

OPINION

Columnists
Letters to the Editor

No one has dibs on American pride



By Emily Weathers Kennedy

As this 4th of July has come and gone, I can say that it is my favorite holiday and has been for many years. This year was not extraordinary; we shot no fireworks (much to our dogs' relief). But, it was familiar and good, just as I like it.

A friend lamented that with the continual degrading of the office of the president and the polarizing state of politics, she had no heart for celebrating America's Independence this year. That struck me as very sad because the true "event" we celebrate was 241 years ago and it came at great cost to the first American citizens.

In a recent Sunday *Advocate*, Frank Valenza wrote an excellent piece entitled "Freedom is not free" that reminded me of the true sacrifice the signers of the Declaration of Independence made to create this great nation. These people knew they faced treason even to sign, and indeed, many lost their lives and their livelihoods for doing so. Likewise, men and women, starting with the original colonists, have given their lives to keep America free since her birth.

1. Our pride should not rest on the current occupant of the White House. It should not be dependent on who

holds the majority in the houses of Congress either. America is bigger than both and belongs to us all. So, I stubbornly refuse to give up what is mine, too, and choose the 4th of July as my favorite holiday. This is why: There are things that supersede politics. Like family. The holidays are times for families to get together in whatever ways they enjoy. Mostly these are traditions that have been carried on for years. My family's Independence Day tradition is to attend Sacred Heart Loretto's annual 4th of July Picnic. We have been doing this since we were born as has most of Loretto. Now, during an election season, there might be politicians handing out cards and whatnot, but I can't remember a time when a political word has been spoken at the picnic, except "Vote for me" maybe. (I always forgive the politicians, especially when they hand out fans on a hot July day.)

2. Did I mention family? As much as I am a "political junkie" who has to have a "fix" most days, nothing about politics is worth sacrificing relationships with my family. When we gather, we try not to talk about the things that divide us.
3. Then there's weather. Holidays that fall in the warm months just beg for porch sitting, outdoor events, and easy peasy entertaining.
4. No gifts. Most people say Christmas is their favorite

holiday, and gift giving seems to be something people enjoy. I, however, enjoy that the 4th of July requires no gift exchange, no shopping for hours, no pressure.

5. Fewer decorations required. No one has mentioned that I don't have red, white, and blue in and around my house, but everyone and her sister has chided me for not putting up a Christmas tree the past few years. For hoopla, I can just watch spectacular fireworks from a distance.

The 4th of July belongs to Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, Unitarians, Bahá'ís, Jews, Muslims, pagans, Atheists, and everyone else and in between just the same. No one has dibs on it. No one can take it away from us. Not a tweeting insulter-in-chief, not a do-nothing Congress (who, by the way, are supposed to work for and answer to us). It unites us, we the mixed bag of immigrants and natives who call ourselves American. I'm proud to be one of us and think I'll just carry this sentiment on to Labor Day.

Emily Weathers Kennedy is a freelance writer, blogger, artist, photo stylist, and decorator. Her work is online and in product catalogs. Emily lives with her husband, 4 dogs, and 1 cat and writes from their farm in Loretto, where she was born and raised. The Kennedys have three beautiful, smart, grown-up daughters.

Americans can do better than the proposed health care legislation

From the Tennessee Justice Center

This week, the United States Senate will again take up the health care bill designed to repeal and replace the current standing health care legislation (the Affordable Health Care Act). The proposed bill has passed the House (in May) but many acknowledge a number of flaws that the Senate must resolve before the bill can be passed. The Tennessee Justice Center strenuously objects to the proposed legislation as written and urges rural Tennesseans to consider the following issues and to contact Tennessee's Senators Lamar Alexander (Nashville; R; Chair; Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions) and Bob Corker (Chattanooga; R) with suggestions such as the following:

RE: AMERICAN HEALTH CARE ACT, H.R. 1628

We write to you concerning the American Health Care Act passed by the U.S. House of Representatives on May 4th repealing major provisions of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and restructuring Medicaid. We understand that the Senate will soon be voting on its own version of the bill. We ask you to please make sure that Congress carefully considers the situation of rural counties across our state.

Rural communities like ours are very reliant on federal Medicare and Medicaid funding, which affects both our health care and our economies. Tennessee has lost more rural hospitals than any state other than Texas. Audited reports that hospitals submit each year to the Tennessee Department of Health show that over 20 more rural hospitals are losing money and are at risk of closing.



The ACA changed Medicare payments in ways that harm rural hospitals. On the other hand, nearly 100,000 Tennesseans who live in rural communities now have coverage because of the ACA. Tennesseans have improved health coverage because of the ACA's protection of people with pre-existing medical conditions. Those protections are especially needed in rural areas, where more residents have chronic medical conditions. These coverage improvements provide financial security for families and a source of payment to their local hospitals

when they get sick. Congress needs to fix the parts of the ACA that harm our communities, while preserving and strengthening those parts on which many of our residents rely.

The House bill would reduce federal Medicaid funding by \$839 billion over the next decade, according to the Congressional Budget Office. Medicaid funding is an important source of revenues for rural hospitals, and for the doctors who practice in them. Rural areas typically have only one hospital (if any) in each county. Any cuts in Medicaid funding could force more hospitals to close, unless Congress is very careful in considering their needs. The loss of a community's sole hospital provider irreparably harms health access for everyone in that community, regardless of their insurance status.

Loss of health resources also has a serious economic impact. Overall, health care creates 15 to 20 percent of the jobs in rural areas. Hospitals

are typically the first or second largest employer in a small town, so there is major job loss when a hospital closes or downsizes. If the hospital closes, doctors and nurses move away to seek other practice settings. Without health care services available locally, it is difficult to recruit new industry. The county loses tax revenues. At the same time, the county has to spend more for emergency services because ambulances have to travel farther to get patients to a hospital.

Medicaid ("TennCare") is a major insurer, covering 1.5 million people in Tennessee. It covers over half of all children statewide, including the great majority of those with serious medical or behavioral disabilities, and all children in foster care. TennCare also covers over half of all births in the state and is the financial foundation of services that have succeeded in recent years in reducing infant deaths. TennCare pays for 61% of nursing home care and provides most of the funding for services for adults with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

In rural communities, TennCare plays an even more important role than these statewide statistics suggest. Because of lower incomes, a larger share of the rural population has TennCare coverage. Health needs are also greater in rural communities. According to the Tennessee Department of Health, rural residents are at greater risk for poor health outcomes. The rural population is also generally older, with more health care needs associated with aging. Our counties are struggling to combat the opioid and meth addiction epidemics which, as you know, are among the worst in the nation. TennCare is a crucial resource in that effort, because it is our largest source of funding for mental health and addiction services. All of these factors make our communities very vulnerable to any cuts in federal funding for Medicaid.

We are grateful for your thoughtful leadership on behalf of all Americans. Please inform your colleagues of the needs of rural Tennessee, and of the health care systems on which our residents rely. Please make sure that congressional health reforms improve, rather than harm, the health of rural communities.

Happy 200th Birthday, Henry David Thoreau!



Tyrades! by Danny Tyree

"Most of the luxuries and many of the so-called comforts of life are not only not indispensable, but positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind." – Henry David Thoreau.

Maybe a hectic lifestyle has prevented you from marking it on your calendar; but July 12 is the bicentennial of the birth of essayist, poet, abolitionist, philosopher, naturalist, surveyor and historian Henry David Thoreau.

Many of you may have only dim, foggy memories of high school American Literature discussions of this Concord, Massachusetts native and Harvard College graduate. If so, you probably think the "transcendental movement" had something to do with either (a) driving a golden spike at Promontory, Utah or (b) translating

a Greek tragedy about dietary fiber.

One of Thoreau's two most famous books is "Walden, or Life In The Woods," which recounts the author's two-year experiment with living the simple life in a small house he had built near Walden Pond. (Of course, this adventure has been memorialized via Walden Puddle in the "Doodlesbury" comic strip.)

As my son Gideon points out, people are mistaken when they think that Thoreau was a total hermit during his stay at Walden. He entertained many visitors, although I have to wonder about the quality of the games he used to entertain them. ("I spy with my little eye...um, er...wish I hadn't simplified my belongings QUITE so much.")

Both during and after his stay, Thoreau was fascinated with the study of flora and fauna. He was a proponent

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Netflix to join net neutrality 'day of action'

Giant jumps in to aid consumer driven cause

Netflix has announced it is joining in tech advocacy group Fight For The Future's net neutrality day of action, in which companies and other stakeholders will "sound the alarm about the [Federal Communication Commission's] attack on net neutrality."

The video streaming company is one of the largest to join the effort, alongside Amazon, Kickstarter, Vimeo and the Internet Association, a Google-backed trade association for web companies. Today, July 12, Net Neutrality Day of Action, is set to be the largest online protest in years as content providers and consumers fight to have service providers continue to provide equal access to all sites without fees or slowdowns.

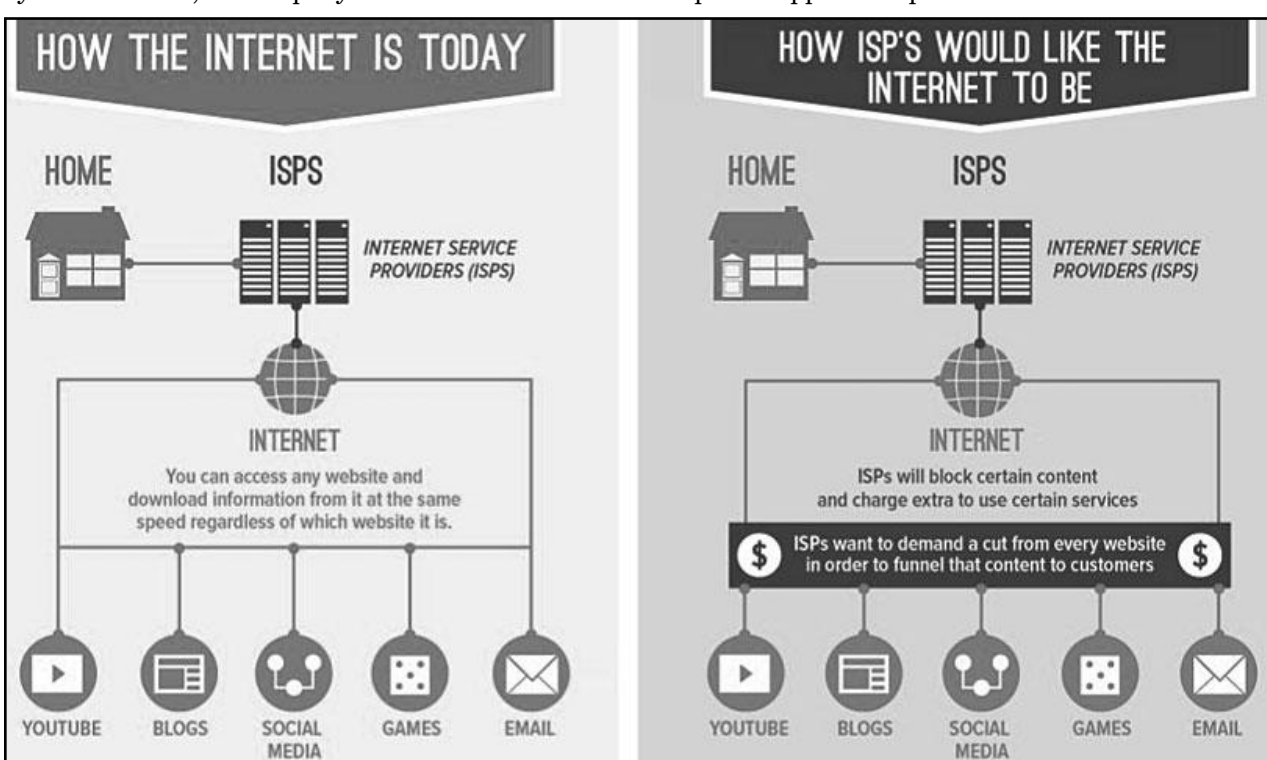
Netflix had been a strong advocate of the net neutrality rules. In 2014, the company warned that if the rules

were not adopted it would rally its customers.

"Were this draconian scenario to unfold with some [internet service providers]," Netflix wrote at the time, "we would vigorously protest and encourage our members to demand the open internet they are paying their ISP to deliver."

The FCC is considering Pai's "Restoring Internet Freedom" measure, which if approved, would get rid of net neutrality. The rules were aimed at creating a level playing field for internet companies and consumers by preventing broadband providers from prioritizing certain types of content over others.

Broadband, cable and telecommunications companies have come out in support of Pai's proposals, but privacy and consumer advocacy groups and some internet companies oppose the plan.



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