposals. We know this will show that the single-payer solution is the way to go.

Having this piece of information is crucial to ensuring an honest, balanced and transparent debate on health-care reform.

As your constituent, I am joining Public Citizen in calling upon Congress to pass HR 676

Free Press **Letter Drop**

• Our readers sound off

(The United States National Health Insurance Act), which would create a publicly financed, privately delivered system that guarantees

comprehensive health care for all Americans. For too long, private insurance companies have denied care, bankrupted hard-working

families and inflated costs, leaving nearly 50 million Americans uninsured and tens of millions more with insurance still unable to afford health care. A single-payer system of national health insurance that eliminates private insurance would save nearly \$400 billion now wasted annually on administrative costs, enough to pay for high-quality, comprehensive care for all.

Edna Hatcher, Colby

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Letters will not be censored, but will be read

Mallard **Fillmore**

Bruce Tinsley



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