

Health care

'Obamacare' a step in right direction



By Rick Hanton@iowastatedaily.com

Destroying Obama's Affordable Care Act would be dangerous

A few days ago, there was an article in the Daily about Congressmen Steve King, R-Iowa, and Mike Pence, R-Ind., who were at a recent Republican fundraiser, giving their negative opinions of various Democrats.

They also made some notable remarks about their wishes to remove the recently passed Affordable Care Act — also known in some circles as "Obamacare" — from law as soon as possible.

After personally spending a lot of free time for a few days last spring pouring over decades of federal budget data, I have to say that King's ambition to destroy "Obamacare" is dangerous for all of us, particularly anyone you know currently using Medicare.

The Affordable Care Act passed by Congress, while imperfect — no thanks to the Republicans in Congress — is a step in the right direction for the federal government's health care expenses.

Looking at the Government Printing Office's spreadsheets of historical federal budget data, in my case due to curiosity about science funding, I saw the budget expanding over time in inflation-adjusted dollars and at the same time forcing

smaller agencies of the government to make do with less.

My first suspect for the cause behind this "ballooning" of the federal budget was the military, which consumes about half of the govern-

ment's budget each year.

But, over time, the military budget has been held roughly constant when adjusted for inflation since the end of the Cold War — whether it should have started shrinking at that time is an issue for another time.

I was then forced to take a second, closer look to find out what costs were straining the federal government's budget.

Surprisingly, the U.S. Department of Health and

Human Services, the agency charged with running the Medicare program for many of our fellow citizens, has seen costs explode in recent decades.

If you look at the spreadsheets, while

Health and Human Services consumed only 3.3 percent of the federal budget before Medicare was signed into law in 1965, by 1988 it had quadrupled as a portion of the federal budget, consuming 13.2 percent.

Today the same department uses approximately 24 percent of the total federal budget to pay for health care for citizens over age 65, as well as medical costs for disabled individuals.

The Affordable Care Act may have been implemented

just in time to help save Medicare, which a few years ago started breaking the piggy bank, costing more than it brings in via taxes in any given year.

The whole idea of the Affordable Care Act was to try to take some control of health care costs while still giving Americans more flexibility than other government health care systems around the world.

The exponentially increasing costs of medical care need to be brought under control.

These costs have been increasing vastly over time, far outpacing the growth due to the aging senior population in the United States.

Much of this growth has happened due in part to the increasing use of the few doctors we — as a nation — have and those doctors' use of more and more expensive medical technology.

Sure, citizens' — or at least their insurers' — willingness to spend massive amounts on health care has fueled amazing technological growth in medical technology in the world, but at what cost?

Bill Clinton tried to address this growing problem back in 1993 but was voted down by Congress.

In eight years, George Bush seemingly did nothing to address the Medicare problem other than signing a bill that added coverage to Medicare for prescription drug benefits for seniors but specifically prohibited the government from negotiating lower drug prices from

manufacturers.

We should at least praise Barack Obama and the Democrats for driving legislation through Congress that addresses the issue of skyrocketing medical care costs and may help save Medicare.

He accomplished what the others before him could not, and may have done so in the nick of time.

Unless Republicans have their own plan to fix Medicare and general health care costs that would be able to replace the Affordable Care Act, the party shouldn't be allowed to tear it down to advance its own personal agenda.

The thought process that drove the creation of Medicare as a form of social insurance for the elderly still makes a lot of sense, and there is no way I will vote someone into Congress who seems happy to tempt fate and have the Medicare system crumble around them.

Now maybe we should seriously think about raising the age bars of programs like Social Security and Medicare above 65.

Maybe we should find other ways to fix their funding issues. But what we shouldn't do is leave these programs to collapse under their own weight, leaving seniors out in the cold in the next few years.

Come back with more solutions and less unsubstantiated criticism, congressmen; and maybe I'll listen next time.

Courtesy photo: LuckyBogey's Blog



Book ban

Censoring should not be the government's job



By Thomas Hummer@iowastatedaily.com

In America, we love our holidays.

There are the traditional day-long festivals, such as Halloween, Christmas and Thanksgiving, as well as month-long memorials like Black History in February and Breast Cancer Awareness in October.

But underneath these well-known celebrations are a countless number of holidays that have slipped into the obscurity of American culture. For example, did you know January is National Oatmeal Month? Or March 30 is National Doctors' Day? Neither did I, and I also didn't realize that last week, I had passively been a part of yet another little-known celebration: Banned Books Week.

After hearing about BBW, I felt compelled to do some research about it.

My initial assumption was that someone created it to commemorate all the controversial literature that has pushed the boundaries of society and gotten our country where it is today.

I expected to find information about books that were banned 50 or more years ago and read the stories of those who bravely stood up for their right to include those works in their schools and libraries. While this is partially the case, I was shocked to find that BBW celebrates books that are still being opposed to this day.



The American Library Association, one of the sponsors of Banned Book Week, has a list of the Top 100 Banned/Challenged Books of 2000-09. It includes "The Color Purple," "Of Mice and Men" and the Harry Potter series. Courtesy photo: Mikael Altemark/Flickr

The American Library Association, one of the largest sponsors of BBW, has a list of the Top 100 Banned/Challenged Books of 2000-09 that includes such classics as "The Color Purple" and "Of Mice and Men," more recent phenomena like "Kite Runner" and the Harry Potter series, and absurdities such

as the Goosebumps series and "Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret."

In fact, two of the top 10 challenged books in 2009 were the Twilight series and "To Kill A Mockingbird."

The fact that BBW exists shows that there is a lot wrong with our country today. I'm not referring to the existence

of offbeat holidays — that's one American quirk I fully embrace — but rather that there are still people who believe certain literature should be censored or completely unavailable to youth.

For example, in 2006 a concerned Georgian mother named Laura Mallory attempted to have the Harry

Potter series banned from schools and libraries. Mallory claimed the book was evil and against Christianity.

In fact, an online petition to have the series banned still exists, arguing that Harry Potter depicts numerous scenes of violence, crime and other offenses to God, such as witchcraft.

All of these objections, of course, are coming from a group of people who endorse the Bible, which is littered with incest, rape, theft and murder.

But it isn't only for religious reasons that people oppose students reading some of these books. "To Kill A Mockingbird," for example, is challenged because of the way it deals with race issues and acts of violence.

Similarly, the tttl series by Lauren Myracle gets most of its flak for drug references and sexual explicitness. Regardless of the specific objection, it's sad that in 2010 we're still wasting our time fighting about what should and shouldn't be said, sang or written.

In the end, extreme censorship only shelters people from the real world. Whether you like it or not, reality will catch up to everybody some day, and it's important to be knowledgeable and prepared for it. This isn't to say that we don't need limitations, but until "A Clockwork Orange" starts being taught in elementary schools, I think it's safe to say we're doing a good job.

Nobody is forcing you to read obscene material, and if you don't want your child reading a book because of its controversial content, that's your responsibility as a parent, and nobody else's. Especially not the government's.

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