

The Ripoon Forum

Spring 2011
Volume 45, No. 2

"MORE WORK TO BE DONE"
Sue Myrick on the fight to
treat mental illness
among children



Between Salvation and SOLVENCY

**Tom Corbett's fight to
save Medicaid for future
generations**

**Also: Tevi Troy on the
keys to entitlement reform
and Richard Burkhauser on why
the Social Security Disability
Insurance system is broken**



**Plus: Dan Coats on his
bipartisan plan to scrap
the tax code**



**And: Bob McDonnell on why
preparing prisoners for reentry
into communities is sound policy**

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The Ripon Forum

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In publishing this magazine, The Ripon Society seeks to provide a forum for fresh ideas, well-researched proposals, and for a spirit of criticism, innovation, and independent thinking within the Republican Party.



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In this Edition

One year before the last presidential election, The Ripon Forum ran an essay entitled, "Entitlement Reform: The 800 Pound Gorilla of the 2008 Campaign."

Authored by David John of the Heritage Foundation, the piece pointed out that none of the major candidates who were then running for the White House were talking about the considerable fiscal challenges facing Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security.

Flash forward to this year, and the story is entirely different. Entitlement reform is shaping up to be one of the defining issues of the 2012 campaign. It's being tackled in statehouses, debated in Congress, and just about every think tank in Washington has put out a white paper or report containing their own set of recommendations of what should be done.

Into this debate we wade with our own perspectives on the issue. We lead off with an essay by Pennsylvania Governor Tom Corbett, who discusses the problems facing Medicaid and the effort he is spearheading to save the program for future generations in his state. We move on from there to a broader piece by former Health and Human Services Deputy Secretary Tevi Troy, who looks at all the entitlement programs and lays out four common-sense steps to save all three.

From there, we delve into the complexities of the Social Security Disability Insurance System with Cornell Professor Richard Burkhauser, who discusses the fact that the system is running out of money faster than expected because of government rules that effectively encourage people to remain out of work. Rounding out our coverage of the issue of entitlement reform is coverage of a policy conference The Ripon Society hosted on the topic in late May with South Carolina Senator Lindsey Graham and others.

Indiana Senator Dan Coats writes about reform of a different kind in an essay about a bipartisan bill he has introduced to scrap the tax code and replace it with a system that's flatter, fairer, and a better promoter of economic growth. And Virginia Governor Bob McDonnell shares his thoughts on an initiative he is leading in his commonwealth to increase the likelihood that incarcerated individuals will lead productive lives when their sentences are up and they are returned to society.

With the eyes of the world focused on the uprisings in the Middle East, Lorne Craner of the International Republican Institute looks at where this unrest might spread next, while closer to home, North Carolina Congresswoman Sue Myrick takes on an issue you don't often hear Republicans discuss – mental illness among young people, and the fact that while great strides have been taken in treating the disease, much more work needs to be done.

In another essay from a member of the Forum's editorial board, grassroots expert Jim Murtha puts forward another idea that could help Members of Congress reach agreement – namely, have them go on a "CODEL to America" to get a better sense of those on the other side of the aisle and the places they call home.

And in our Ripon Profile for this edition, we focus on Wisconsin Freshman Senator Ron Johnson, who not only discusses why he ran for office in the first place, but also reveals his favorite Vince Lombardi quote.

As with every edition of The Ripon Forum, we hope you enjoy this latest offering and encourage you to write us at editor@riponsociety.org.

Lou Zickar
Editor
The Ripon Forum

Growing our Economy through Tax Reform

DAN COATS

There is an ongoing debate in Washington over how to reduce the exploding national debt and strengthen America's economic outlook. While spending cuts must occur, these reductions alone will not solve the nation's problems.

To address our financial crisis, Congress must pair spending cuts with a pro-growth agenda that boosts our economy. Simplifying and modernizing the outdated tax code is one way we can encourage job investment here at home, provide relief to working families, and make our country more competitive in a global marketplace.

When President Ronald Reagan signed the Tax Reform Act of 1986 into law, he said, "Fair and simpler for most Americans, this is a tax code designed to take us into a future of technological invention and economic achievement, one that will keep America competitive and growing into the 21st century."

Twenty-five years later, more than 60 percent of Americans have to pay an accountant or tax preparation service just to submit their tax forms to the IRS correctly. Rather than hold true to simplification, Congress has passed over 14,000 amendments to the tax code since Reagan signed his reform bill into law. Today, the U.S. tax code is a tangled web of nearly 10,000 exemptions, deductions, credits and other preferences.

It is time to revisit President Reagan's vision to reform and simplify the tax code. This task will require support from both Republicans and Democrats. Senator Ron Wyden of Oregon and I joined forces to identify five foundational principles of tax reform that both parties can agree upon.

These principles form the basis of our *Bipartisan Tax Fairness and Simplification Act of 2011*, a comprehensive

tax reform package that would modernize the U.S. tax code and generate economic growth.

First and foremost, comprehensive tax reform legislation must be revenue-neutral. The Wyden-Coats plan achieves that goal. Anything other than a revenue-neutral bill would be a non-starter in Congress.

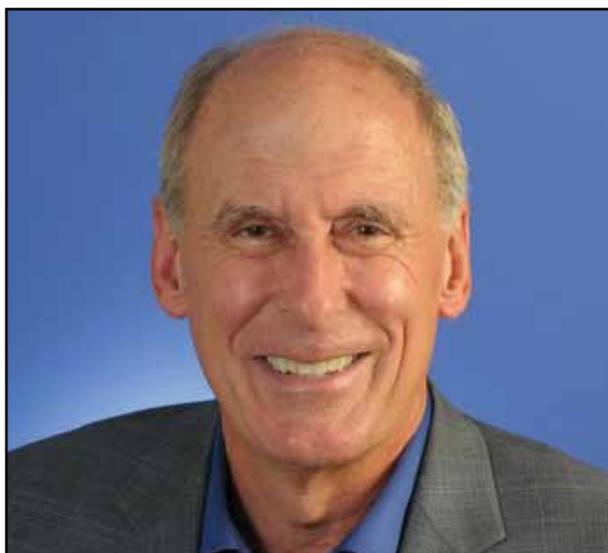
Second, comprehensive tax reform must achieve Reagan's goal of simplification. Every year, Americans

spend far too much of their hard-earned money and time navigating our convoluted tax system. A recent study from the Laffer Center found that Americans pay \$431 billion each year just to comply with the current system. The IRS estimates that taxpayers spend 6.6 billion hours per year filling out their tax forms. Our bill reduces the number of individual rates from six to three and nearly triples the standard tax deduction. These changes will make it possible for most taxpayers to file a simple one-page 1040 form in less than an hour.

Third, restructuring the tax code must encourage investment and produce economic growth. The current U.S. tax system puts American businesses at a disadvantage. U.S. corporations pay the second highest tax rate among industrialized countries. The Wyden-Coats plan reduces the corporate tax rate from 35 to 24 percent making the U.S. a more attractive place to invest.

Recognizing that small businesses and entrepreneurs are the backbone of our economy, the Wyden-Coats plan takes steps to encourage small business growth. More than 95 percent of businesses with gross annual receipts of up to \$1 million will be able to permanently expense all equipment and inventory costs in a single year.

When job creators can keep more of their hard-earned



money, they are able to invest and hire. Following the enactment of tax reform in 1986, more than 6.3 million new jobs were created in two years. The Heritage Foundation found that our approach to tax reform would create 2.3 million new jobs a year while cutting the federal deficit by an average of \$61 billion a year.

Fourth, Americans need a tax system that is fair, not one that picks winners and losers. The current tax code contains hundreds of specialized tax breaks that benefit some, but not all. In an effort to make the tax code fairer and reduce opportunities for individuals and businesses to avoid paying their taxes, Wyden-Coats ends a number of specialized tax breaks that favor one group over another.

Protecting the middle class and holding down rates for families is the fifth foundational principle of tax reform. The Wyden-Coats bill not only reduces tax bills, but also maintains some of the most popular tax breaks that provide

relief to American families. We recognize that during the current housing and economic crisis, it is critical to maintain the mortgage interest and charitable contribution tax deductions. The bill also eliminates the Alternative Minimum Tax, a burden that currently applies to more and more taxpayers every year.

Across America there is a growing recognition that tax reform needs to be part of a larger pro-growth agenda that strengthens our economy and restores America's fiscal path. The Wyden-Coats proposal, based on bipartisan principles, should serve as the starting point for this much-needed debate. A simpler and fairer tax system will help make our country more competitive,

create jobs and reduce the skyrocketing debt. **RF**

Dan Coats serves in the United States Senate from the State of Indiana.

Simplifying and modernizing the outdated tax code is one way we can encourage job investment here at home, provide relief to working families and make our country more competitive in a global marketplace.



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Improving Public Safety through Prisoner Reentry Programs

BOB MCDONNELL

Preparing prisoners for successful reentry into communities is not soft on crime; it is sound public safety policy. It creates an opportunity to reduce recidivism, and reflects the idea that America is a nation which believes in second chances.

In 1995, Virginia abolished discretionary parole and implemented “truth-in-sentencing.” Under this system, all felony offenders must serve a minimum 85% of their prison or jail terms before earning good time credit. As a former prosecutor and Virginia Attorney General, I strongly support the “truth-in-sentencing” criminal justice approach, and believe that those who commit a crime must take complete responsibility and fully repay their debt to society. However, we cannot ignore the fact that 90 percent of offenders will be released into our communities. Thus creating successful reentry programs is not optional.

Currently in the United States, over 4 million adults are on probation or parole. In 2010, Virginia released over 13,000 state offenders who had completed their prison sentences. Further, over 55,000 of our state offenders are on community supervision. Additionally, at the jail level, over 50,000 inmates were released after serving their time in local jails. These numbers are significant.

For each offender who recidivates, it means a new crime and a new victim. Two-thirds of those who come out of prison are re-arrested within three years of release. In addition to new victims, recidivism means more human suffering and higher costs to the taxpayer through police and court process, as well as re-incarceration.

Re-incarceration also significantly impacts families and children of the offender who are left unsupported and may require public assistance for an extended period of time. Studies show that children with an incarcerated parent are more likely to suffer from negative social impacts, and are denied economic stability due to the loss of the wage-earning ability of

the incarcerated parent.

Re-incarceration also impacts businesses and communities. Communities are faced with having to deal with crime and victimization, as well as the loss of revenue that comes with a thriving and safe community. Victims of crime experience loss of productivity because of disruption in their jobs and in their personal lives. They also suffer the emotional trauma associated with victimization.

Recently, the Pew Center on the States released its findings regarding recidivism around the country. Among the 41 states that report felon recidivism as re-imprisonment within three years of release, Virginia has the fifth lowest recidivism rate. Virginia also has the seventh lowest crime rate in the Nation. Although both rates are low, I continue to believe that we can and must do better.



Instituting effective collaborative and evidence based reentry practices in the criminal justice system is smart and good government. Upon taking office as Governor in January 2010, I appointed Virginia’s first-ever statewide prison reentry coordinator and directed all my agencies to collaborate on reentry issues

as well as incorporate reentry related policies and practices into their mission and work plans for effective service delivery.

Reentry preparation must start at the time of admission to prison or jail. This is true for adults and juvenile offenders. In Virginia, we have developed a four year re-entry plan to address the transitional needs of juveniles and adults. This includes offering programs that address criminogenic needs designed to help change criminal thinking habits and help offenders practice socially responsible thinking and behavior during incarceration.

In Virginia, we have developed strategies that require offenders to take responsibility for their own preparation for reentry and to work with their families or support groups in preparing for eventual release.

Virginia, like many other states, is facing budgetary challenges and has had to make difficult decisions. This process presents an opportunity for us to better leverage our resources to develop well reasoned reentry policies that are evidence-based for offenders who are high risk for victimizing again.

Fiscal responsibility and cost effectiveness are promoted by targeting resources towards offenders with higher criminal risk factors. A strong focus on reentry requires our Department of Corrections and Department of Juvenile Justice to shift some organizational practices and policies. Corrections officials have been asked to ensure that operations and programs are research-based and that services are provided to address transitional needs.

Not all offenders will take advantage of the opportunities with which they are provided. Some will commit new crimes or will fail to comply with the conditions of probation or parole supervision. That is a reality we face. For those individuals, the application of swift and strong punishment through our criminal justice system is imperative.

Public safety is a priority of state government. Consequently, in addition to ensuring that law enforcement and the rest of our criminal justice system have the resources necessary to keep our citizens safe and their property secure, risk control should be a priority. Corrections agencies should

incorporate reentry strategies with existing correctional tools to reduce future victimization and create safer communities.

In addition to incapacitation, corrections officials must take an active role in the reduction of crime by preparing offenders for success through a continuum of services and supervision. This is done, in collaboration with state and local partners, from the time

of the offender's entry into prison or jail through his or her reintegration into the community.

Modern innovative public safety policies must include prisoner reentry in any state strategic plan. It is not only smart public policy; lives depend on it.

RF

Bob McDonnell is the Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

...we cannot ignore the fact that 90 percent of offenders will be released into our communities. Thus creating successful reentry programs is not optional.



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“More Work to Be Done”

The fight to treat mental illness among children

SUE MYRICK

“I knew from a very young age that something was very wrong with me.”

American stage and screen actress Patty Duke once said that about her own childhood memories of a condition that would affect her for the rest of her life. She, like other children and adolescents, had a severe form of bipolar disorder — a biological illness of the brain that wasn’t diagnosed until many years later.

For decades, Americans with serious mental illnesses — like bipolar disorder, depression, and schizophrenia — and those who love them, have battled an overwhelming stigma that kept discussions about these diseases at the level of hushed whispers, and kept many of us ignorant of the potential for treatment and recovery.

Unlike cancer, diabetes, and heart disease, public discussions of these biological and treatable conditions were limited at best and taboo at worst. The symptoms of these illnesses seem less physical than traditional ailments. They are, by their nature, emotional and behavioral — making them difficult to understand, live with, and discuss in polite company. Unfortunately, the toll that they take on our nation, whether through loss of productivity, broken families, criminality, violence, and suicide, is just as serious as diseases like cancer and diabetes.

While stigma remains -- and is likely to remain years from now -- awareness about severe mental

illnesses has increased dramatically. Treatment is more easily and publicly discussed, and while it sounds like a small gesture, seeing public figures and celebrities speak about their own experiences with these diseases

indicates that the country is better able to view them as conditions that can be coped with successfully, given the proper care.

Children with these conditions face special challenges, and their families struggle daily to manage symptoms and get them the care they need. Nearly five million children have a serious brain disorder that significantly impacts their daily life. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, half of all lifetime mental disorders, those that are considered serious mental illnesses, begin by age 14. As scientists discover more underlying genetic, chemical, and biological bases for these diseases of the brain, it becomes clearer that patients often exhibit symptoms many years before they’re diagnosed and treated — often in childhood.

Far too many adolescents fail out of school, make contact with the criminal justice system, or otherwise harm their life’s potential due

to symptoms of these illnesses. This often happens before they’re able to seek diagnosis and medical assistance. And far too often, their families are left with few treatment options and little guidance about how to help a youngster who is in crisis.



Far too many adolescents fail out of school, make contact with the criminal justice system, or otherwise harm their life’s potential due to symptoms of these illnesses ...

Several years ago in a hearing that I requested before the House Energy and Commerce Committee, Pete Earley, who wrote a book about his college-aged son's battle with mental illness, testified about this very problem: "It is difficult enough to battle a biological brain disorder. It is even more frustrating and more heartbreaking when you encounter a mental health care system that is callous and so deeply flawed that it throws up roadblocks to recovery rather than offering a helping hand." This is the case for too many parents, and it's a state, local, and national problem that should continue to be addressed.

We have made strides forward, but there is much more work to be done. Research on mental illness continues to provide new clues about its causes and treatments. More resources are being made available to parents who, years ago, would have found very little in the way of a support system. State and federal mental health parity laws, while not perfect, hopefully provide

some security for families working through the insurance maze of inpatient psychiatric stays and medical visits. Advocacy organizations have sprouted up across the country to assist families in finding psychiatric providers and other mental health care services.

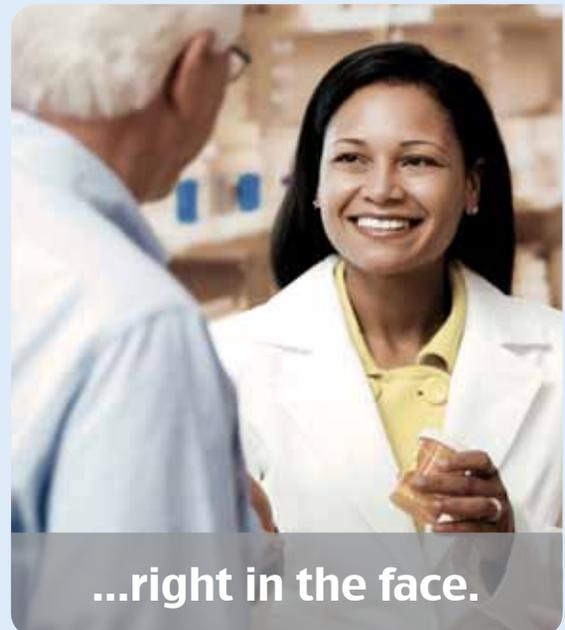
There is hope for families who feel hopeless in the wake of a diagnosis. It is possible to overcome these conditions if proactive steps are taken to get help and seek support. As research advances and we learn more about how the brain works, the stigma of mental illness is being lifted.

I'm hopeful that we can continue these advances, both in the public arena and in Congress, to make real progress towards treatment of these brain illnesses, so that American children and young adults who struggle with them can reach their potential.

Sue Myrick represents the 9th District of North Carolina in the U.S. House of Representatives.

And far too often, their families are left with few treatment options and little guidance about how to help a youngster who is in crisis.

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Beyond the Arab Spring

What the United States can do to
prepare for – and encourage –
change around the globe

LORNE CRANER

Since the mid-1970s, Middle East experts have cited a variety of reasons as to why the Arab world would not change.

Some pointed to the belief that Islam was incompatible with democracy. Others noted the fact that Arabs generally favored strongmen as leaders. Still others pointed to the notion that the aftermath of the Iraq war had discredited the idea of democracy.

At most, it was assumed that if change did occur in the region, it would progress glacially, as it had for decades, and that whatever political openings would be generational. This assumption that developments would continue in a linear fashion generally led U.S. analysts to maintain contact primarily with individuals within official circles.

Consequently, when change did come this past spring with uprisings throughout the Arab world, Washington policymakers were left scrambling to identify and try to build relations with political and civil society figures outside of official circles – figures who were not only little known to them, but who were less than receptive to their new American friends as a result.

Unfortunately, such linear thinking -- with virtually no consideration of sudden change -- continues among analysts of individual countries in other regions of the world.

Consider the following:

In Cuba, where the Castros have been in power for longer than many experts have been alive, the principal

discussion amongst such analysts is how the United States should lift its embargo to take advantage of the existing market, not whether and how the island's economic and political system might change for the better.

In China, Beijing's economic policies have produced such astounding growth that most scholarly discussions center on when the country's gross domestic product will surpass America's. Rarely does one hear discussions of whether political and societal strains will result in a more open society.

In Iran, discussions among most analysts focus on our willingness to reach a *modus vivendi* with the current regime on its nuclear program. Despite the Green Revolution, there is little analysis of what a different government would mean on these issues.

And in Uganda, the government is lauded for its progress on AIDs and regional cooperation. Less consideration is given of societal resentments over events such as the disputed February election.

As was the case in the Middle East, dramatic change in these and other authoritarian countries is unthinkable among American and other analysts.

Interestingly though, the rulers of these and other authoritarian countries appear to believe their tenure is more fragile, particularly since the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt.

Havana is exiling scores of dissidents jailed some years ago, and making elimination of other nations' democracy assistance programs a prime target of its foreign policy.



Lorne Craner

The revolts did not arise spontaneously for the abstract ideal of “democracy” ... They occurred instead for a variety of homegrown reasons that should give all authoritarian governments pause.

Beijing's Ministry of Public Security dramatically intensified a three year old crackdown on dissent after outside bloggers urged Chinese to take inspiration from Tunisia's Jasmine revolution; total official Chinese spending for internal security now surpasses that devoted to its military.

Iran, which first lauded revolutions in the Middle East, jailed Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubin, both candidates in the disputed 2009 presidential election, after the Green Movement renewed street protests.

And in Uganda, President Museveni cracked down on opposition supporters who threatened a Jasmine revolution.

Of course, change in the Middle East does not guarantee there will soon be revolution in other regions. The decay of the Soviet Union inspired unrest in Tiananmen Square, but did not produce change in China's system of government. Iran's revolution, just ten years old in 1990, was barely affected by the Soviets' passing. The demise of regimes in Cuba, North Korea and elsewhere was thought to be inevitable with the dissolution of the Soviet bloc, but all have endured for decades since.

There are, however, many differences between the world of 1990 and today. A principal difference is technology, which enables citizens in all but the most closed societies to know that the repression they endure is not the norm in today's world. In addition, not only have most former Soviet bloc countries become democratic over the last 20 years, but more countries in Africa, Asia and now the Middle East have rid themselves of authoritarian forms of government since 1990. At this point, there are many more democratic than authoritarian countries on earth.

Thirty years ago, a country's form of government meant little in dealings between states. Today, even if there is little material effect in relations with other countries, less respect is accorded to authoritarian governments -- a fact that is not lost on their people, decreasing pride in their country. Finally, there has been a sea change in theories of development in the last two decades. Accountability and freedom of thought and information are now seen as essential for a people's material betterment and for ameliorating corruption by the United Nations Development Program, the World Bank and other multilateral and national development agencies. Seeing the economic advantages of democracy in everything from movies to the internet, people in authoritarian countries have also begun to draw the connection.

Clever authoritarians will be sending study missions

to Egypt, Tunisia, and when possible, Yemen, Libya and Syria to discern what indigenous factors led their people to become so dissatisfied. They will find that the revolts did not arise spontaneously for the abstract ideal of "democracy," or because of the activities of outside democracy promotion organizations (as some authoritarian governments believed of the "colored revolutions" in Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan). They occurred instead for a variety of homegrown reasons that should give all authoritarian governments pause.

The first was a demographically youthful population with little reverence for their regimes because of events that happened decades before they were born, such as a struggle for independence or beginning an economic expansion.

Second was a widespread resentment over pervasive regime corruption, with leaders and their families profiting while many (especially young) people were unable to find jobs matching their education, and most of the population lived in poverty.

Third, even economic betterment -- decent growth rates in Egypt and a middle class along Tunisia's coast -- proved insufficient to save the regimes. Indeed, in Tunisia, relative wealth along the coast was resented by the poorer interior population.

Fourth, decades of economic and political repression led to a yearning not necessarily explicitly for the idea of "democracy" but for its attributes -- "dignity," "justice" and "respect." People believed these desires -- exemplified in the story of the Tunisian fruit seller Mohamed Bouazizi, whose self-immolation was the spark for revolution -- could only be satisfied by ending their authoritarian governments.

Finally, as noted above, technology such as the Internet and satellite television showed people that their countries' situations were abnormal and that they were falling behind in a more democratic and globalized world. Newer technological applications, such as Facebook, Twitter and other forms of social networking, while not the source of the population's beliefs, enabled them to give expression to their desires in a more rapid and organized fashion.

If these are lessons for authoritarians, what should Washington learn from recent events? Beyond addressing what has already happened, by helping the transitions in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and elsewhere, Washington policymakers should gain wisdom for the future. We do not necessarily know when authoritarian regimes will fall, but we should by now know that they will, and plan accordingly.

First, the "it can't happen here" attitude of most

When change did come this past spring with uprisings throughout the Arab world, Washington policymakers were left scrambling...

analysts and policymakers regarding authoritarian countries should be replaced by asking, “How could it happen?”, “What might take place afterwards?”, and “How should the U.S. therefore act?” We should not again, as has happened from Tehran in 1979 to Jakarta in 1998 to Cairo in 2011, have to scramble to keep up with events, often falling behind in our responses.

We need to have relations with many authoritarian governments and their militaries and security services, but in the meantime, we should be pushing them more forcefully – certainly in private and if need be, in public – to open up their systems in a deliberate manner. Having been reminded yet again of our lack of foresight and the transitory nature of authoritarians, we should also begin or redouble efforts to befriend and assist those who may well be the next generation of leaders. In all of these dealings, we should also enlist our European and regional democratic allies, who have as much interest as we do in stable openings in authoritarian states. Finally, we should

ensure that the populations of poorer authoritarian states are aware of the bilateral and multilateral assistance that is extended to democratizing countries.

The Middle East was the final region assumed by area experts to be impervious to democracy. That democracies now exist in every region of the world should put rest to the canard that it is an “American” or “Western” system.

It should also help us get past the idea that any authoritarian government is immune to freedom. As Hillary Clinton recently put it, “They’re worried, and they are trying to stop history, which is a fool’s errand. They cannot do it. But they’re going to hold it off as long as possible.”

America can’t implant democracy, but to ensure we are on the right side of history, we should

responsibly do everything possible to catalyze it. **RF**

Lorne Craner is President of the International Republican Institute.

**We do not necessarily
know when
authoritarian regimes
will fall, but we should
by now know that
they will, and plan
accordingly.**



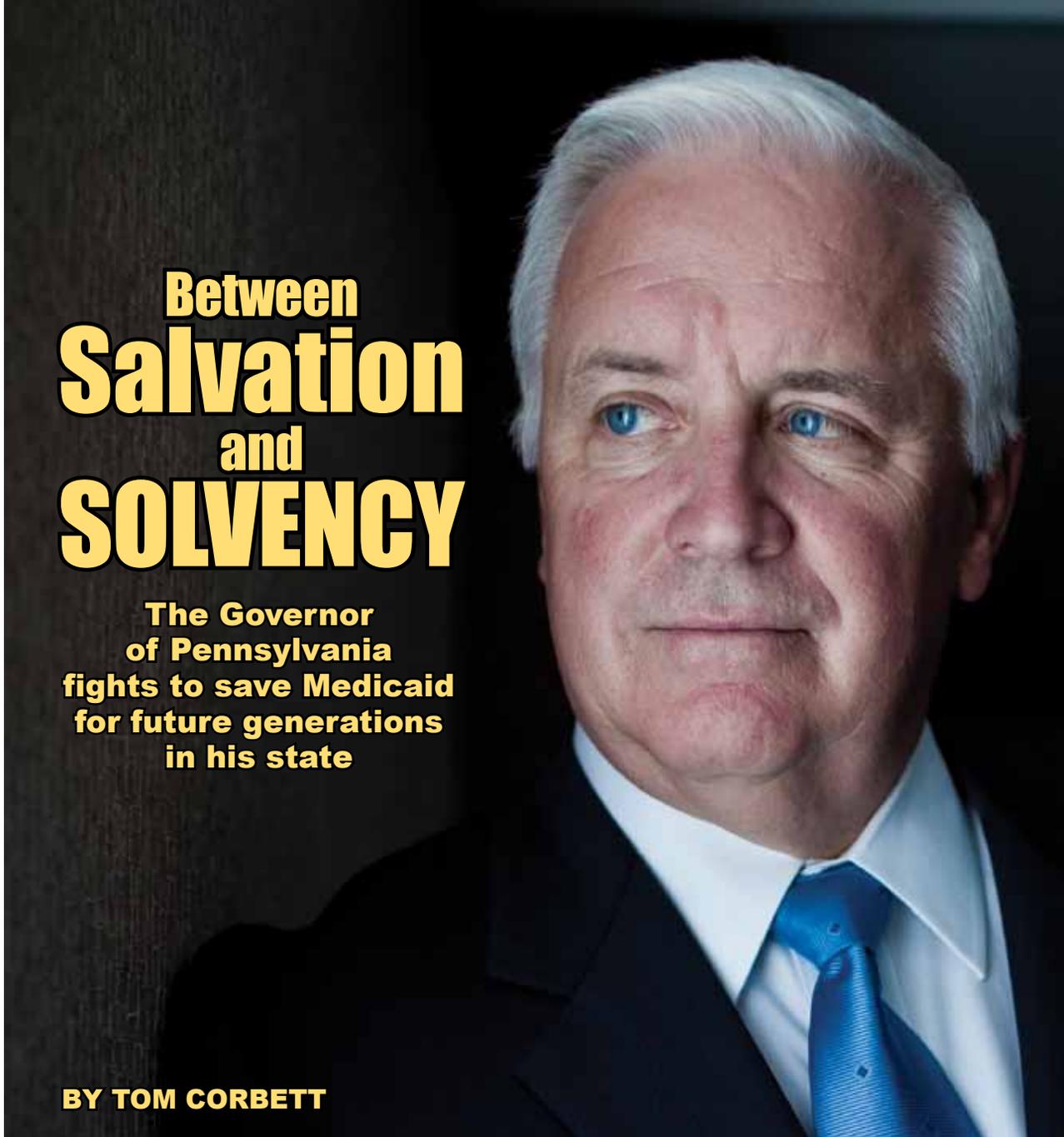
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A close-up portrait of Tom Corbett, the Governor of Pennsylvania, with white hair and blue eyes, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and blue tie. The background is dark and textured.

Between Salvation and SOLVENCY

**The Governor
of Pennsylvania
fights to save Medicaid
for future generations
in his state**

BY TOM CORBETT

Pennsylvania's Medicaid reform efforts are still in the formative stages, with assorted models and numbers competing for attention and occasionally challenging the comprehension skills of average citizens. It is a difficult and intricate program, assembled like a watch but set to a time zone we long ago departed.

With its federal formulas, sliding scales and state-by-state eligibility quirks, Medicaid could well be called America's dullest important issue.

So my administration is operating on two guidance principles:

1. Medicaid in Pennsylvania must be foremost about saving people.

2. We can save no one if the system is bankrupt and ineffective.

This balancing act between salvation and solvency presents challenges on a greater scale than many other states. While my Secretary of Public Welfare, Gary Alexander, hails from Rhode Island where he gained attention by shaping that state's Medicaid reform, we really need a Pennsylvania model. Our population numbers and demographics demand as much.

At present, Medicaid exists as a one-size-fits-all program, with little room to customize to the needs of a different group. More than 2.2 million Pennsylvanians use Medicaid and many of them are elderly or disabled – people with far different needs and aspirations and prospects than healthy users. As it now exists, Medicaid treats ailments but does little or nothing to prevent them.

And, perhaps most importantly, it traps people into an inflexible system in which they have no options.

Because federal funding is limited but the number of recipients is growing, the money paid to doctors for a Medicaid visit often means doctors won't take those patients. One of the first questions asked by some receptionists when a prospective patient calls is whether they are medical assistance recipients. They don't want them.

This is an utter inversion of the theory of patient choice. Instead of picking their doctors, too many Medicaid recipients end up looking for doctors who will pick them. This isn't just bad medicine; it's bad social policy.

The bad economics of the current Medicaid system is, perhaps, the only simple thing about it. Medicaid recipients do not especially care what their visit costs so long as someone else is paying. This is not an impulse unique to the disadvantaged. Common sense tells us that the more we are aware of the price of a service the more likely we are to become careful shoppers.

Pennsylvania intends to seek a waiver that will move more and more of the options for funding medical coverage for the poor into private-sector providers. The major problem our recipients have faced is access, a problem found in any number of states.

That standard of careful shopping must apply to states. Since its inception, the federal formula for Medicaid has provided a steady flow of dollars that assures that no state carries the entire cost. This has tempted many states to expand their programs when the economy and revenues are

increasing. As the last recession has shown, that formula is one for fiscal disaster when it comes to open-ended entitlement programs.

So, the overall model we think most practical for Pennsylvania is a set grant to a Medicaid recipient from which he or she can choose from a menu of private medical insurance providers. This provides an incentive for providers to compete with each other by providing the best value for the available money while encouraging recipients to take charge of their own care and budgeting.

The trick to all of this is to get recipients to play their roles as consumers. The only way to do that is to create a system with plainly written rules, easily comprehended guidelines, and carefully crafted eligibility standards. The point of Medicaid is to be someone's temporary medical insurance, not their lifelong provider.

One incentive to a healthier lifestyle could also include allowing a Medicaid user who is able to retain a healthy balance in his or her grant at year's end to apply that money to something else inside the social welfare and needs system. The point of welfare programs is not to be permanent. We cannot risk making poverty an acceptable lifestyle.

Medicaid and how we confront its shortcomings will be an important measure of how this nation will frame its philosophical outlook for the next generation. One side would argue for universal care funded unceasingly and encompassing as many people as possible in as uniform a way as possible. The other would stress personal autonomy, a range of choices and as limited a role for government as feasible.

The first formula has been tried and now we face insolvency with no appreciable gains to show for it. It is time to consider the second. Doing nothing is not an option. **RF**

Tom Corbett is the Governor of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

The point of Medicaid is to be someone's temporary medical insurance, not their lifelong provider.

Medicaid by the numbers

In FY2011, the Medicaid program will cover an estimated 69.5 million people. Medicaid is a means-tested entitlement program that finances the delivery of primary and acute medical services as well as long-term care. Medicaid is jointly funded by the federal government and the states. Federal Medicaid payments to states are estimated to reach \$275 billion in FY2011, which would include \$12 billion as a result of increased federal medical assistance percentage funding that Congress provided through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (P.L. 111-5). In a typical year, the federal government covers roughly 57% of the total cost for Medicaid. As a percent of GDP, federal Medicaid spending is expected to reach about 1.9% of GDP in FY2011.

Source: Congressional Research Service

HOW TO FIX OUR ENTITLEMENT CRISIS: *A Workable Four Step Plan*

TEVI TROY

A recent feature in the *Washington Post* highlighted the essential challenge we face with respect to entitlement programs.

According to the *Post*, “by 2020, spending on Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security and interest on the debt will usurp much of the revenue from federal taxes, leaving other government expenditures . . . to be paid for with borrowed funds.”

For a long time, people warning about the coming entitlement onslaught seemed like Chicken Littles referring to a remote and far off event. 2020, in contrast, is not very far away. A fourth grader today will either be entering college or the work place by the time the point at which entitlements and interest will have completely captured the budget, unless something is done about the problem in the immediate – and I do mean immediate – future.

It is this “unless” that is flummoxing Washington these days. To review: President Obama ignored this problem when he released his budget in February, effectively daring the Republicans to go first with a proposal. The Republicans did just that, with Paul Ryan’s framework. At this point, Obama, recognizing that he could ignore the entitlement crisis no longer, then sought a budget “mulligan,” coming out with a speech in which he laid out some relatively vague ideas for addressing the problem. To fix the problem, however, presidential leadership is a must. Waiting for the other side to go first so that they get hit with more flak is a form of “leading from behind” that is unlikely to generate the type of serious reforms we need.

Each of the three main entitlement programs – Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid – are very different in both goal and design, and need to be examined and reformed individually, even if all of the reforms come as part of a

larger deal or package. When I served as Deputy Secretary of Health and Human Services in the Bush Administration my boss, HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt, used to say that Social Security is a math problem, but Medicare was far more complicated.

He’s right, and the solutions that will help with one program differ from the options available for the others.

The Path to Reform

With respect to Social Security, a recent graph in the *Wall Street Journal* has showed that we are already at the point where annual outlays are outpacing receipts. According to the chart, this problem is going to steadily worsen between now and 2040. But we know that Social Security is fixable because it has been fixed before, giving us a model for how to proceed. In 1983, the bipartisan commission led by Alan Greenspan helped initiate a series of reforms aimed at keeping the system solvent for 75 years. While this effort did not attain its full 75 year goal, it did extend the time before we faced another Social Security crisis, and did so in large part by extending the retirement age and adjusting future benefit levels. However policy makers choose to adjust the Social Security formula, the key point is that fixing Social Security is a doable endeavor by

changing the mix of retirement age and benefits, without necessarily changing the character of the program.

With both Medicare and Medicaid, however, more significant fixes -- which go beyond simple, if politically challenging, mathematical tinkering -- will be required. The essential problems with Medicare are that the costs of health care continually grow faster than inflation, and that the Medicare benefits are largely open ended. There is no fixed annual budget for Medicare, and while costs keep



Tevi Troy

rising every year, beneficiaries have little incentive to keep costs in check. This is why the idea of making Medicare into a defined benefit, also known as premium support, is so difficult.

Despite President Obama's rhetoric about reining in the costs of health care, the issue of health care inflation is largely out of direct government control, so President Obama's idea to extend Medicare via an outside price commission – the Independent Payment Advisory Board, or IPAB – is unlikely to succeed. A better approach is to add more predictability to the system, for both future seniors and the government, by providing assistance for Medicare recipients to purchase insurance on their own, and to protect the government from the vagaries of the health care inflation index.

With respect to Medicaid, the problem here is that the federal government pays for part of the program -- the states pay the rest. Moreover, the federal government limits state flexibility in setting up and running programs as the state sees fit. The federal government also often adds new obligations, as it did by putting approximately half of the anticipated new entrants to the rolls via the new health care bill on Medicaid. Approximately 16 million people will be added to the Medicaid rolls as a result of the Obama health law, further challenging already strained state budgets.

To address this problem, the federal government needs to give states more flexibility and more authority to run their Medicaid systems. This is often derisively called a block grant approach, but the truth is that this approach will be better for the states and for the federal government. The interaction will be more limited and cleaner, and states will know that the systems are theirs to run, with limited interference from Washington. People on both sides of the aisle recognize that this type of reform is likely to take place.

I was on a recent panel discussion in Washington where participants across the ideological spectrum were asked about the prospects for block granting Medicare, and I was shocked at how little objection there was to the idea. The representative from the Obama Administration issued a brief pro forma objection at the end of his comments, but the relative lack of ire that the concept raised indicates that this idea may be more politically attainable than previously thought.

An Area of Possible Compromise – and Revenue

The last aspect of the challenge we face is on the revenue side, and here there is some good news in that Ryan, Obama, and the bipartisan fiscal commission

all agree on the need to reduce what are known as tax expenditures. The bipartisan fiscal commission, in fact, found that various breaks and subsidies in our tax code cost the U.S. Treasury over a trillion dollars annually. In addition to the direct costs of these subsidies, they also complicate the tax code, make filling out your taxes a lengthy, expensive, and painful process, and foster tremendous economic inefficiencies.

As former Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors Martin Feldstein has noted, our “tax code is full of special features that reduce revenue, [which] are really forms of government spending that have been built into the tax code.” According to Feldstein, “These special features -- known as tax expenditures -- add more to the deficit each year than all the non-defense discretionary spending in the budget.”

In undertaking this effort to raise revenues by cleaning up the tax code, the Reagan Administration experience is once again instructive: in 1986, President Reagan pushed a bipartisan tax reform that cleaned up our tax code and reduced income tax rates, which had the happy effects

of both raising revenues and boosting our economy. President Obama would couple this with raising taxes by allowing the Bush tax cuts to expire. This additional step is unnecessary. Eliminating the vast majority of expensive tax code subsidies will both raise revenues and help our economy.

Contrary to those who fear that addressing spending means stepping on some kind of political third rail, polls show that the American people are ready to take some of these

difficult steps. According to a Resurgent Republic poll, for example, 89% of Americans oppose increasing the debt ceiling without cutting spending. Furthermore, there is historical precedent for getting our debt under control by taking a series of measured, non-radical steps to control spending and maintain revenue levels.

According to Feldstein, “It is worth remembering that after World War II we brought our national debt down from 109 percent of GDP to 46 percent of GDP in 1960. We did it by avoiding any growth of the government's debt during those years -- that is, by balancing deficit years with surplus years.”

This effort is not just doable, though. It is also necessary.

RF

Tevi Troy is a Senior Fellow at the Hudson Institute. He has served as the deputy secretary of Health and Human Services and a senior White House aide.

Reforming Social Security Disability Insurance

RICHARD V. BURKHAUSER

United States disability program expenditures are rising at an unsustainable pace. The just released 2011 Annual Report of the Social Security Trustees documents that since 2009 Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) has been paying out more in annual benefits than it has been receiving in taxes and interest from its trust fund. At this pace, it predicts that SSDI will be insolvent by 2018.

These costs are not driven by a medically-based disability epidemic — the percentage of working-age people with work limitations has not changed over the past 30 years. Instead, as Mary Daly and I argue in our forthcoming book, “The Declining Work and Welfare of People with Disabilities: What Went Wrong and a Strategy for Change,” it is primarily a consequence of changes in SSDI and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program rules and their administration. These changes have made it far easier to gain entry to these benefit rolls for those with disabilities who do not work.

Since 1982, this policy-driven epidemic has reduced the employment of working-age people with disabilities from roughly 35 to 23 percent and increased their enrollment in SSDI and SSI from 33 to over 50 percent. That is, working-age people with disabilities are now more likely to stop working and take the non-work path to SSDI or SSI. But, the increase in benefits from these programs has, on average, barely offset the reduction

in their earnings, making them as a group no better off economically and more dependent on transfers. Hence, despite the substantial increase in SSDI program costs, the economic well-being of working-age people with disabilities has fallen further behind the rest of the working-age population, whose average income has increased over the last 30 years.

Fortunately, since past policy changes are the cause, future policy changes can be the solution. But policy change is never easy. Previous attempts at SSDI policy reform have only temporarily succeeded in controlling program growth. Reforms started by the Carter Administration and vigorously pursued by the Reagan administration in the early 1980s — during a severe economic recession — focused on removing current beneficiaries from the rolls. These reforms were extremely controversial and resulted in a backlash that ended up making both SSDI eligibility criteria less strict and removing someone already on the rolls nearly impossible.

Rather than simply returning to policy changes taken up in the 1980s, we argue that reforms should be pro-work and hence focus on slowing SSDI growth at the entry point. The question is how to do it.

The answer begins with the recognition that SSDI is the final part of a much larger set of public and private programs available to individuals following the onset of a work-limiting impairment. At each point



Richard Burkhauser

...working-age people with disabilities are now more likely to stop working and take the non-work path to SSDI or SSI.

in the process, those with a disability and their service providers both have to make decisions with respect to accommodation, rehabilitation, and return-to-work which will determine whether a move along the path to long-term SSDI benefits is warranted. SSDI is not a passive actor in this process. Rather, the way SSDI is financed — and its willingness to accept responsibility as the last-resort program for those with serious impairments who do not work — influences the way workers and employers respond to a worker's initial health shock.

Our current system of funding SSDI via a flat-rate payroll tax on employers and employees fails to send the appropriate signals with respect to the full costs of a worker moving from the work path to the permanent disability path. In contrast, raising the SSDI payroll tax of firms whose workers enroll in the system at above-average rates and lowering the SSDI payroll taxes on firms whose workers enroll at below-average rates via experience rating would more directly link the costs to the firm of one of its workers moving onto the SSDI program. Doing so would require an employer to balance the full economic costs and benefits of providing accommodation and rehabilitation versus assisting a worker onto the SSDI program following a health shock.

Under the current cost structure, the federal government pays for the additional SSDI beneficiary, which simultaneously frees the employer from bearing the costs associated with accommodation and rehabilitation. Employers who bore the costs for both options would be more incentivized to make the investments in accommodation and rehabilitation that could prolong the employment tenure of a worker with a disability. This is currently the system used to fund state Workers Compensation benefits, and the best practices from these state programs could be considered for SSDI as well.

Alternatively, employers who provide short-term private disability insurance for employees and whose private insurance agents cooperate with SSDI gatekeepers in managing their cases could be granted a reduction in SSDI tax rates, while firms that did not offer such private insurance could be charged higher SSDI tax rates. Each of these alternative reform mechanisms would make employers more likely to provide greater accommodation and rehabilitation to

their workers immediately following the onset of a disability. Doing so would not only bend the cost curve of projected SSDI program expenditures by reducing incentives for employers and employees to overuse the system, but would increase the employment of working-age people with disabilities as well as their income.

Can experience rating work? In a forthcoming piece for the Industrial and Labor Relations Review, I — along with fellow authors Maximilian D. Schmeiser, and Robert R. Weathers II — show that employers were more likely to provide accommodations to their workers following the onset of work limitation when it occurred on the job and, hence, were more likely to be subject to experience rating. Other evidence suggests experience rating of Workers Compensation has improved safety and reduced accidents by requiring employers to more directly bear their costs. This direct relationship between the benefits received by a firm's workers and the premiums the firm pays encourages

firms to provide the optimal amount of accommodation and rehabilitation, and thus reduces transfer payments and ensures greater return to work by injured workers.

The current method for funding SSDI that allows employees, employers, and private insurance agents to pass the costs of long-term cash transfers to the federal government is unsustainable. The most straightforward way to overcome this flaw is to ensure that those best able to provide the mix of

accommodation, rehabilitation, and access to short- and long-term disability cash transfers to workers following the onset of a disability have the correct cost signals to make these decisions efficiently.

For SSDI, this can be achieved by giving workers, employers, and private insurers these same signals via experience-rated employer payroll taxes. **RF**

Our current system of funding SSDI via a flat-rate payroll tax on employers and employees fails to send the appropriate signals with respect to the full costs of a worker moving from the work path to the permanent disability path.

Richard V. Burkhauser is the Sarah Gibson Blanding Professor of Policy Analysis, in the Department of Policy Analysis and Management at Cornell University and an American Enterprise Institute Fellow. He is also co-author, with Mary Daly, of the forthcoming book, "The Declining Work and Welfare of People with Disabilities: What Went Wrong and a Strategy for Change" (American Enterprise Institute Press).

Saving Social Security:

Ripon Society Holds Policy Conference to look at a Plan on the Table and the Prospects of Reform

STEPHEN JACKSON

The Ripon Society hosted a Bully Pulpit Policy Conference on Social Security Reform in Washington, DC, on May 26, 2011, a conference that focused not only on the need to address the fiscal challenges facing the Social Security system, but a plan that has been introduced in Congress to do just that.

The Conference featured a panel discussion with three experts on the Social Security program and the need for reform. The panelists included Andrew Biggs of the American Enterprise Institute, David Kendall of Third Way, and Maya MacGuineas of the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget. The discussion was moderated by Margaret Hostetler, a Professional Staff member on the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Social Security.

The panel discussion was followed by a keynote address by South Carolina Senator Lindsey Graham, who is the author of legislation that would reform Social Security by, among other things, means testing

and raising the retirement age of Social Security recipients.

An Opening for Reform

Starting the panel discussion, AEI's Biggs expressed his view that the government needs to help the public do three things: work more, save more, and retire later. Some incentives to achieve these goals, he said, include increasing the early retirement age from 62 to 65 and eliminating the payroll tax for anyone 62 and older.

He added that this would not only provide a better incentive for individuals to delay retirement, but also a reason for companies to hire and retain older workers. While there have been cries on the left that the only way to fix the system is to increase revenue, MacGuineas echoed Biggs's approach and stated her preference is "to do as much of this as possible on the spending side."



Panelists at The Ripon Society's May 26th Conference on Social Security Reform included (l to r): David Kendall of Third Way, Maya MacGuineas of the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget and Andrew Biggs of the American Enterprise Institute.

“There is such a strong case to bring down benefits aggressively for people at the high end,” MacGuineas stated. “To me, that’s actually the combination...It combines the Republican or conservative preference for keeping spending down and not using taxes to fix this, and it combines the progressive perspective for making the program more progressive ... There is such a strong case for making Social Security more progressive through benefit reduction.”

However, Kendall stressed that some revenue increases would be necessary for Democratic support, noting Third Way’s preference for a 2:1 ratio of spending reduction to revenue increases. While there was a great deal of optimism among the panelists about possible compromises, skepticism for Congress acting on one of these compromises remains. Kendall explained that Republicans need to look towards the left in order to get the public support necessary. “You can get political cover from Democrats,” he stated. “Democrats created Social Security, so we are more trusted to reform it.”

MacGuineas stated that given the divisive political climate, Social Security is the only major program which can be touched. “I do see an opening right now,” she said, noting that neither party has turned Social Security “into the punching bag of this election.” While sharing the optimism of his fellow panelists that the opportunity for reform exists now, Kendall also made sure to keep everything in perspective for Republicans, who he suggested may have been too aggressive with their plan to overhaul Medicare coming off their electoral successes in 2010.

“One party can reform an entitlement program alone if you’re adding benefits,” the Third Way scholar noted. “But two parties are necessary to reduce benefits.”

Breaking the Status Quo

In his keynote address following the panel discussion, Graham discussed his bill, *The Social Security Solvency and Sustainability Act* (S. 804), which he introduced on April 13 with fellow Senators Mike Lee of Utah and Rand Paul of Kentucky.

He also discussed the political realities of passing

various reform proposals that have been put forward thus far. For instance, Graham, who played a key role in trying to forge a bipartisan consensus during President Bush’s 2005 attempt to reform Social Security, explained that there are not 60 votes in the Senate for private accounts, which were a core part of the 2005 debate.

Moreover, he noted, the Republican House Majority has stated firmly that they are not willing to raise taxes. “What’s left?” he asked. “Age and formula benefits changes ... You can achieve solvency by adjusting the age and doing a means test, but every year you wait, the harder it gets.” Defending these proposed changes, Graham said: “We’re not being mean. We’re just being responsible.”

In addition to his legislation, Graham also offered some suggestions to make any Social Security reform proposal more palatable for Democrats who feel higher income individuals should contribute more. Once again explaining that raising taxes would be a non-starter for many Republicans, the Senior Senator from South Carolina suggested that higher income individuals could forgo future benefits, calling it “a form of sacrifice.”

“You don’t have to raise taxes to ask upper income Americans to contribute to solvency,” he continued. “You can readjust their benefits ... To me, it’s better for the economy, and makes more sense for the individual.”

Graham concluded by noting that Social Security reform of any kind will require strong leadership from both President Obama and Congress.

“The Ronald Reagan-Tip O’Neill model is the only way this can possibly work,” he said, referring to the 1983 Social Security agreement struck between the Republican President and Democratic Speaker.

“It’s going to take Republicans and Democrats -- with some support network -- breaking the status quo. That’s the formula of the past, that’s the formula of today, and that’ll be the formula for the future.” **RF**

Stephen Jackson is an editorial assistant with The Ripon Forum and special projects director for The Ripon Society.



SOCIAL SECURITY SOLVENCY AND SUSTAINABILITY ACT The Problem & The Proposal

The Problem

Demographic changes are impacting Social Security solvency. When Social Security was created, there were over 40 workers for every retiree. In 1950, there were 16 workers supporting 1 retiree. Today, the ratio is 3 workers to 1 retiree. In 2035, the ratio drops to 2 to 1.

The Trustees of Social Security have warned of serious, structural problems facing the system. In 2015, the program will begin to permanently pay out more in benefits than it takes in as taxes. In 2037, the Trust Fund will be exhausted and unable to pay full benefits to retirees.

The Proposal

S. 804 would do the following:

- Reduce debt held by the public by \$6.2 trillion by 2085;
- Eliminate the current difference of \$5.4 trillion between benefits promised and what Social Security can actually pay;
- Create a fully solvent and sustainable Social Security system that will be able to provide the benefits it promises to future generations without raising taxes.
- Provide for a gradual increase in the Social Security full retirement age to 70 by 2032.
- When retirement age of 70 is achieved, the full retirement age will then be indexed to increases or decreases in life expectancy. Indexing will help maintain a constant ratio of years worked to years spent in retirement.
- Provide for a gradual increase in the Social Security early retirement age from 62 to 64 by 2028. After 2018, all new retirees coming into the system will have benefits based on the first \$43,000 of their average lifetime yearly earnings calculated based on the current formula. Benefits for earnings above \$43,000, will be calculated at a lower rate as earnings rise.

Source: Office of Senator Lindsey Graham



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Sunshine is for Voting, not Bargaining

BILL FRENZEL

For the past 50 years, the American public has placed a high value on transparency in its government. Open meeting laws are pervasive and popular in government. Transparency is rightly thought to be an integral part of our democratic process.

But all good things can be overdone. There are exceptions to nearly every good rule. While acknowledging that openness is a virtue, it is not a bad idea to recall that our own prized Constitution was put together under conditions of strictest secrecy.

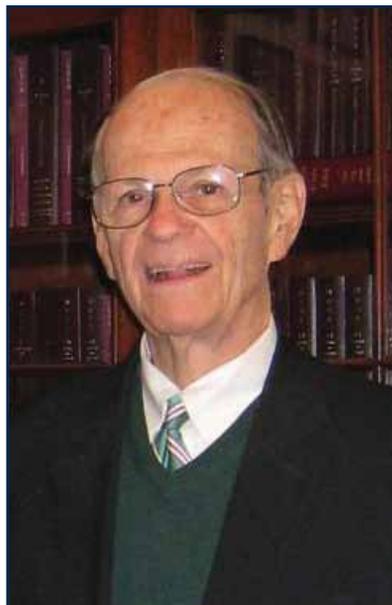
The Framers operated behind locked doors and windows, with the press barred from entry to Constitution Hall, and the Delegates sworn to secrecy. In so doing, they set a standard that their successors sometimes forget. They achieved their grand compromise in a series of closed meetings, secure in the knowledge that their work would be voted on publicly by all Delegates. They knew, too, that it would later have to pass -- or fail -- in the sunshine of state ratification conventions.

Nowadays, the Congress acts in a similar manner. Groups of members, sometimes full committees, hold non-public meetings to find agreement on thorny problems. But, committees and both the full House and Senate invariably subject bills and resolutions to public debate and open voting.

When the President negotiated with the Speaker and the Senate Majority Leader on the FY 2011 Appropriations package, the meetings were secret until the compromise was announced. Nearly all union/management bargaining is done in secret. In our system, difficult

compromises are not achieved in full sunlight.

Whether for public or private purposes, the reasons for such closed meetings are simple: the negotiators expect to be judged by the total product, not by the day-by-day or point-by-point



The Framers operated behind locked doors and windows, with the press barred from entry to Constitution Hall, and the Delegates sworn to secrecy. In so doing, they set a standard that their successors sometimes forget.

discussions.

In contentious issues -- like the creation of the Constitution, a compromise on the budget, or

comprehensive tax reform -- strong positions must be abandoned for the success of the final, comprehensive solution. If early concessions are revealed, the process may be doomed.

As American politics have become more polarized, political activists at both ends of the spectrum have become less trusting of their representatives. The zealots of the polar constituencies -- who might tolerate a final compromise which were to include concessions by their opponents -- are highly intolerant of their own representatives "caving in" on any of their strongly-held positions as the negotiations proceed.

As noted, Congress has found a way "around" its open meeting rules. But statutory and presidential commissions, which are assigned the most divisive questions, cannot avoid the strictures of the open meeting law. In 1988, for example, The National Economic Commission was obliged to terminate its work after a successful lawsuit forced it to open up its discussions. Its members, including Reagan Administration appointees, union leaders, and congressmen, were unwilling to negotiate under the harsh glare of TV cameras.

In our current debt and deficit crisis, more and more commissions will likely be created to resolve the most difficult political questions. The most obvious recent example is the Fiscal Commission headed by former White House Chief of Staff Erskine Bowles and former Wyoming Senator Alan Simpson.

The open meeting law was not this group's primary difficulty. But the law certainly made its work more difficult. The leaders were obliged to hold repeated, separate meetings with individual

members, rather than being able to discuss the problems with everybody present. Without extraordinary effort on the part of its leaders, the Commission might never be able to report a majority vote of 11 of 18.

This Bowles-Simpson Fiscal Commission will be followed by other commissions. The debt and deficit crisis will require a decade of hard work just to stabilize the debt. One can imagine a series of commissions, some structured in the manner of a base closing commission with the right to bring its solutions directly to the floor of both houses.

President Bush's Social Security Commission and his Tax Reform Commission were both hampered by the open meeting law. And yet looking ahead, we will probably need to establish future similar commissions

to deal with each of these political explosive issues. Perhaps there will also be a Targets and Triggers Commission, a Medicare Commission, a Safety Net

The point is this – if we are going to rely on commissions to help us meet our most pressing fiscal challenges, we need to make sure they have the space and breathing room that will help them get the job done.

Commission, and more.

The point is this – if we are going to rely on commissions to help us meet our most pressing fiscal challenges, we need to make sure they have the space and breathing room that will help them get the job done. To that end, future commissions of this nature should be granted some kind of waiver to give them a way around the open meeting law

so that they can operate and deliberate in the same way the Framers did when they drafted the Constitution – in private. Otherwise, these commissions may be created in vain, like most of their predecessors.

Transparency and openness are wonderful for debates and for actual voting. However, history shows that they have been a real hindrance to successful bargaining and negotiating of tough issues, especially in today's polarized political environment. **RF**

Bill Frenzel, a former Member of Congress (MN-3), has served on three presidential commissions. He currently serves as the Chairman Emeritus of The Ripon Society and Chairman of The Ripon Forum's editorial board, among his many other roles.

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CODEL to America

A proposal to connect Congress to the country it is trying to lead

JIM MURTHA

I was a lobbyist. I did it for five years, liked the work and loved the “inside” game.

I also worked in the media, for 15 years, in radio and TV. I had a political beat and it gave me my introduction to government. It was good work for a young man. Both of these professions gave me a front row seat in the sausage-making that is the legislative process.

Now I travel the country as a consultant on legislative affairs. In the course of a year I get to meet hundreds of average, everyday Americans. You know the type: the kind of people that do most of the working, living and dying, and they do it outside the glare of the paparazzi, 24-hour news coverage and the witty banter of talk shows. They are everyone and no one, and they are everywhere. Yet, with numbers in the millions, how is that our Congress seems to know so little about them?

Our Congress is sent to Washington ostensibly as a reflection of the population that elected them. I suppose that is true to a point. But in listening

to the rhetoric and what passes as intellectual discourse in our nation’s capital, one could conclude that our representatives don’t understand much of our people beyond the narrow confines of their individual districts and the city in which they all periodically congregate for session – Washington D.C.



In listening to the rhetoric and what passes as intellectual discourse in our nation’s capital, one could conclude that our representatives don’t understand much of our people beyond ... Washington D.C.

Throughout the year, dozens of Congressmen and Congresswomen and a coterie of staffers will pack up, dress up and take off on the travel-fest known as a CODEL. Short for CONgressional DElegation, these junkets permit lawmakers to leave our country and learn how the other half lives in the four corners of the globe. These are getting-to-know-you trips.

They have alternately been

described as boring trips punctuated by endless lectures and PowerPoint presentations to bacchanals that only Caligula could appreciate. Want to see how high-speed rail really works? Go to France and take a ride on the 180- mph Tres Grande Vitesse. What about wind projects? Denmark will do nicely.

While not perfect, CODELS do offer some utility in furthering our understanding of foreign lands. It’s one thing to read about a place. It’s another thing all together to be there in person. Some criticize these trips for their cost to the American public, and certainly, priced out through commercial rates, CODELS to some might be a bit pricey.

But I think their value usually overrides their cost.

Getting to Know “Those Guys”

But I write not to end CODELS in the name of fiscal austerity. Instead I am writing a plea to expand them to one more destination. You may have heard of it:

The United States of America.

It’s ironic that with the myriad

of ways to communicate -- from Twitter to Facebook to e-mail to texting, and with three 24-hour news channels and a seemingly endless reservoir of voices weighing in on every issue trivial and important -- that our leaders seem to know so little about the country they are trying to lead.

What's striking is that it's not their fault. Think about it: each House member represents a district of roughly 650,000 individuals. And every decade those districts are carefully gerrymandered scientifically to silence the cacophony of discord and replace it with the harmony of one note played by one instrument orchestrated by one party for a 10-year concert. And this being the year when all districts are redrawn new, one-note tunes are being composed as I write. The result of this reconfiguring is that it spawns individuals who respond mostly to their political family, who care little for countervailing opinions, and who inject a take-no-prisoners, combat-level of hostility into the debate. No one gets hurt physically. But there's a lot of collateral damage.

A CODEL to America will afford every Member an opportunity to know that part of the U.S. that comprises their personal fly-over territory. Going to another district that is identical or even similar will do nothing but beef up frequent flyer accounts. No, it has to be alien territory that one visits; city to country, liberal to conservative, Republican to Democrat. In other words, you must get to know "those guys."

The guest Member will have to see the host's district up close and personal. That means touring a district in the backseat of a staffer-driven Suburban is out -- at

least out as the only thing that is accomplished. Instead, I submit, that both Members host a town hall meeting or two. Take questions from constituents. Do an editorial board meeting with a local paper. Take calls from listeners to a local radio talk show. Have dinner in the host's home. Maybe even spend the night in the host's home.

Then, reverse the trip at some later time but within the confines of a Congressional session. It will take two days tops; long enough to get the swing of things, but not too long to be cumbersome for the host.

Santa Monica Meets Sioux Falls

What would a Member gain from this CODEL? Well, for

A CODEL to America will afford every Member an opportunity to know that part of the U.S. that comprises their personal fly-over territory.

starters they would get a front-row seat in seeing how the other half lives.

Think mass transit is waste of money? Then talk to a worker or professional that has millions of neighbors all vying to get to the same place at the same time.

Think about adding a buck or two to the fuels tax? Talk to a farmer who owns machinery that helps provide food for thousands but sucks gas like an airplane.

Want to take guns away from individuals? Talk to a family that has owned firearms for generations, or a person who has used a gun to defend his or her family from an intruder.

In a sense these CODELs to America would be like a Congressional hearing, except

without the formality, and where the setting is part of the information gathering process. Ask any man or woman who has run for President about what they learned about this country in the early stages of a campaign. The time spent in living rooms, back yards and diners in Iowa and New Hampshire or South Carolina provides a graduate level course on America and the people who really make it work.

Take any Member -- let's say Representative Mike Pence, a seven-term Republican from the sixth congressional district in Indiana -- and have him spend a couple of days in the district of his political opposite -- say Representative Gregory Meeks, a six-term Democrat who represents Queens in New York.

Pence -- a conservative -- hails from a largely white mostly rural agricultural district in the eastern part of the Hoosier state. It has lots of farmers and wide-open spaces.

Meeks -- a liberal from minority-majority Queens -- has a district that is 100 percent urban. It has no wide-open spaces and no farmers. Think either one of these legislators know all that much about the other's district and their constituents? I am going to go out on a limb and guess their knowledge barely scrapes past anecdotal.

Another example could pair Republican freshman South Dakota Representative Kristi Noem and 19-term California powerhouse Democrat Henry Waxman. Santa Monica meets Sioux Falls. How about Diane DeGette, eight-term liberal Democrat from Colorado, pairing off with Republican first-term Tea Partying Tim Scott from South Carolina? Replicate these domestic CODEL's to include the

entire House of Representatives, and you would get a talent pool on Capitol Hill that just might be more well-rounded on the subject that is most important to all of us – America.

Who'll decide who goes where? Let's try a non-partisan, good-government organization to determine the matchups. The pairings should not be determined by Congress because -- well, we all know why.

Individuals change the longer they remain in public office. And I don't necessarily mean that in the pejorative. It's just that the demands of public office these days are an all-consuming commitment of time and

energy. Couple that with the need to constantly raise money, to meet with constituents and lobbyists, and to tend to party matters, and it's no



How about Diane DeGette, eight-term liberal Democrat from Colorado, pairing off with Republican first-term Tea Partying Tim Scott from South Carolina?

wonder that the worlds created for Members of Congress tend to be insular echo chambers. If you are doing all of that, all of the time, just how much

do you really know about the rest of America?

In listening to the cacophony that emanates from the Capitol, this American has concluded the answer to that question is not much -- which is why it might be as good of a time as any for Members of Congress to do something out of the ordinary.

Visit the country they are trying to lead. RF

Jim Murtha is a member of The Ripon Society's

editorial board and Board of Directors. He is also Managing Partner of the National Field Resource Network.

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Question: What do Richard Nixon, Dan Rather and Chuck Norris have in common?



Answer: They have all written for The Ripon Forum.

(As have Lamar Alexander, Howard Baker, Haley Barbour, John Barrasso, Sandy Baruah, Charlie Bass, Bill Beach, Bob Bennett, Judy Biggert, Bob Bixby, Matt Blunt, Myrna Blythe, John Boehner, Rich Bond, Jan Brewer, John Bruton, George H.W. Bush, Ken Calvert, Dave Camp, Eric Cantor, Shelley Moore Capito, James Jay Carafano, Donald Cardieri, Mike Castle, Susan Collins, William Connelly, Charlie Cook, John Danforth, Dan Danner, Tom Davis, Charlie Dent, Bob Dole, Pete Domenici, Daniel Drezner, Mickey Edwards, Vern Ehlers, David Eisenhower, Jo Ann Emerson, John Engler, John Feehery, Carly Fiorina, Jeff Flake, Bill Frenzel, Bill Frist, Joe Gaylord, Jack Gerard, Elham Gheytauchi, Newt Gingrich, Bob Goodlatte, Slade Gorton, Kay Granger, Chuck Grassley, Bob Greenstein, Judd Gregg, Frank Guinta, Carlos Gutierrez, Chuck Hagel, Morton Halperin, Orrin Hatch, Dave Hebert, Steven Hill, Carla Hills, Scott Hodge, John Hoeven, Douglas Holtz-Eakin, Jon Huntsman, Jr., Darrell Issa, Tamar Jacoby, Nancy Johnson, John Kasich, Jack Kemp, Peter King, Thomas Kuhn, Bill Lacy, Melvin Laird, Marc Lampkin, Mike Leavitt, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Linda Lingle, Robert Litan, Burdett Loomis, Dan Lungren, Maya MacGuineas, Mel Martinez, Mary Matalin, Christine Matthews, John McCain, Michael McFaul, Kevin McCarthy, Bill McKenzie, Buck McKeon, John McLaughlin, Bob Michel, Joshua Muravchik, Peggy Noonan, Joseph Nye, Norm Ornstein, Mike Oxley, Chester Pach, Rod Paige, Demetrios Papademetriou, Landon Parvin, Tim Pawlenty, Rudolph Penner, Tim Penny, Pete Peterson, Walid Phares, Billy Pitts, Rob Portman, Tom Price, Dave Reichert, Jodi Rell, Pat Roberts, Nelson Rockefeller, Cathy McMorris Rodgers, George Romney, Gary L. Rose, Paul Ryan, Larry Sabato, Andrew Samwick, Mark Sanford, Robert Scales, Tom Schatz, Bruce Schneier, Dan Schnur, Carl Schramm, George Schultz, Chris Shays, Josette Sheeran, Olympia Snowe, Lionel Sosa, Jim Squires, Michael Steele, Ben Stein, Max Stier, Duf Sundheim, Phillip Swagel, Lynn Swann, Michael Tanner, Bill Thomas, Fred Thompson, Robert J. Thompson, Tommy Thompson, Mac Thornberry, William Tlichin, Brad Todd, John Tower, Fran Townsend, Stephen Joel Trautenberg, David Tuerek, Fred Upton, Susan Urahn, Richard Vedder, Vivek, Wadhwa, Bob Walker, Hank Wasiak, J.C. Watts, Reg Weaver, Murray Weidenbaum, Gail Wilensky, Christine Todd Whitman, Meg Whitman, Frank J. Williams, Frank Wolf and many others.)

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Ripon Profile

Name: Ron Johnson

Occupation: U.S. Senator (WI)

What was your first job, and what lesson did you learn from it that sticks with you today? My first tax-paying job was at Walgreens. I started at 15, as a dishwasher – then soda jerk, fry cook, and finally night manager before I turned 16.

This is your first elective office. Did your decision to run for the Senate come to you gradually, or did you have an “aha” moment that convinced you to launch your campaign? The decision came when people came up to me after my Tea Party speech. I would say the passage of Obamacare from the Senate - the initial passage - is the one that put me over the edge. It's a huge assault on our freedom. Non-politicians had to step up to the plate.

You've been in office now for nearly five months. What has surprised you most about the job? What's most surprising to me is that there are actually people here in D.C. who still don't understand how urgent the debt problem is. Way too many are only now understanding how urgent it is. We have a \$1.65 trillion deficit this year. We have amassed \$14.3 trillion in debt that will crush the hopes and dreams of future generations unless we take action now.

What's been the toughest vote you have cast so far, and how did you explain it to your constituents back home? The toughest vote so far was probably the FAA vote. Part of it modernized the Air Traffic Control system. I support both that and other elements of the bill. I felt I had to vote against it because it rejected the proposal to bring spending back to 2008 levels. We've got to learn how to make government more efficient and effective. We've got to learn how to live within our means.

When you leave office – whether it be at the end of your current term or at the end of another term somewhere down the road – what do you hope your greatest accomplishment will be? I hope I can say I contributed to actually saving this nation from bankruptcy – to bringing us back from the tipping point. I hope to help start us down a path that reverses a culture of entitlement and dependency.

Between you in the Senate, Paul Ryan in the House, Scott Walker in Madison and Reince Priebus at the RNC, Wisconsinites are rattling political cages at every level of government and political office. How do you explain this? Is there something in the water, or is there something else about the politics – and politicians -- of the Badger State? In many respects Wisconsin is a microcosm of America. America is divided along a very deep ideological divide - right down the middle - and that's being played out in Wisconsin. I also believe the folks here are down-to-earth, honest, hard-working people.

Finally, every Wisconsinite has a favorite Vince Lombardi quote. What's yours? “People who work together will win.” We could use that attitude here in Washington. It's certainly the attitude I bring to this town.





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