

EDITORIAL

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OPINION

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Editorial

Medicaid cuts will cost us all

WE HESITATE TO criticize when we don't have any solutions to offer, and we certainly don't have any idea how to fix the immediate problem of the state cutting back payments to doctors who treat our neediest citizens. With the Legislature out of session, across-the-board cuts are the only option for closing an expected budget deficit, and any cuts to Medicaid that doctors don't take must be borne by Medicaid recipients.

But the absence of an immediate solution doesn't change the fact that this is a significant problem that could have been prevented and can — and must — be solved when lawmakers return to work next year.

It wouldn't be a huge deal to cut physician reimbursement rates by 2 percentage points as a temporary measure to get us through a budget shortfall if the rates weren't already so low, and if we didn't all know the cut is unlikely to be temporary. How do you think we got to the point where Medicaid pays physicians just 86 percent (84 percent come Oct. 1) of what the federal government pays doctors to treat Medicare patients?

The S.C. Medical Association, which notes that other states pay an average of 90 percent to 95 percent of Medicare fees, warns that the cut will cause more doctors to stop taking Medicaid patients. Already only 53 percent participate, down from 60 percent in five years.

Not your problem? That's what you think. When sick people can't find a doctor who will see them, they get sicker. They can't work, so they lose their jobs and require more government assistance. They eventually go to the emergency room, the most expensive place in the country to treat people. Federal law prohibits hospitals from turning people away when they can't pay, so they treat them for free — and send the bill to everybody else who uses hospitals, or insurance.

Shorting Medicaid is even dumber when you realize that the federal government kicks in \$3 for every dollar our state spends — which means the Medicaid program is hurt three times as much as other agencies by across-the-board cuts.

We don't know of any way to stop this free-fall before January. But there's a solution come January — the same solution that was available but rejected when the Legislature wrote the current year's budget and, for that matter, the budgets going back for years: Put enough money into Medicaid to pay doctors a decent wage for the work they do — and to cover the prescriptions (also reduced by the cut) that patients need. That means either spending less somewhere else, or raising taxes, but given the way our medical system works, it's penny-wise and pound-foolish to do otherwise.

Healthy schools

ALTHOUGH OUR STATE does more than many to promote physical activity and healthy eating at school, our requirements are still modest in the face of a burgeoning childhood obesity epidemic. So it's worth taking a moment to celebrate those schools that go above and beyond the requirements, with a genuine commitment to instilling healthy lifelong habits and values.

The state Education Department and DHEC recently recognized seven Healthy Schools award winners (go to <http://ed.sc.gov> and select "Latest Headlines" for more details), three of which scored top honors:

■ Charleston's Jennie Moore Elementary School has a walking program, a "Try it Tuesday," which lets kids try fruits and vegetables they wouldn't normally be exposed to, and a healthy snack list; it reports kids are bringing healthier food for snacks and lunch and that 65 percent of parents are trying healthier foods.

■ At Charleston's Drayton Hall Elementary, nutrition education and physical activity are integrated throughout the curriculum, and kids who eat better and exercise get their names entered in daily prize drawings. As a result, involvement in team sports and activity classes has increased by 12 percent, truancy and tardiness have plummeted, and parental involvement is up.

■ Students in Anderson 1's Hunt Meadows Elementary School start every day with a five-minute classroom cardio workout, aerobic workouts are offered in the classroom, fifth-graders can sign up for unicycle and juggling programs, and nutrition information is available for all the cafeteria food.

Yes, we know before you say it: We're already asking schools to do a lot more than we used to, and every new thing takes away time for other things they need to do. But the research is pretty clear that exercise helps kids learn, that a good diet helps kids learn — in short, that healthy kids learn better than kids who are inactive and overweight. And the programs that work don't tend to be terribly complicated, time-consuming or expensive; sometimes, all kids need is an environment that encourages them to be healthy.

Moreover, it doesn't matter how well you educate a child if that child drops dead from a heart attack or stroke in his early 20s. And unfortunately, that's no longer the far-fetched scenario it once was.

Robert Ariail



Letters to the Editor

Blame those who borrowed too much

Everyone wants to blame the lenders who offered these bad loans for the housing crisis; what about the people who took them and knew they'd be in for rough waters financially in six years? They knew they were in over their financial heads but just had to have the bigger, better house, car, TV, etc. These people gambled, and we lost.

These people will not learn their lesson from getting a "Get out of jail free" card; they'll jump at the next chance to beat the system.

Yes, these lending institutions should be made to pay, too, but what about all the responsible home buyers who bought within their means?

This will never get fixed, just continually bandaged, while those who are serving or have served their country will feel the brunt. All those military folks will see their retirement pensions shrink, while these brats live high on the hog they can't afford and don't deserve.

It's time for a responsibility lesson for the spoiled brats of the nation.

STEPHEN L. MOUNT
Gaston

Defeat GOP, who made the U.S. mess

Who is responsible for our present crises, and how do we hold them accountable?

Take Iraq, a war that most now agree was misguided, with the people misled and the conduct woefully mishandled.

And the costs? More than 4,000 American deaths. Add to this a staggering estimate of more than 1.2 million Iraqi deaths since our invasion. Who is accountable?

Then the economy, with all of the shock waves that we've seen in the last days from Wall Street and Washington. Combine the incredibly escalating national debt with the colossal failure of financial institutions, and by any measure, our national economic situation appears perilous, affecting every citizen at the pocketbook

level. Who is accountable?

We can certainly place blame on Wall Street and the financial barons, but who has championed a policy of deregulation?

How can the current administration and the party that has been dominant for the past eight years escape responsibility?

And if they are responsible, then the electorate must respond by holding them accountable.

That calls for a resounding defeat of most Republican candidates in November. The public trust has been betrayed.

HAL W. FRENCH
Columbia

Richland council is 'fee-ing' us to death

What is wrong with Richland County Council nowadays?

Now another bond issue — \$50 million for dozens of projects, including, of all things, new parks. Ridiculous, I'd say.

If all of the parks we have were used, this would make sense, but ride by any of them, day or night, and they are underutilized. Why build more to sit idle, wasting funds that could be put to better use?

Council says it is only \$12 on a

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\$100,000 house, but added to the \$10-\$12-\$15 increases and the fees we are paying to finance bonds, buses, etc., and we're being fee-ed to death — plus interest.

Granted some of the projects are worthwhile, but let's slow down a bit and catch up, what with the economy the way it is.

Let's throw the bums out next Election Day. This goes for City Council members, as well, who vote for new, not-needed projects.

LAVINIA P. GOFF
Columbia

Bus funding needed more than new parks

I heartily agree with *The State's* excellent editorial on Sept. 9 concerning our bus system ("Richland must keep vehicle tax in place to fund buses").

In the same issue, there was an

article on Richland County's consideration of a bond for recreation facilities in the amount of \$50 million. This was approved by council Sept. 9.

The proposed facilities sound wonderful but very extravagant when our bus system is in dire need of funds. The argument against funding a bus system if we do not ride the bus is no more valid than the argument of people with no children in public school saying they should not have to pay for public education.

These are services we have an obligation to provide our citizens. Having a way for people to get to work and also to receive an education will allow them to be independent and not need to be supported by the government. As *The State* pointed out, we must all get behind a plan to help support and, in the future, expand our bus system.

SANDRA RAVENEL
Columbia

Paying more taxes not a patriotic act

This is in response to Sen. Joe Biden's comment that paying higher taxes is an act of patriotism.

Last time I checked, my brother has served a few terms over in Iraq. That is an act of patriotism.

This is America; everybody has a fair chance to get rich, so I say that the effort by Sens. Obama and Biden to take more from the rich and give more to the poor is an act of laziness.

I'm a working, struggling mid-20s guy, and even I see that this isn't fair. So quit looking for hand-outs, and go work harder.

TYLER GILROY
Cayce

Correction

A column on Wednesday's editorial page incorrectly identified blogger Ross Shealy. Ryan Shealy, a former state senator, was Mr. Shealy's grandfather.



Renewable energy potential overlooked in South Carolina

South Carolina may not be known as the Sunshine State, and our region isn't even the Windy West. But the sun does shine, and the wind blows, providing ample opportunity to benefit from solar and wind energy. It's time for our leaders to recognize the benefits of moving away from fossil fuel dependence and developing local energy resources that support the economy while cleaning up our air and reducing global warming pollution.

This summer, the Department of Energy released the results of an 18-month analysis that verified the feasibility of producing 20 percent of the United States' energy using wind energy by 2030. The report, "20% Wind Energy by 2030," recognizes South Carolina as a regional leader in installed capacity. It estimated that 3,500 megawatts of wind energy could be built by 2030, but this is only a fraction of South Carolina's tremendous offshore wind potential.

Recently, Sen. Lindsey Graham and Rep. Jim Clyburn overlooked our state's renewable energy potential during a conference on nuclear energy. They ignored well-documented facts about the wind energy potential off the coast, choosing instead to fall back on old rhetoric, which would ensure that our state continues to export billions of energy dollars to purchase coal and uranium from other states and countries for years to come.

Graham and Clyburn also overlooked the fact that South Carolina, much like the rest of the United States, has not even begun to tap into the sun's power. In fact, South Carolina has nearly twice the amount of solar energy potential as Germany, the global leader in solar installations.

During a time of economic uncertainty, we should seek opportunities to invest in local resources and protect local jobs. Harnessing renewable energy such as wind, solar and biomass

will allow us to retain our hard-earned energy dollars and stimulate our local economies. Promoting renewable energy technologies will encourage further investment in S.C.-based companies such as GE Energy and Silicon Solar, which already manufacture wind and solar systems.

We urge Sen. Graham, Rep. Clyburn and all of our elected leaders to embrace this opportunity and support the development of our state's renewable energy potential. Everyone will benefit from a clean energy economy.

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