

# The Pueblo Chieftain

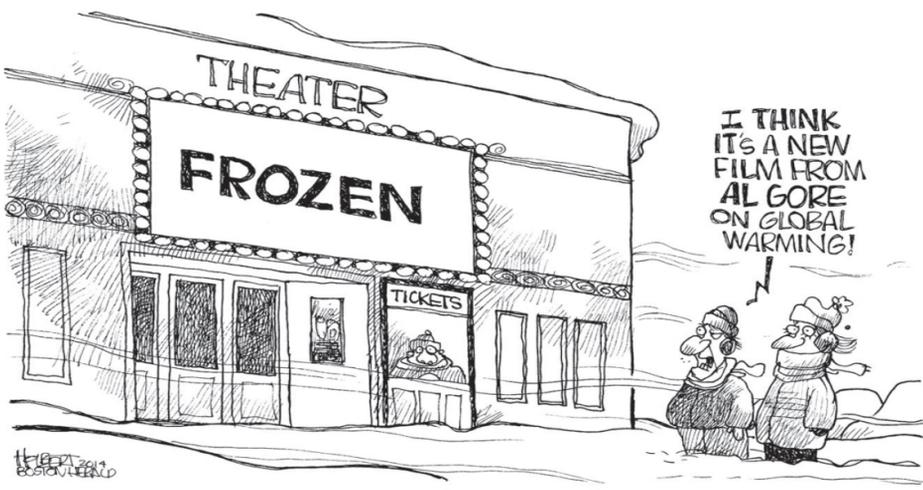
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FRANK S. HOAG, JR., Chairman, Publisher, President — 1931-1989

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**EDITORIALS**

## Legislative priorities

**C**OLORADO'S GENERAL Assembly opens its 2014 session today. As the legislators gather in Denver, each member has a list of priorities they'd like to accomplish during the session, which runs from January to May. We have a few suggestions on things we would like to see them accomplish over the next five months.

### Voter laws

The top priority for the House and Senate should be a revamping of the newly approved voter registration and election rules. Same-day voter registration should be abandoned, as it is too difficult to determine if those registering are qualified to vote. Certainly the portion of the law that allows a voter to simply indicate his or her intent to move into a district is worthy of repeal. We also take issue with ballots that are mailed to all registered voters. Not only are local governments wasting money sending ballots to ineligible or deceased voters, but the sheer volume of ballots opens the door to fraud. We question the new state rules allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to register to vote as well. We see no reason to register young people prior to the time they can actually cast a ballot.

### Renewable requirements

A second bad bill from the 2013 legislative session deserves the ax. The Senate and House approved a requirement forcing rural electric providers to supply 20 percent of their electricity through renewable sources by the year 2020. The industry was facing a 10 percent requirement by 2020, but the new law doubled the figure. If left alone, the bill would force electricity costs in rural areas to skyrocket. Gov. John Hickenlooper knew there were problems with the bill but signed it anyway. Legislators need to fall back to the 10 percent requirement.

### Amtrak service

Several local legislators are behind a push to save Amtrak's Southwest Chief route through Southern Colorado. A bill setting aside \$40 million over the next 10 years for track maintenance is already waiting to be introduced. We think the continuation of passenger service is important to this part of the state, and we

also encourage efforts to add Pueblo as a stop for the Southwest Chief.

### Parole improvements

Department of Corrections officials are seeking an additional \$8 million in funding to shore up its parole system and boost its monitoring capabilities. Reports during 2013 about the system's failures were disturbing and the public deserves better protection from the bad guys. While we would be in favor of extra funding if that's what it takes, legislators should insist that the problem be fixed.

### Flood help

September flooding impacted much of Northern Colorado. Several potential legislative bills to help make sense, including property tax relief for damaged properties and assistance for speeding up the process of fixing irrigation ditches.

### Marijuana law tweak

Pueblo officials have differing views on whether recreational marijuana use should be allowed on a person's porch or in their yard. The Legislature needs to answer that question for the entire state. Either all Coloradans should be able to use marijuana on their own property, or they should be forced inside and out of view of others.

### Superfund money

The state's Hazardous Substance Response Fund was previously raided to balance the budget. Funded through hauler tipping fees, the HSR fund is supposed to be earmarked for the state's share of Superfund project costs. But \$20 million of the \$30 million set aside has been used for other purposes. We would agree with Gov. John Hickenlooper's suggestion that \$10 million be returned to the fund, and that a cap be placed on the amount the fund can collect. A healthy HSR fund will benefit Pueblo in the near future with the planned Eilers cleanup.

The 2014 session promises to be less contentious than last year, especially with a big election looming in November. But when it comes to state government, sometimes accomplishing less turns out to be a good thing for Colorado residents. Maybe legislators can focus on just a few key items like those above.

Dr. Moya said she recognized that the warm-water pool is a favorite for many senior citizens and some of her patients, who rely on the facility for exercise and relaxation. So she decided to step up to help in a big way.

We commend Dr. Moya for her willingness to assist the YWCA, and encourage local organizations and individuals to do their part to keep the YWCA pool in operation for years to come.

"My No. 1 goal is to not have to close this pool ever again," Dr. Moya said. We think that's a great goal.

## Pool party

**W**E WOULD be remiss if we didn't thank Dr. Nancy Moya for her generosity.

The local physician recently donated \$10,000 to help the local YWCA reopen its swimming pool.

"This is a great community resource, which was going to waste by sitting there empty," she told The Chieftain.

The 75-year-old pool, which has been closed for about six months, needed significant repairs and utility costs associated with its operation were cutting into the YWCA's budget.

### OBAMACARE SUCCESS

## Medicaid for all?



**MONA CHAREN**

**Opinion**

The Washington Post's Ezra Klein has found what he thinks is a bright spot amid the gloomy Obamacare news. When you hear what he's enthusiastic about, you'll perhaps understand why I wonder if there is any common ground at all between liberals and conservatives.

Klein reports that Obamacare's "biggest success" is that 4 million new enrollees signed up for Medicaid as of November and the number should be even higher when December's statistics are tallied. "If the point of health care reform is covering people who need health insurance, the expansion of Medicaid should be a huge win."

Sorry, but the expansion of dependence on government is never cause for rejoicing. Conservatives acknowledge that a safety net is necessary for the poor, but we regard only the number of people leaving a government program like Medicaid as cause for celebration, not adding to the numbers who receive benefits.

Klein is hardly alone. Nancy Pelosi describes unemployment benefits as the greatest possible "stimulus" to the economy. By this logic, we should put everyone on unemployment, right?

Why is it terrible news that millions more people are signing up for Medicaid? Here are just a few of the reasons:

Medicaid is one of the entitlements whose growth endangers national solvency. Together with Medicare, Medicaid was already consuming more than one in five federal dollars before the enactment of Obamacare.

Medicaid is plagued by fraud. Among the common scams perpetrated by enrollees, the National Conference of State Legislatures lists "obtaining medications or products that are not needed and selling them on the black

market, filing claims for services not received" and more. Providers commit fraud by "billing for services not performed, billing duplicate times for the same service, ordering excessive or unnecessary tests" and so forth. Just last month, dozens of Russian diplomats — yes, noncitizens — were charged with bilking Medicaid of \$1.7 million over the course of nine years.

Medicaid is not just a program for the poor; it's a poor program. Reimbursement rates for doctors, dentists and other professionals are so low under Medicaid that enrollees have difficulty finding care. Having health insurance does not equate with having medical care.

Expanding Medicaid was sold on the premise that uninsured people were driving up health care costs by waiting until they were very sick before seeking care and thus overburdening emergency rooms. If the near poor had Medicaid coverage, the argument went, they would see doctors before their conditions required expensive emergency room treatment.

But research on Oregon's program, published in the journal *Science*, found the reverse to be true. Tracking 25,000 enrollees for a period of 18 months, researchers found that Medicaid patients used emergency rooms 40 percent more than similarly situated adults who lacked health insurance. Having a Medicaid card did not divert people away from emergency rooms and into primary care.

An earlier analysis of Oregon's data found that having a Medicaid card did not improve health outcomes.

There are alternatives — like a combination of health savings accounts and catastrophic insurance — that would provide better care to the poor and an improved outlook for the nation's fiscal health. Klein's happy talk notwithstanding, there are no "successes" in Obamacare. Left alone, it will remake the entire health care system in Medicaid's image.

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### TELL IT TO THE CHIEFTAIN

#### Taking advantage

I have two sons who were in Pueblo County jail.

I put \$22 in a machine for one of my sons. This machine takes \$1.50 to process, and then the money goes on his books.

The computer showed he was still in jail, but he already must have been sent to another place, so he didn't get the money.

When we found out that he wasn't there, my husband went to pick up his clothes. In with his clothes was an EZ exit card with the money we sent.

It costs \$3 to get the money off this card but you can only get the rest in \$10 increments. So out of my \$22 we have paid \$4.50 in fees and charged another \$7.50 as it will only let me get \$10 off of that card.

I called the sheriff's department and they told me once people put the money on a card it is out of their hands. I called the card company and I was told that in order to speak with a person it would cost \$2 and the fee would be taken off of the card. I didn't speak with anyone.

I had asked my son to leave the card for his brother, but the sheriff's department said they don't transfer money.

Earlier this year, the sheriff said he had thousands of dollars that were unclaimed to put toward the needs of the jail. This is not unclaimed money, it is taken from prisoners' families.

Not everyone who is arrested is guilty. All people who are arrested are charged a booking fee of \$30. If they have another charge added while they are in jail, that is another booking fee of \$30.

The card service is out of

California. I don't know where the one is that runs the phone service, which charges \$14 for a collect call. If the prisoner has money, the charge is \$5 for a call. For anyone getting arrested, they'd better hope they have some money to buy food, make calls, get their prescriptions, or see a doctor (that is \$20).

My biggest complaint is not being able to get the money off of that card. I think that out of \$22, I should get back all but the \$1.50, but I will get \$10 and they will keep \$12. I think the people should know that I think this is wrong.

Sylvia Ward  
Pueblo

#### Retail pot

The Pueblo Chieftain's headline ("High taxes will send weed users underground," Jan. 2) got it backward. High taxes will not send cannabis (marijuana) users to the underground, but instead the customers will simply not use the legal regulated market.

Voters cast a ballot to legalize cannabis similar to alcohol, yet cannabis is taxed higher than alcohol or anything I'm aware of.

The underground market has eight decades of supplying demand and now an ounce goes for as little as \$150.

The tax-the-hell-out-of-it crowd must have forgotten God indicates He created all the seed-bearing plants saying they're good on literally the very first page of the Bible. Only the devil would tax the hell out of it. Come to think of it, only the devil would cage him, only the devil would cage given plant to begin with.

Stan White  
Dillon

### MALLARD FILLMORE

By BRUCE TINSLEY

