

EDITORIAL OPINION

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GOP, Democrats should work together on health bill



ROBERT WEINER AND BEN LASKY
ROBERT WEINER ASSOCIATES

Sen. Mitch McConnell's threat to Senate Republicans that he would be forced to work with Democrats if Republicans couldn't agree on a new health care bill is exactly what they should do.

Republican Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Wisconsin, has begun to go in this direction, as has moderate Sen. Joe Manchin, D-West Virginia. Working with Democrats is the only way an American Health Care Act (AHCA) will ever pass. If that's a threat, both sides should go for it!

Why not do what the Senate is famous for and deal with the issues that are problematic in health care that Democrats have admitted for some time? Just because there are problems with the bill isn't a reason to blow it up. You don't buy a new car because the air conditioning doesn't work. Instead of calling it "repeal and replace," say "repair," and we can actually get something positive done.

Florida has the highest percentage of seniors in the U.S. The bill had quin-

tupled the cost to seniors and took away the opportunity for grandma to be in a nursing home under Medicaid. It also took money to fight opioid addictions, which doesn't get much attention, but is an issue for many seniors who are addicted to painkillers. These are issues that a bill must take care of.

The reason the system is collapsing is because Republicans in Congress have refused to do what Democrats did for George W. Bush's Part D Medicare when there were fixes needed. Congress fixed them on a bipartisan basis.

There were 160 amendments that were adopted on tax breaks and other provisions that Democrats weren't prone to do that were put into Obamacare. President Obama had massive meetings at the White House bringing in the Republican leadership. There were 100 days of hearings. This time there were none. It was done totally in secret, and there was no involvement whatsoever from the Democratic Party. So of course you're not going to get any Democratic support.

That's why it wasn't quite as violent when Obamacare passed. When it did pass there weren't sit-ins by Republicans blocking the bill from passing. Democrats are furious because they were completely excluded. The bill was written in a few weeks by 12 men and no women, let alone a group like Planned

Guest commentaries

A guest commentary can be 675 words or less on a topical subject. Authors must have considerable experience, public involvement or expertise in the subject matter. A guest commentary may be returned to the author with a recommendation to resubmit it as a Letter to the Editor within the guidelines for letters. It is recommended that authors receive preclearance before submission; call 239-435-3457.

Parenthood.

Now senators get to go home on recess and face constituents, which is exactly what McConnell wanted to avoid. He wanted this process to be secret and quick. That's not possible anymore.

There are mothers whose children will die if they don't receive cancer treatments. This bill would have been a disaster. Did you know 49 percent of births in the U.S. are paid for through Medicaid? If you take away peoples' health insurance, you are taking away what is really important to them.

Senate Republicans had emphasized that the bill would have saved \$321 bil-

lion. Of course there's savings when you cut benefits and don't give the health care. That savings is a myth. It just means people aren't getting health insurance. So when you hear "savings," think reduced benefits and reduced care.

There is room for compromise. In addition to making sure the Medicaid expansion continues, subsidies get put in, fixing the exchanges, making sure that seniors don't pay five times as much and that opioid treatment is in, they could, as part of a compromise, take away the mandate and do everything else.

It would satisfy the Republicans that this is still voluntary and market driven, but it would have all the benefits of Obamacare. That is one of the possible compromises if Republicans would be willing to sit at the table with Democrats.

Howard Dean said years ago, when Obamacare was in the making, that the mandate is not something that is a killer provision of the bill that Democrats like to make it out to be.

Robert Weiner is a former spokesman for the Clinton and Bush White Houses and was chief of staff of the House Aging Committee under Rep. Claude Pepper, D-Fla.. Ben Lasky is a senior policy analyst at Robert Weiner Associates and Solutions for Change.

Today in history

Today is Monday, July 24, the 205th day of 2017. There are 160 days left in the year.

On this date in:

1567: Mary, Queen of Scots was forced to abdicate by Scottish nobles in favor of her infant son James, who became King of Scotland at the age of 1.

1783: Latin American revolutionary Simon Bolivar was born in Caracas, Venezuela.

Today's birthdays



Actor **John Aniston** ("Days of Our Lives") is 84. Comedian **Ruth Buzzi** is 81. Actor

Mark Goddard ("Lost in Space") is 81. Actor **Chris Sarandon** is 75. Comedian **Gallagher** is 71. Actor **Robert Hays** ("Airplane!") is 70. Actor **Michael Richards** ("Seinfeld") is 68. Actress **Lynda Carter** is 66. Director **Gus Van Sant** is 65. Country singer **Pam Tillis** is 60. Actor **Kadeem Hardison** is 52. Actress-singer **Kristin Chenoweth** is 49. Actress **Laura Leighton** ("Melrose Place") is 49. Actor **Eric Szmarda** ("CSI") is 42.

Today's quote

"And now, farewell to kindness, humanity and gratitude. ... I have substituted myself for Providence in rewarding the good; may the God of vengeance now yield me His place to punish the wicked." — Alexandre Dumas, "The Count of Monte Cristo"

Bible quote

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

— Hebrews 12:1

Letters

Congress should grow up

Why did we send you to Washington? The correct answer is that we sent you to Washington to represent the needs of the people and on that basis legislate laws that provide for our well-being independent of your political leaning. The best response to any problem is the solution that can be implemented by all and serve the public.

To be more precise, I saw the adoption of the Affordable Care Act (aka Obamacare). This was apparently crafted by a minority of your fellow Congress people. It needed to be passed so it could be understood, to paraphrase U.S. Rep. Nancy Pelosi.

Well, it has been implemented, but has some warts that apparently need to be removed. I saw the GOP repeatedly try to repeal that law, with no concrete idea for

Letters policy

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its replacement. On CNN, I heard that the GOP has given up on passing a new health care measure. Sen. Chuck Schumer celebrated this as a victory. This is shameful for both the GOP and the Democratic Party. A failure in process should be celebrated by no one. Meanwhile, the population is left with a flawed health care system.

I do not pretend to have any idea what the "right" answer is to repairing the health care system. I do, however, have an idea on how to approach the problem. It requires cooperation between the parties and inclusion of the health care community together. This is not a partisan issue and should not be treated as one. It affects the lives and livelihoods of all Americans.

Congress needs to begin acting as adults solving real problems and crafting an American healthcare act.

David C. Bliet, Naples

White House press living on borrowed time



JENNIFER PALMIERI
SPECIAL TO THE WASHINGTON POST

When I was White House communications director for President Barack Obama I would warn the White House press corps that they were living on borrowed time.

At the Obama White House, we often chose to go outside regular channels to communicate with the American public. Still, we respected the institutional importance of the press corps and the importance of engaging with journalists dedicated to covering the president day in and day out.

But in a digital age, with the proliferation of communication platforms, the media was eventually going to need a better answer for why 50 or so reporters deserved daily access to the White House — access not available to other outlets and the general public.

Now the clock has run out. The ultimate disrupter, in the form of President Donald Trump, is seeking to change nearly every rule that presidents and the reporters who cover them have lived by.

This phenomenon was on vivid display Friday with the resignation of press secretary Sean Spicer and appointment of Anthony Scaramucci as White House communications director.

Scaramucci is well-suited to be Trump's White House communications director. He is a more sincere representation of what Trump seeks in a spokesperson than Spicer. Scaramucci projects all that Trump respects — wealth, scrappiness, loyalty and an impressive ability to dissemble while defending Trump on television. If you are looking for someone to "communicate" what this president values, Scaramucci is a good choice.

Spicer was a vestige from the initial era of the Trump White House when Washington regulars joined, hoping to "professionalize" this very unconventional president. It was immediately apparent that Spicer would fail in that endeavor as he was forced by the president to so famously lie about the



White House press secretary Sean Spicer speaks in the briefing room. Almost from Day One, it was clear that Spicer would ride a uniquely rocky and humiliating road as White House press secretary.

crowd size at the inauguration. It has been a long, slow, painful slog to the inevitable moment when Spicer would quit. For his sake, I wish it had happened Jan. 21.

Judging from his and Sarah Huckabee Sanders' turns in the White House briefing room Friday, it seems that Scaramucci, not the White House press secretary, may be the one doing on-camera press briefings. That's unusual.

In the Obama White House, as with its predecessors, the press secretary, and not the communications director, faced reporters every day. This practice reflected Obama's belief that the president has an obligation to the American media. Appointing a single individual — accountable to both the president and the press — to answer ques-

tions on camera and on a regular basis was the most important means of fulfilling that duty.

Having the communications director serve as on-camera spokesperson seems an apt metaphor for Trump's disdainful view of the press. In his mind, reporters do not exist to press him for answers on behalf of the American people but to communicate whatever message Trump chooses to give the American public.

While recent White House practice has been to hold off-camera briefings, it seems the Scaramucci era will be televised. Taking advantage of his considerable television skills was the point in hiring him. But reporters need to be careful to not be lured into providing a platform for a Trump propaganda show simply because a White House official is willing to go on camera. It is more likely that Scaramucci will use the press room lectern to communicate whatever he chooses, not sincerely engage in answering reporters' questions. At that point that room is no longer the James S. Brady Press Briefing Room — it's a television set, with a "White House" plaque behind Scaramucci as an attractive prop.

The media has other soul-searching to do here, too. The Obama White House conducted daily on-camera briefings, but — let's be honest — these weren't usually occasions of high-brow discourse. There was a near-incessant drive by the media to sensationalize whatever was the story of the day — in a way that I believe gave the public a distorted picture of the true nature of the issues at hand. Surely, there were moments our side could have done more to improve the tone of the discussion, too. But most days — day in and day out — our press secretaries worked diligently and sincerely to answer questions and do so truthfully.

To lose this give and take — either by refusing to turn on the cameras or by putting a showman at the podium — would be a significant blow to an accountable democracy.

Jennifer Palmieri served as White House communications director from 2013-15 and was communications director for Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential campaign.