



Kids can choose, and need to do so

So the big news this week was all about President Barack Obama’s speech to students on Tuesday. The White House, it seems, sprung this on everyone at the last minute, and didn’t really give schools time to get parent’s permission such as they would with some guest speakers, films or field trips. It certainly could have been handled better, but the uproar across the country was astounding.

The outcry was fierce on both side, those for showing the speech, those against it. There was even a very vocal contingent who just wanted a bit more warning. Some thought it brainwashing socialist propaganda, and some thought it a stirring address to an at-risk group. All of this, of course, before anyone knew what the content of the speech was going to be.

After a transcript was released on Monday, of course, quite a few people backpedaled on those statements. Some Republican leaders even called it stirring. The text of the speech was, in fact, quite neutral and apolitical. The president highlighted his youth, identified with the experiences of today’s youngsters and gave them a positive message to stay in school. Not an original statement, of course, but one worth repeating.

The only political issue discussed was not even in the speech itself. The president held a question and answer session with kids at Wakefield High School in Virginia, and one student asked him directly about healthcare. He did answer according to his political beliefs, and why wouldn’t he? But nowhere in the speech broadcast to the nation did he say, “Oh and, by the way, tell your parents to support healthcare reform.”

Now, some districts, such as ours here in Colby, opted to delay the speech for scheduling reasons and send out permission slips. Some opted not to show the speech at all. All of this got a lot of play in the national. But the thing that seems to be missing in every opposition statement, letter to the editor and op-ed piece is this: did anyone ask the kids whether or not they wanted to see the speech?

Our kids are often far more discerning, responsible and free-thinking than we give them credit for. After all, that’s what we try to teach, isn’t it? People think of them as impressionable, as if they soak up everything they come across and are greatly influenced by all of it. It’s understandable to think that of our kids, after all, that’s probably what our parents thought of us, but it is simply not the case.

One of the things our schools are trying to teach is critical thinking – how to look at an issue or event and say: what does this mean, what do I think about it and what can or should I do about it. Isn’t this speech a good lesson? It’s no different from adults choosing to listen to a State of the Union address. Some would not listen at all, some would listen while disagreeing with everything, and some would listen and agree. We all have to decide things for ourselves one day, so where do we start?

We can try to shield kids from the world, but in some cases that does them a disservice. They have to make decisions about what to hear, see, and pay attention to sooner or later. This is as good a lesson as any. A democracy doesn’t work without participation, and we can decide how and when to participate, but where do we learn that? We learn it from our parents, we learn it in school, and we learn it in life, so why not start with deciding whether or not to listen to a speech by the leader of the free world? If we give kids the responsibility to make their own choices, they may do better than we think.

–Kevin Bottrell

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Memories of the day still live on

Today is a day to remember those lost on Sept. 11, 2001. Most of us will never forget the day a group of religious fundamentalist lunatics crashed airplanes into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon killing, nearly 3,000 people in a matter of hours.

While we should remember those who were lost on that terrible day, we should also remember the acts of heroism we saw from firefighters who risked their own lives trying to save those trapped in the burning remnants of the World Trade Center. Many of these people died trying to save others. To give your own life for someone else is the greatest and most honorable sacrifice any person can make. It’s comforting to know that even in the most hellish situations the best examples of humanity will rise to the occasion.

We also should remember the brave men and women on Flight 93. The revolt of a group of passengers against the four terrorists who hijacked the plane prevented a potential attack. A 9-11 Commission report said that Ziad Samir Jarrah was intending to fly the plane into the White House or the U.S. Capitol.

“He was defeated by the alerted, unarmed passengers,” the report said.

The passenger revolt began at 9:57 a.m. that day, nearly 30 minutes after the terrorists had hijacked the plane.

The heroic acts of the passengers on the flight was personified by words uttered by passenger Todd Beamer. He had used an onboard phone to call the Federal Bureau of Investigations. Cable News Network (CNN) reports that



Andy Heintz

- Wildcat Ramblings

at the end of his call, the operator overheard him say to other passengers, “Let’s roll.”

The report also said, “with the sounds of the passenger counter-attacking continuing, the aircraft plowed into an empty field in Shanksville, Penn., at 580 miles per hour, about 20 minutes’ flying time from Washington D.C.” One could only imagine what would have happened to our country if the terrorists were able to crash the plane into the White House or the U.S. Capitol.

Americans will be responding to the eighth anniversary of Sept. 11 in different ways. The Associated Press reports many Americans will use the day to volunteer. Some will be planning beach cleanups, others will be giving packages to U.S. soldiers.

The report also said the volunteers who made firefighter meals or helped remove debris from the World Trade Center site planned to join family members to read names of the more than 2,700 victims killed eight years ago. President Barack Obama and Congress have declared the day will be dedicated to service this year for the first time.

While volunteerism is a commendable thing,

we should not let it overshadow the events that took place that day. The family members of those who died should not be forgotten due to well-intentioned folks eager to do service for their country. Today should be about service, but it should also be about reflection and remembrance.

However people decide to deal with this sad day, we should remember our troops serving in Afghanistan and Iraq. We should also remember the thousands of soldiers who have given their lives in these wars. There are thousands of people in our country who are now living without a father, daughter, mother or son. We should all do what we can to help these people deal with the emotional and economic difficulties that come with losing a loved one.

The innocent civilians who have lost their lives in Iraq or Afghanistan should also be remembered. It is all too easy to forget about the hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians who have died since the beginning of the Iraq War or the thousands who have died in Afghanistan. All of these people were someone’s brother, sister, child, father or mother. Both countries have known nothing but suffering for the past several decades.

Hopefully, some day in the near future people will consider the loss of an innocent life in Afghanistan to be just as important as the killing of an innocent person here in the States.

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Health care reform needs to be defined

There is little doubt that health care is a complex issue involving dozens of players, including patients, physicians, insurance companies, hospitals, pharmacists and government. Often the patient – the consumer – is the least remembered.

There’s been a lot of talk about public options, co-ops, mandates and pre-existing conditions, but there’s not been nearly enough discussion about which concept of health care is in taxpayers’ best interest.

There are two very different concepts from which to choose: a top-down government centered model, or a bottom-up reform which empowers individuals and allows them to choose the type of care and coverage best suited for them. That’s it, in a nutshell.

We can and should talk about how to make health care more affordable and accessible, but first we have to decide whether we want the government or the consumer to be in charge. It’s not that only one model can deal with some of the critical issues; it’s about political and economic power. Do we want to give more power to government or to individual taxpayers?

Empowering the consumer to take control of their own health-care spending has been the missing idea in the debate over reform. But consumer-driven reforms contain the best chance of reducing health care costs and insuring more Americans while not adding to budget deficits.

Health Savings Accounts, catastrophic insurance for the young and healthy, reforms which would end guaranteed issue of insurance and community rating all deserve study. Tort reform would reduce the expense of com-

Other Opinions

- Gregory L. Schneider
Flint Hills Center

bating health-related lawsuits, which may cost as much as \$100 billion per year. And allowing health insurance to be sold across state lines would increase competition, possibly drive down cost sand avoid interruption of coverage because of a move to another state

These changes would make health reform a reality and empower consumers without spending taxpayer money.

Consumer-driven reforms would be affordable, provide accessibility for those currently without insurance, and since the insurance one purchases wouldn’t necessarily depend on one’s job, consumer-driven health care options would be portable.

None of these reforms is included in the plans being discussed in Washington; instead, they focus on centering power in either a government-run insurance exchange which will eventually replace private health insurance, or of creating a “government option” based on a single-payer system such as exists in Great Britain and Canada.

Government-run health care as it exists in America today is already in trouble and costs more than the private health insurance system. Medicare and Medicaid already pay doctors less for services than private insurance, the re-

sult of which is that more doctors are unwilling to take patients with Medicare and Medicaid.

The government-run argument is that the country faces a health insurance crisis. There are 45 million uninsured who either cannot afford insurance or have pre-existing conditions which prevent them from qualifying for private insurance. But every analysis of the actual uninsured numbers points to one fact: the actual number of uninsured (those who do not qualify for Medicaid, and who cannot afford private insurance) is more in the neighborhood of 5 million. Through tax credits or other means, these five million could be insured far less inexpensively than by reforming the entire health care system.

Another big weakness of the government-run plans is that they would do nothing to reduce the costs of health care, as the Congressional Budget Office figures show pointedly. Instead it would add \$1.7 trillion to an already overblown deficit over the next decade.

On Sept. 9, President Barack Obama spoke to Congress on health care. It was, according to some estimates, his one hundred-eleventh such speech on the topic. It is thought that he will finally propose a plan without the government option. It would be better for health care reform if he proposed the consumer option instead and junked the other plans. It would be a nice surprise and signify a movement towards the real reforms which will actually lower costs and insure more of the uninsured.

Gregory L. Schneider is a senior fellow with the Wichita-based Flint Hills Center for Public Policy and heads the Center’s Consumer-Driven Health Care Project.

Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

