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OUR VIEW: HOMELESSNESS Community response needed

The number of people experiencing homelessness in the Mankato area has grown. The need for shelters has grown. The need for affordable housing has grown. Now it is time for the community response to grow.

The Free Press has embarked on in-depth series of reports on homelessness with the second installment in today's edition.

Why it matters:

Shelter is a basic need for living a productive life.

The first installment published on Nov. 24 showed the number of homeless families tracked by Mankato schools has grown from about 95 six years ago to 120

today.

In October, The Reach center that serves homeless youth had 315 visits, far above the typical 200-250 per month and the most ever since 2011.

A Wilder Foundation survey found 589 people homeless in a spot check in 2018 in a 20-county area of southern Minnesota that includes Mankato.

Partners for Affordable Housing shelters at the Welcome Inn and Theresa House have about 32 residents. A new shelter in St. Peter has 15.

The emergency shelter at the Salvation Army houses 10-18 regularly and the new Connections Shelter run by area churches has about 20 people every night.

The story in today's edition explores the ability of six local organizations to continue to have enough funding to meet the needs of growing homeless populations. Most face flat or lower funding. Federal funding for these programs has modestly increased compared to the needs. State funding for housing programs has been uneven, but more recently on the rise.

And the groups are joining together to hire a support worker who can help people fill out sometimes burdensome paperwork for these programs.

These nonprofits groups are making efforts nothing short of heroic in many cases. They are stretching their dollars, thinking about how to best serve the most critical cases and collaborating on how to work with each other.

A regular homeless response team meets once a month that includes representatives from nonprofits, county, city and others.

How can the community help? At a minimum, you can support the organizations caring for the homeless with time, money or in-kind contributions.

In the coming months, The Free Press series will also offer broader solutions to the problem. At that time, there may be a need to lobby local, state and federal elected officials to increase funding or adopt specific strategies.

The Mankato community has often risen to the challenge of solving local problems. The homeless not only need stable places to live and a hand up to get training or counseling or other services so they can get jobs and live the life many of us take for granted.

OTHER VIEW

Focus impeachment on Ukraine

San Diego Union-Tribune

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has made history with her decision to pursue the impeachment of President Donald Trump. A vote by the full House on multiple impeachment counts is expected by Dec. 20. But if House Democrats want history to be kind to them, they need to act in a focused way that hinges on Trump's clearest abuse of power: his attempts to use \$391 million in withheld military aid to extort Ukraine into announcing official investigations into Joe Biden and his son, and into the refuted narrative Ukraine — not Russia — was behind foreign attempts to influence the 2016 election.

Republicans can pretend all they want that this didn't happen, but such an exercise in delusion requires ignoring the testimony of Gordon

Sondland, the businessman Trump chose to be ambassador to the European Union. He said that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky only needed to announce the investigations, not actually carry through with them, to get the aid. That shows that Trump wasn't actually worried about "corruption" in Ukraine but about manufacturing a tool that he could use to a) bludgeon a top Democratic rival whom polls show can beat him next year and b) muddy the evidence that Moscow acted to help Trump's 2016 campaign.

This is what Democrats should focus on like a laser. There should be no attempts to bring in the Mueller report. Or emoluments. Or tax returns. Or any other controversies. Lawmakers must act with an appropriate seriousness of purpose — not pursue a grab bag of allegations.



YOUR VIEWS

Mayo patients in Springfield should come first

It is unbelievable the Mayo Clinic Health System is going to eliminate another small community hospital and clinic. Their excuse is: "declining patient volume, physician shortages and accreditation."

It is amazing to me that this world-renowned health care system, which has some of the most intelligent physicians in the world, cannot figure out how to "save" a rural community hospital and clinic. This "trend" has

been experienced by Albert Lea, Waseca, Fairmont, Madelia, St. Peter and "2" This has been a failure by the "system" of not really and truly caring about our rural communities!

It seems ironic the MCHS can help build a multi-million dollar facility in a foreign country, but fail locally. For years Springfield had an excellent health care system with very fine physicians who were dedicated to their community. Now?

It would seem, then, if Mayo would begin to feel in their "heart" an understanding of what it is like to live and breathe in small town America they would "wake up"! Wake up to taking care of their physicians and staff!

The philosophy should be: Our patients and our physicians and staff come first.

Dr. James Eiselt
Madelia

Universal health care is right, affordable

The World Health Organization said in a September 2014 report that the United States is "currently the only high-income country without nearly universal health-care coverage."

In fact the Trump administration is trying to cut Medicare and Medicaid and to kill the Affordable Care Act.

Trump said in October, "We have a great Republican plan" to replace the Affordable Care Act.

There has never been a serious Republican plan to replace Obamacare. "Repeal and replace" is an empty slogan designed to snooker the gullible.

In reality, the administration has thrown its full weight behind a lawsuit to kill the ACA. It said in court filings: "The proper course is to strike it down in its entirety."

Trump recently issued an executive order that purports to save Medicare, but would have the opposite effect, according to Pulitzer-winning L.A. Times columnist Michael Hiltzig. It promotes a false narrative about Medicare competing in the open market, when in fact, its major advantage is that it pays physicians 40% less than commercial plans and pays hospitals only half to two-thirds of what private insurers pay. Trump's sleight-of-hand would raise the Medicare price structure and bankrupt it.

Consumers are already being subjected to shady dealing and secret negotiations between hospitals and insurance companies, and price gouging by Big Pharma (see My View, April 19, 2019). Hospitals have many different prices depending on who pays: group plans, unions, Medicare, Medicare advantage, worker's compensation, tort, out of network, and self-pay.

Hospitals and insurers typically

treat prices for specific medical services as closely held secrets, which makes it difficult to comparison shop.

The WSJ cited the example of a magnetic resonance image of the lower back that costs \$141 at an imaging center in Jefferson, La., but \$7,646 at a hospital in Torrance, California.

Congress added to the problem. Sen. (R-Utah) Orrin Hatch's Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act of 1994 all but eliminated government regulation of the (now) \$50 billion dollar dietary and herbal supplements industry — for which his son was a lobbyist. As Dr. Peter Lipson has stated, DSHEA, was intended to facilitate the legal marketing of quackery.

Over-the-counter products frequently contain little or none of the active ingredient(s), but unless the manufacturer claims to treat some illness, or people are injured/killed, the FDA cannot intervene.

U.S. health care spending in 2016 totaled 17.2 percent of GDP, compared to just 8.9 percent for the other OECD countries, which for them is sufficient to fund universal health care. Workers on average pay \$6,015 toward their coverage, according to a September survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation, plus average deductibles of \$1,655 for a single plan. The average premium for family coverage is \$19,616 per year, says the Kaiser.

The Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) projects that health care costs will climb to \$6 trillion, or about \$17,000 per person, roughly 19 percent of GDP by 2027.

Universal health care inevitably provokes cries of "socialism" among opponents, who invoke communist countries like North Korea as examples of socialism. For some reason,

the multi-trillion dollar Bush bank bailout, the \$1 trillion annual subsidy to fossil fuel, the \$20 billion annual ag subsidy, and Trump's \$28 billion in handouts to farmers to cover his China tariffs are not socialism. For the record, the VA system is socialized medicine because, well, only the best for our veterans.

In contrast, democratic socialist countries such as Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Canada, Sweden, Norway, and Ireland provide universal health care and education for all; they have higher life expectancy, much less poverty and significantly higher overall life satisfaction than in the U.S.

Gallup does a worldwide survey for the U.N. every year of the world's happiest countries: for 2019, they are, in order: Finland, Denmark, Norway, Iceland, Netherlands, Switzerland, Sweden, New Zealand, Canada, and Austria. The U.S. is #19. Health care is a major factor.

Most universal health care plans would raise taxes on the wealthy, who, largely as a result of Trump's 2017 tax cut, now pay a lower tax rate than the middle class, according to The New York Times and the Washington Post.

"The Triumph of Injustice," by economists Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman, reports that the richest 400 families have more wealth than the bottom 60 percent of households, while the top 0.1 percent own as much as the bottom 80 percent.

CNBC recently reported that the wealthy will avoid/evade \$5 trillion in taxes in the next decade.

It's clear where the money is to pay for universal health care; what's missing is the willingness to go after it.

Tom Maertens was a naval officer, a Peace Corps Volunteer and a Foreign Service Officer who served around the world, in the White House and in the U.S. Senate.

World has always seen Trump as buffoon

The Baltimore Sun

For those who may have been too distracted by impeachment proceedings to follow campaign politics, let us catch you up: Former Vice President Joe Biden released a video this week deriding the president as a global laughingstock. To this we must rise to Mr. Trump's defense and say, "alternative facts."

Mr. Biden's campaign would have the American people believe that because a video recently surfaced showing top NATO leaders openly mocking President Trump at the London summit, he has somehow recently — perhaps this week, this month or even this year — lost the respect of the world. Nothing could be further from the truth.

If there's one thing that Americans can have absolute faith in, it's this: World leaders never had a high opinion of President Trump. The behind-the-back snickering is nothing new, aside from its capture on tape. Since the moment he took the oath of office

(and likely before), he's been regarded as a 21st century version of Margaret Dumont from the Marx Brothers movies who gets played right and left by the sharpies around her. Sometimes, it's funny, as when he once claimed Korea used to be part of China or suggested Israel was outside the Middle East. Often, it's scary as when he scorns allies, embraces tin-pot dictators and seems completely oblivious to, and uninterested in, the role U.S. diplomacy plays in the world.

Granted, that video clip is some pretty high school-level stuff as Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau appears to be leading a gossip circle with his buds, French President Emmanuel Macron, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte and, the one that must really hurt, Britain's Trump-like prime minister, Boris Johnson (Et tu, Boris?). They appear to be laughing uproariously at the jaw-dropping reaction of the Trump "team" at their boss' wide-ranging remarks to the press. No wonder the president later called Mr. Trudeau "two-faced" and

decided not to do a planned news conference at at the summit's close.

But is it really any worse than September of last year when President Trump was openly scorned at the United Nations after he bragged about all this administration's record "accomplishments" and the delegates just laughed? "I didn't expect that reaction, but that's OK," was the president's response. Perhaps he thought it was a translation problem.

Mr. Biden's ad never makes the claim that the worldview of Mr. Trump is only recently diminished, of course. But then that's the oddity of going after the president based on snickering instead of listing his long, sad string of foreign policy failures such as his tariff wars and inability to make much headway on trade agreements, his abandonment of the Kurds in Syria, his made-for-TV flirtations with North Korea's Kim Jong-un who continues to test missiles and develop nuclear weapons and his rejection of the Iran nuclear deal or Paris Agreement on climate change.

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