

47 million Americans say it's time for reform

THE ISSUE | Reforming health care.

OUR OPINION | A new policy is needed because far too many Americans are without health care.

According to a new report released by health advocacy group Families USA, 2.3 million Americans are losing their health-care coverage each year. The number of individuals without health insurance is around 47 million.

We find these numbers appalling. The national health-care crisis has recently been placed front and center on the agendas of Congress and the White House. Both House and Senate committees have approved measures overhauling health care and keeping the government-run option intact.

The public option is one of the most controversial pieces of the legislation, but we believe that giving people an option to the private health insurance market is key to reform. The health of ourselves and our loved ones is far too important to be left solely in the hands of for-profit industry.

The debate on this bill has underscored the partisan divide on this issue, but we believe that the public option should receive bipartisan support. Democrats, Republicans and independents all get sick and all deserve the right to affordable health care. America has always thrived on competition, and we believe that a public alternative to private providers would improve the health care system overall.

Will it be expensive? Sure, what isn't these days in Washington. But much of the bill aims to make use of money we're already spending on health care. Remaining costs will be shouldered by the very rich so that folks on the other end of the economic scale can afford to go to a doctor and a dentist.

Eventually, government costs could lower as private health care agencies respond with lower prices of their own. We urge politicians to put partisanship aside and support this legislation.

NATIONAL VIEW | CHICAGO TRIBUNE

F-22 an expensive luxury

In a world without budget constraints, the F-22 fighter jet would be a nice weapon to have. It's swift, stealthy and superior to anything a potential enemy can throw at us in aerial combat.

But ours is not a world without budget constraints. In a time of intense fiscal pressures, Washington has to give priority to defense systems that are vital, and the F-22 is not one of them. Taxpayers should be pleased that Tuesday, the Senate went along with President Barack Obama and deleted funding for more of these aircraft.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates prefers to stop production at 187 planes and rely more on the newer, cheaper and more versatile F-35. Last week, he told the Economic Club of Chicago that the United States can't afford to lavish funds on improbable scenarios while neglecting more likely ones.

Other nations, he said, have learned that "it is ill-advised, if not suicidal, to fight a conventional war head-to-head against the United States." So we are more likely to face "asymmetric" threats from enemies using unconventional tactics from roadside bombs to cyber attacks.

The F-22, true, surpasses the F-35 in its ability to defeat a technologically advanced enemy in old-fashioned dogfights. Fortunately, those aren't likely to happen, simply because no foreign

military can hope to challenge our air superiority. Defense analyst Cindy Williams of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology says, "I would be surprised if Russia or China could match the F-35 as soon as 25 years from now."

But the administration encountered strong resistance on Capitol Hill, where the F-22 has been popular for reasons having nothing to do with national security. It has subcontractors in 44 states – giving innumerable members of Congress an incentive to keep the dollars coming. So even though the administration won this vote, we would be surprised if it's the last word.

Even in a recession, politicians should make weapons decisions with an eye to saving lives rather than preserving jobs. The military has more pressing demands, such as fighting counterinsurgency wars, taking out terrorists and averting the danger of weapons of mass destruction.

"Every defense dollar diverted to fund excess or unneeded capacity – whether for more F-22s or anything else – is a dollar that will be unavailable to take care of our people, to win the wars we are in, to deter potential adversaries and to improve capabilities in areas where America is underinvested and potentially vulnerable," Gates said in Chicago.

Those obligations are necessities. More F-22s are not.

ARTIST'S VIEW



COMMENTARY | LINDA P. CAMPBELL

One ruling can't define a judge

Here's the problem with using a single legal case to make broad generalizations: Opposing sides both make compelling arguments, but only one can prevail.

"If there is a bedrock principle underlying the First Amendment, it is that the government may not prohibit the expression of an idea simply because society finds the idea itself offensive or disagreeable," Justice William Brennan wrote when a 5-4 majority of the Supreme Court ruled in 1989 that the Constitution protects flag-burning as political expression.

"The creation of a federal right to post bulletin boards and graffiti on the Washington Monument might enlarge the market for free expression, but at a cost I would not pay," Justice John Paul Stevens wrote in dissent.

"The Constitution forbids the State to exact religious conformity from a student as the price of attending her own high school graduation," Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote for a 5-4 majority when the court in 1992 struck down prayer at high school graduation.

"Today's opinion shows more forcefully than volumes of argumentation why our Nation's protection, that fortress which is our Constitution, cannot possibly rest upon the changeable philosophical predilections of the Justices of this Court, but must have deep foundations in the historic practices of our people," Justice Antonin Scalia wrote in dissent.

"What we would do in the present case is ... hold that the Florida Supreme Court's interpretation of the Florida election laws impermissibly distorted them beyond what a fair reading required," Chief Justice William Rehnquist wrote when the court stopped the recount in the

2000 presidential election, resulting in George W. Bush's victory.

"The extraordinary setting of this case has obscured the ordinary principle that dictates its proper resolution: Federal courts defer to a state high court's interpretations of the State's own law," Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg wrote in dissent.

Republican critics of Judge Sonia Sotomayor harped and pounded to use the Supreme Court's disagreement with her in the New Haven, Conn., firefighters case as proof that she's an "activist" bent on promoting racial politics through the law.

It's entirely plausible that the appeals court panel on which she sat was wrong in its cursory handling of an appeal from firefighters denied a promotion when the city tried to throw out test results.

What, though, does that prove? What does it indicate about how she might rule as a justice on equal-protection cases? Not as much as sweeping generalizations would have us believe.

The 5-4 majority in the firefighters case said the trial court used the wrong standard for evaluating whether a government entity trying to not discriminate illegally against some workers ends up discriminating illegally against others.

But the dissenters said the majority concocted an "enigmatic" standard based on a "false premise" about the facts in the case.

Much as competing sides want to paint issues in highly emotional legal disputes as clear-cut – and the other side as not just wrong but radically so – the fact is that the divide often is narrow even when it is deep. Most cases can be resolved before reaching the highest court in the land. But some issues are simply so difficult

or have such broad impact that the only way to sort through them is to have them decided by the court whose job is to "say what the law is." That's why new appointments matter so much in the political realm.

But acknowledging the reality that reasonable people can have legitimate but fundamentally opposing arguments doesn't play well to core constituencies.

What does play well is to accuse unnamed justices of "creating new rights spun from whole cloth," as Texas Sen. John Cornyn said in his opening statement during Sotomayor's confirmation hearing.

Cornyn went on to complain about the Supreme Court micromanaging the death penalty – even though that hasn't stopped Texas from executing 439 people since 1982, including 16 this year. He complained about the right to keep and bear arms being "artificially limited" – even though the court just last year struck down a District of Columbia handgun ban, saying the Second Amendment protects an individual's right to gun ownership.

He also accused the Supreme Court of having taken on the job of defining the rules for the game of golf – even though the case he cited involved the scope of the Americans with Disabilities Act and whether it prevented the PGA Tour from barring golfer Casey Martin the use of a cart during tournaments.

Scalia called it "benevolent compassion that the law does not place it within our power to impose."

But he was out-voted, 7-2.

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Corning Inc. seems to be backing blue team

Has Corning Inc. turned blue?

It's possible, judging by who's congressional campaign the company has contributed to. According to Federal Election Commission records, the Corning Inc. Employees political action committee has given U.S.

Rep. Eric Massa \$10,000 since the start of the year towards his re-election bid. Massa has also received \$6,500 in individual

contributions from Corning Inc. executives, some who are dyed-in-the-wool Democrats and others I'm not so sure of.

That's a pretty good haul for Massa, a Democrat, to get from a company like Corning Inc. which has a long and storied legacy with the Republican Party.

To be fair, it's not yet known how much Massa's opponent, Republican Tom Reed, has received from Corning Inc. since he recently declared his candidacy and won't be required to file a quarterly financial campaign report until this fall.

It's safe to assume Reed will get some support from the area's largest employer since a lot of Republicans work there.

Also, the company has a history of contributing to opposing candidates – particularly in federal contests – to protect their interests regardless of the outcome of the election. Call it covering all the political bases.

Why has Massa gotten such early support from Corning Inc.?

It could be a combination of reasons, including a reward for how the stimulus packages supported by Massa benefited Corning Inc. Also, Massa has shown he's an independent thinker who doesn't always vote along party lines – much in the way of former U.S. Rep. Amo Houghton who ran Corning Glassworks before going to Washington.

There may also be some backlash against Reed, who announced he's not seeking re-election as Corning mayor in the midst of his first term. The company strongly supported Reed in his successful bid in 2007 to unseat Democrat Mayor Frank Coccho in hopes of securing the office for a number of years.

There were those who felt Reed jumped ship too early for his own political gain, allowing Coccho back into the political picture with his own bid to regain the mayorship. Those who donated to Reed's campaign against Coccho might not be so eager to give to his congressional campaign.

Obviously, it is very early in this congressional contest, which won't be decided until November 2010. But the financial reports show Corning Inc. may be changing from the red to the blue team.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Foreign companies behind wind farms

TO THE EDITOR | In our last letter we discussed the falsehoods of some of the Windustry signage. Let's touch on one more sign, then start looking at other points.

WIND MAKES AMERICA STRONG: When Old Glory is invoked you know you need to be on guard. The fact is these companies are all foreign-owned. They are looking for safe investment havens and a big return to their foreign

investors. When you consider that lobbyists have arranged for U.S. taxpayers to pay for the installation and huge sums to be spent on infrastructure, you realize how deep are these European pockets. In Europe, not one coal-fired plant has gone off-line in spite of thousands of wind turbines. Wind will suck more tax money right out of our economy to the pockets of foreign investors. Every town has a dedicated lobbyist, the state and federal governments are literally blowing in the lobbyists' wind.

They are being built to exploit cap and trade where cap means nothing more than continued pollution. All paid for by taxpayers.

The money being spent on new infrastructure alone would go a long way in repair of bridges or bringing high speed computer access to rural areas, the same small town rural areas now being targeted by sophisticated lobbyists for exploitation.

James Lindsay
Hornell