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HOW OBAMALISM WORKS

State Capital Highlights

Compiled by Ed Sterling, Texas Press Association



Sequestration happens, effects to be felt

AUSTIN — Friday, March 1, was the deadline for Congress and the White House to agree on how much to tax and how much to spend to avoid "sequestration" — automatic across-the-board cuts to federal programs in the current federal fiscal year, which ends Sept. 30, and beyond.

No agreement came. Now, budget reductions totaling \$85 billion will come, resulting in fewer federal dollars meted out to the 50 states for education, social programs, environmental funds, civilian jobs linked to defense functions, and more.

According to Texas' 10-member Legislative Budget Board, however, key safety-net programs are exempted from federal cuts, such as Medicaid, Children's Health Insurance Program, National School Lunch Program, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. Also, certain transportation programs are exempted, including those administered by the Federal Highway Administration and the Federal Transit Administration. The Airport Improvement Program is also exempted, the LBB said.

On Feb. 25, F. Scott McCown, executive director of the Austin-based Center for Public Policy Priorities, said, "Sequestration will be extremely damaging to our economy and to American families." McCown listed possible effects in Texas resulting from sequestration, such as:

- Loss of \$68 million in funding for primary and secondary education, putting around 930 teacher and aide jobs at risk.
- Loss of \$51 million in funding for about 620 teachers, aides, and staff who help

children with disabilities.

- Around 4,720 fewer low income students would receive aid to help them finance the costs of college and around 1,450 fewer students will get work-study jobs that help them pay for college.

- Head Start and Early Head Start services would be eliminated for about 4,800 children.

- Loss of \$8.5 million in environmental funding to ensure clean water and air quality, as well as prevent pollution from pesticides and hazardous waste.

- Some 52,000 civilian Department of Defense employees would be furloughed, reducing gross pay by around \$274.8 million in total.

Lawmakers here march on

Even with the prospect of no agreement in Washington to avoid sequestration, the Texas Legislature pressed forward with its tasks in the weekdays leading up to March 1.

On Feb. 27, the Senate Finance Committee tentatively approved SB 7, legislation funding education and health and human services. The House on Feb. 21 passed House Bill 10, a patch that funds Medicaid until Sept. 30 coupled with partial restoration of the \$5 billion hit suffered by public education in 2011. The bill quickly moved through the Senate Finance Committee, where it was substituted and passed. CSHB 10 is on the Intent Calendar, awaiting consideration by the full Senate.

SB 7, by Senate Health and Human Services Chair Jane Nelson, R-Flower Mound, redesigns the Medicaid long-term care system for individuals with physical, intellectual and developmental disabilities, as well as Texans 60 and over, she said.

"We cannot continue to fund the same inefficient, unsustainable Medicaid system and expect a different result, especially given the significant increases in our populations of seniors and individuals with developmental disabilities - who are living longer, healthier lives than ever before," Nelson said, adding, "SB 7 ensures that those currently being served continue to be served — but in a more efficient, coordinated manner. It also lays the groundwork to extend services to those currently waiting for them."

Military vote effort starts

Texas Secretary of State John Steen on Feb. 25 launched an initiative, The Boots and Ballots Tour, by the Elections Division in the Office of the Texas Secretary of State, to prepare and provide military voters with additional resources to register to vote and participate in local, state and federal elections.

As part of the effort, military and overseas voters are also being reminded the Federal Post Card Application they can fill out and return permanently registers them to vote and serves as a ballot request for a calendar year so they do not have to request a ballot each time an election is held.

There are two Uniform Election dates in Texas this year: May 11, 2013 and Nov. 5, 2013.

"No one does more to protect our freedom and right to vote than the men and women of our armed services," Steen said. "So we must do everything we can to ensure they can participate in the very process they are serving and fighting to protect and defend."

Paper 'n Ink... finding the cure...

By Lynn Brisendine
When I was in High School, not quite 50 years ago, a joke made the rounds which was sick humor at its best.

On a cold morning in Russia, the Premier Nikita Khrushchev was informed that the wart on his nose was cancer. He decides that he doesn't have long to live and if he can't go on, then no one else should either. So, he pushes the red button and begins an all out nuclear attack. The missiles fly...

While this action was taking place, deep in the outback of Kansas, a lab researcher rushes from his lab and proclaims...Eureka, I have discovered the cure for cancer....

Remembering Khrushchev, it is easy to recall the mole beside his nose. So the joke had some reality involved. Why the joke's author decided on rural Kansas as the site of the cure is anyone's guess.

Curing cancer has long been a dream of the human race. The disease, in so many dreaded forms, has plagued mankind as long as we have been around.

Recently, a television commercial, I'm not sure what it is promoting, begins with a fellow telling his audience that two out of three cancer patients are cured. He goes on to say that the fight isn't over until the third person in the equation was also cured.

Every year we observe a special day where we "walk for the cure." It has become a large event held in the park. Lots of people, of every description, race, gender, a true cross section of our community, walks the first lap, these fortunate folks are cancer survivors. It is noteworthy that every year more of these survivors show up and begin the trek around the track. Most have big grins. All have fought personal battles that only they can understand and celebrate.

Scientists have made some brilliant breakthroughs, many of them coming just within the last decade.

The modern fight against these multiple diseases we term cancer began 150 years ago. Every year since, advances have been made to treat people. Figuring out how mutant cells begin, multiply and destroy healthy tissue was a start at developing ways and drugs to disrupt the harmful effects.

Using an internet search engine, I asked about the ongoing fight and if a cure is close at hand. I found an interview that I remember viewing a few months back that tells the tale better than I can.

"Fareed Zakaria speaks with Ronald DePinho, president of the world's largest cancer center, MD Anderson in Houston, about the future of cancer research, and whether a cure is within

reach. This is an edited version of his interview on Global Public Square.

"You believe that we are at a point where we could actually finally cure cancer?"

"I think we're at a major turning point in the history of cancer medicine where we have a very deep understanding of how it comes about, and, if it is established, how to deal with it, and we have game-changing technological advances that allow us to do much better care, accurate care, of cancer patients.

"What is the game-changing technology? What's happened? You say this has happened, really, in the last five years.

"Well, there have been major events. And what's unusual about this period in science history, is that it's occurred in a narrow window and across a very broad front. So it's not one technology. It's the fact that we can sequence genomes, the entire genome, your entire tumor profile, in a few hours for a few hundred dollars — what took billions of dollars and a decade. We have the ability to analyze those data through very sophisticated computational structures and artificial intelligence."

The fight against the dreaded Big C has gone in so many different directions that just trying to keep up a little bit is practically impossible. Drugs to kill rebelling cells are numerous and specific. Radiation, a treatment which goes back over a century, is also being used to target and destroy tumors. But the most amazing and probably most promising ideas to defeat this ancient monster go into the cell structure itself and manipulate genes which make up individual DNA strands seeing hopeful results and the promise of more cures to come.

All of this is good news, no doubt. But, two out of three still leaves a lot of folks who aren't fortunate to take treatment and return to the non-cancer world. Which simply stated, points out some real and dreaded facts. Some of these cells gone wild are tough to deal with and hard to eradicate.

Treatments, too, are a struggle. Chemotherapy and radiation are months long ordeals, not for sissies. Killing cancer means, in too many cases, nearly killing the patient. While these sessions of drugs and radiation are not nearly the ordeals they once were, they continue to be tough days and months for many. Just taking a shower becomes a struggle. But, in the end, for a lot of us, the results are glorious. Hearing that Oncologist utter the words "complete remission" is a wonderful experience.

Much of the credit for the race to a cure can be given to the American Cancer Society. It is one of the charity organizations which sees a great deal of the money raised actually go into the effort to find a cure.

Finding the cure is no longer a dream of the future, now it is an ongoing fact.

Wright Words...

By Dustin Wright
Sentinel Managing Editor

In Harper Lee's American Classic, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, primary character Atticus Finch was quoted in the fiction novel as saying "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view - until you climb into his skin and walk around in it."

I've recently "considered" — actually lived the experience — of what it's like to be deaf.

A few weeks back, I came down with a rarity in my life — a serious cold — which knocked me down for several days.

I am blaming said illness on my "pride and joy" 3-year-old son, who had his touch of the sniffles and cough several days prior, but that's another story for another time.

As I was preparing for bed one Sunday evening, I laid down under the blankets and closed my eyes.

Then it happened.

"Gargle, gargle, gargle."

It was the sound of my ears clogging up.

Typically keen on my ability to hear all things that go "bump" in the night, I suddenly went "deaf."

I couldn't hear a thing. Not the heater of my three-bedroom house running. Not the sound of my son mumbering and breathing heavy sighs in his sleep from one bedroom away.

Nothing. I immediately sprung from my bed and charged down the hall to my bathroom. I had to combat this, since the last time I can recall an ear incident of the magnitude was when I was child, not much older than my own.

To the medicine cabinet I went, searching through my bachelor's pad ration of medication.

Ibuprofen? No, that's not going to work, I am not in any pain at all. I just can't hear!

Zantac? I don't have heartburn tonight, and I don't think that will do anything to cure my instant deafness.

Vicks Vapor Rub? I'm not coughing my lungs off and I the days of

placing a few dabs undemeath my nostrils while changing Jeremy's nasty baby diapers are long gone thanks to successful potty training techniques.

What the heck am I going to do? Off to the computer in the kitchen. I don't have the answers, but I know Google does.

A few clicks of the mouse, a few keystrokes on the laptop, and I am back to researching the latest in medical breakthroughs to solve my medical mystery.

"Try yawning, chewing gum or swallowing, as the body's natural movement in the ears, nose and throat will force your ear canals to open up on their own," I read aloud, but couldn't hear myself.

Being sleepy as it was, yawning was a no-brainer but offered no relief. Off to the kitchen counter I go in search of a pack of gum I know had been sitting around for a few days.

A few sticks of wintergreen gum later while watching some late night sports news, and still yawning, still no luck. I can see what the highlights were on tv, but the muffled commentary made me want to frantically search for the closed caption button on my remote.

Maybe a big glass of water will do the trick.

No, all that made me do was go back to the bathroom some time later in search of further relief, still leaving me deaf to my surroundings.

Over the next several days, and

numerous Google searches for home remedies, I tried everything I could to relieve my acute deafness.

The placement of sweet oil, hydrogen peroxide, olive oil, and over the counter ear medications — all at different intervals — worked to no avail.

Without a physician's visit, I was doomed to be deaf for the rest of my life.

Which, some days, might not be a bad thing come to think of it!

After a week or so of muffled sounds, high pitched voices and extreme concentration on my part to make sure I understood general conversations with those I encountered, my hearing slowly came back.

My ears began to pop more than a "the big finish" of a fireworks show.

Relief!

My hearing has been restored for the most part, after my lengthy battle with this nemesis, with the occasional muffled moment or two, but after a few yawning techniques and a couple of "holding my nostrils, keeping my mouth closed and exhaling air from my lungs to the point where I almost black out" techniques, I can hear just like I had prior to this battle.

In the end, I will chalk up the victory of this battle to that nagging cold.

Well played, sir. Well played, indeed. You may have won the battle, but I will win this war.

Just don't mumble anything and if you see me slip away and almost pass out, just know I am clearing out my ears, to better hear you with.

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