

Free Press Viewpoint

NASA is needed for practical hope

The sky is falling. But if NASA got all of the money they want, we'd at least know where and how much.

The space administration has been tracking objects in and around our solar system for years. nobody outside the agency really paid any attention until a couple of blockbuster movies came out in the '90s. After that, we all suddenly became worried a big asteroid or a comet would crash into the Earth.

But in the realm of science fact, NASA's required goal is to track 90 percent of the potentially dangerous objects which might take aim at Earth. This seems a little short-sighted on Congress' part. Why not set the goal of tracking them all, or do they think that the 10 percent we can't see will magically pass through the Earth?

In any case, NASA doesn't have the money to track those objects anyway. They don't even have the money to get to 90 percent.

The reality, though, is that we have very little to worry about from falling objects. NASA's Near Earth Object Program, the one whose budget is in question, has identified over 11,000 objects that have a chance of hitting Earth. And in all that, only five have less than a one in a million chance. Sounds like we'll

However, the program's budget woes are a microcosm of the whole problem with space travel. Nobody wants to sink the money into it. NASA, like everyone else, is feeling the pinch in our current economic climate.

Discovery is a tricky thing to fund, because you don't know how long it will take, you really don't know how much it'll cost and you don't know if you'll get any tangible benefit from it. You only find those out after they make the discovery.

The Apollo program cost about \$25 billion in the 1960s and '70s, which would be about \$145 billion in today's dollars. But it got us to the moon.

And all senators and congressmen want to hear about are tangible gains – and why not, since that's what their constituents want to hear about back home. Tracking rocks in space won't create jobs, it won't grow the economy and it won't pay for health care, and neither will going to the moon or to Mars.

But going to the moon again or going to Mars for the first time will bring other benefits. Just look at Apollo 8. In 1968, the nation was deep in one of the bloodiest parts of the divisive Vietnam War, rocked by protests and had just seen the death of Robert Kennedy. The Apollo program looked like it was stalled in the mud.

It had been years since the tragic fire on Apollo 1, and it seemed that NASA hadn't achieved anything in the meantime. Along came Apollo 8, which not only became the first manned spacecraft to leave Earth's orbit, but the first to orbit the moon. Frank Borman, the mission's commander, got a telegram after the mission from a complete stranger, who said very simply, "Thank you, you saved 1968."

We need to give NASA the money to do what it needs to do, whether going to Mars, tracking asteroids or just looking up into the sky. We need it so we can feel good again, like the world isn't just sliding down into new dark ages.

We've seen what humans can accomplish in space when we have our hearts behind it. In 1969, we had our hearts in Apollo because we wanted to prove to the world that we could do things better than the Soviets. We need to find out how to put that kind of commitment in it again, or we're going to stay grounded - or one of those asteroids we couldn't afford to track will slam into us. – Kevin Bottrell

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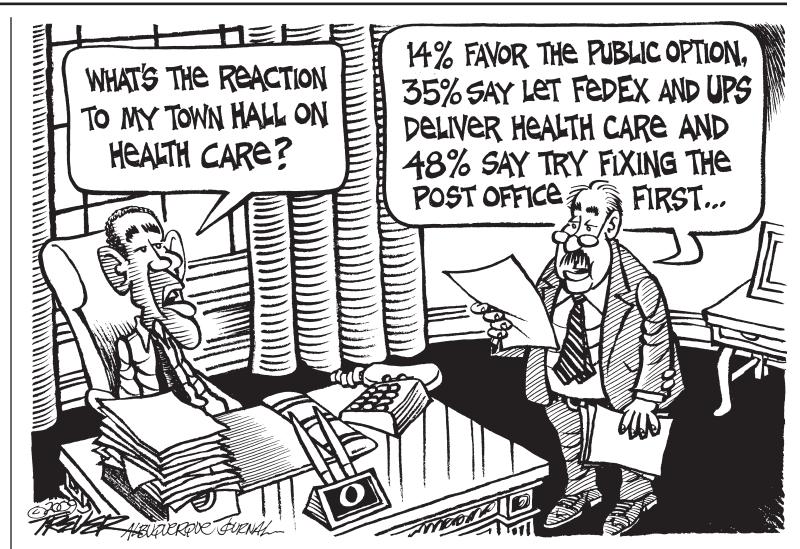
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Take a break from the health care debate

Ramblings

I would advise the politically-oriented individuals who have managed to remain partly sane in today's political climate to take a threeweek vacation.

Go fishing. Go on a hike. Order a pizza. Do a favor for your neighbor. Volunteer for a charity. Find a new hobby. Do anything you can think of to keep your eyes away from the television screen and your nose out of the newspapers, because it will only lead you on a road

We might as well admit that we live in an era where even the most malicious and fraudulent lies can whip people into a frenzy of paranoia and anger. The difference between reality and faux reality have been so blurred over the years that no one seems to be able to distinguish one from the other.

Those of us who had the audacity to hope for a more constructive political dialogue in this country after the election of President Barack Obama now know how unrealistic we were being. The current debate over health care isn't even really a debate, because so many people's views are based on far-fetched conspiracy theories and falsehoods.

I'm certainly in favor of the public being privy to the views of both the supporters and the detractors of the health care reform bill. But if we're going to have a debate, then we have to actually listen to opposing viewpoints.

to get health care.

The Commonwealth Fund, a private New York-based health policy foundation, reported that 101,000 fewer Americans would die each yar if the United States matched its preventable death rate to that of France, Japan and Australia. In the study by the fund, America ranked last among the 19 countries surveyed when it came to preventable deaths due to



treatable conditions.

In their rankings, the researchers considered deaths before age 75 from several diseases, including heart disease, stroke, certain cancers, diabetes, certain bacterial infections and complication of common surgical procedures. This group represented 23 percent of deaths in women and 32 percent of deaths in men. This research was done in 2002-2003. Interestingly, the researchers said American health care was good if you could get it.

The World Health Organization ranked the world's health care systems in 2000. The results were not much different. Despite paying more per person than the other 189 countries, America's health care system was only ranked 37th. France was once again ranked first.

I'm sure there are many legitimate criticisms that could be levied against these polls. But I would hope it would cause even the most adamant opponent of health care reform to at least look at alternate points of view. Americans The advocates for health care reform think should be willing to look at France's health this is the only way to contain costs and ensure care system, which is much more effective and will will only lead to anger, fear and possibly people with medical problems will still be able more ideologically consistent with American culture than those in Canada and Britain.

> Health reform supporters need to listen to opposing viewpoints as well, as long as these viewpoints are not based on conspiracy theories that are as outlandish as the people questioning whether or not our president is an American citizen.

Weekly Standard Magazine by Yuval Levin in sports and opinion writing.

which he endorsed what he called a marketoriented health care system. In the article, he advocates ending tax penalties for purchasing outside of the employer system and reforms of insurance regulations to allow for sales of coverage across state lines.

He makes a case for medical liability reform to lower costs and allow doctors to no avoid "defensive medicine," ordering extra tests due to fear of being sued for malpractice.

I don't have many problems with any of these proposals, but I do think patients should be able to sue doctors if they make mistakes that permanently change their lives. In other words, I think there has to be a middle ground that allows doctors to have more freedom to do their job, while not taking away a patients right to file lawsuits in when extreme mistakes are made. I would hope other proponents of universal health care will also read opposing viewpoints before tearing down those with different ideologies.

This health care debate is about much more than health care. It's a test to see how we as a country can handle a topic that many people passionately disagree about.

Human nature often causes us to seek shelter by reading only the views of those we agree with and to find solace with the public figures who seem to relish in demeaning the other side as evil. But we need to look to the better angels of our nature and reject this kind of behavior. It violence

If we can learn to agree to disagree, then our country still has a chance of prospering, but if we continue on the course we are on, we are likely to become a country guided by intolerance and unreason.

Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate, is sports reporter for the Colby Free Press. I recently read a piece in the neoconservative He says he loves K-State athletics and fishing,

College radio students need to do sports

I am writing this letter to address a situation that needs to be resolved. As a former student of Colby Community College, and a graduate of the radio program, it has come to my attention that an individual outside of the college, who is not a student, has bought his way into doing both the play-by-play of college basketball and Colby High School sports on the college's radio station, only to make a profit for himself.

This is not fair to the students of the radio program who are interested in doing sports play-by-play. While not all radio students wish to pursue this part of the occupation, there are usually a handful who have an interest, and in some cases, such as myself, are *only* interested in doing sports.



Free Press **Letter Drop**

• Our readers sound off

To have someone from outside of the college paying to take this opportunity away from students is wrong, and can be very discouraging to the recruiting efforts of the radio faculty trying to bring students to the college.

I was in a similar situation when I was at Colby, and was only able to do limited color duties on sports broadcasts, while a faculty

member was given the full-time spot. Thanks to Gracemary Melvin, who was the dean of instruction at the time, that changed during my second year at Colby, giving me a better opportunity to learn and hone my skills.

I ask that those who have a say in this matter understand that a college radio station is for the sole purpose of educating radio students, and giving them the hands-on training required for them to be successful after college. To take that away is an injustice to the college and the students. Those who were involved in the approval of this transaction should be ashamed of themselves for selling out KTCC for the profit of someone else.

Dwayne Hall, Mansfield, Texas Colby Community College Class of 1996

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