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March is Red Cross Month

MARCH 25TH 2011 BY NEWS

March is Red Cross Month

By JO ANN EMERSON

March has been celebrated as Red Cross Month in the United States since 1943, and the role of this humanitarian organization in our communities continues to grow.

Most of us hear about the Red Cross when disaster strikes. In the darkest hours of our communities, the American Red Cross is a swift source of relief. The organization provides food, water, shelter and aid in the wake of tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, earthquakes and any other disaster that can befall us. Yet the mission of the American Red Cross is broader than just emergency relief. Red Cross volunteers also support the armed services, our veterans and their families. They teach lifesaving skills, like CPR, to people we hope will never have to use them. The Red Cross is an important partner in international disease prevention efforts. And, of course, the collection, testing and supply of blood donations across our country is a mainstay of the Red Cross mission.

For 130 years, the Red Cross has been one of the leading humanitarian organizations in our nation and around the world. It is a true partnership: our communities depend upon the Red Cross in their hour of greatest need, and the Red Cross depends upon the support of the public to be always ready to serve in a crisis.

Even in Southern Missouri, we have seen the quick response of the Red Cross in the wake of severe weather, and we would surely rely on their rapid response with essential

supplies if a major earthquake should strike the communities within the New Madrid Seismic Zone. Without a doubt, the Red Cross will be on the scene in any American community where people need their assistance. The organization has over one million volunteers and more than 650 chapters in the U.S. Every year, the Red Cross responds to some 67,000 disasters where relief operations are needed.

So March is set aside as a time to recognize the unique work of the Red Cross whether or not there is a disaster in the news. As with any kind of preparedness, the hard work is accomplished before catastrophe strikes. The stockpiling of supplies, the readiness of volunteers, the plan – ready to implement at a moment’s notice – are all constructed well in advance of the time when they are needed.

In Southern Missouri, countless community volunteers work to make this level of organization possible. Nationally, Americans combine to support the Red Cross with their time and talent for relief efforts around the world in addition to their daily work in training, emergency preparedness and prevention. Abroad, the Red Cross is an international symbol for the humanitarian efforts of an organization which boasts tremendous support from the American people.

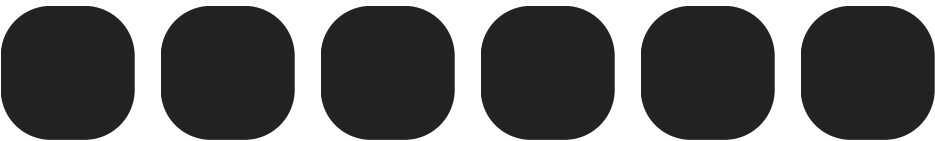
For this important work to continue to benefit our region and our nation, we must recognize their efforts rain or shine, so to speak. And let’s all hope for sunny days ahead.

Jo Ann Emerson, R-Cape Girardeau, represents the Eighth Congressional District of Missouri in the United States House of Representatives

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In Defense of Rural America

MARCH 11TH 2011 BY NEWS

In Defense of Rural America

By JO ANN EMERSON

As I work to represent our rural congressional district in the U.S. House of Representatives, I encounter policy issues from time to time that I find my colleagues from urban areas are less familiar with than I. For instance, a couple of years ago, I found myself explaining the silliness of federal regulations that penalized American farmers for the “greenhouse gas effect” of placing an acre of U.S. farmland in conservation status by charging them for an imaginary acre of deforestation in the Brazilian rainforest. Some of my colleagues from urban areas just didn’t grasp the issue and others didn’t care because the rule didn’t directly affect the cities they represent. That’s just one example of many.

I try my best to educate my colleagues on the importance of, say, sound energy policy for rural America, where our economy simply uses more energy for agriculture, transportation and manufacturing than the economy in places such as San Francisco or New York City. And I usually find that there is quite a lot that people from urban areas don’t understand about rural issues, and some representatives from those places have never been to a real working farm or visited a county with fewer than 8,000 people living in it.

I have long wondered about the origins of those misconceptions. Usually, it is just a straightforward lack of familiarity with rural communities or rural economies or rural health care. That’s understandable, and many of my colleagues in Congress really try hard to expand their understanding.

But there is also a prejudice against rural America in the media, I have found, that

perpetuate myths about places like Southern Missouri. A blogger for The Washington Post, Ezra Klein, gave yet another voice to that prejudice last week in a post he titled: “Why we still need cities,” (as though our cities are going anywhere).

Mr. Klein writes about the book he is reviewing: “...cities make us smarter, more productive and more innovative. To put it plainly, they make us richer. And the evidence in favor of this point is very, very strong.” And later, to make sure no one misses his point about how he thinks the safety net for American agriculture is a waste of money, Mr. Klein says in a dialog with Ag Secretary Tom Vilsack: “My understanding of why I pay 6 or 7 percent of my paycheck for food and people in other countries pay more is that I’m richer than people in other countries, my paycheck is bigger.”

There’s more, but the salient points are these: that Mr. Klein has no clue about the innovations in energy, science and agriculture which take place in rural areas and at research universities in rural states. He doesn’t understand our entrepreneurialism, and he has no grasp of the economic importance of the fact that rural America is the only part of our country in which we run a trade surplus.

Most striking is the fact that Mr. Klein has no idea how rich life is in rural America. He doesn’t understand the relationships between our families and our small communities, where every person counts and everyone contributes. The traditions of small towns may not be much different from the traditions in big cities: our Fourth of July parades, our church picnics, and our active community organizations. Cities have these things, too. But there is a great difference in the fact that we know our neighbors’ names, we know how their kids are doing, and we step in to help them out when a member of their family suffers an illness or gets deployed far from home in the military.

There is a lot to love about rural America, a lot to fight for, and a lot that some folks in cities just don’t know they are missing.

Jo Ann Emerson, R-Cape Girardeau, represents the Eighth Congressional District of Missouri in the United States House of Representatives

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No To The Mandate

FEBRUARY 18TH 2011 BY NEWS

No To The Mandate

By Jo Ann Emerson As the House of Representatives charts a fiscal course for the country, there is one thing I know we should not be spending taxpayers' hard-earned money on: the health care mandate.

Last week, I offered an amendment to legislation which will fund the operations of the federal government through the rest of the year. My amendment is simple enough. It says the Internal Revenue Service cannot spend any money to enforce the individual mandate to carry insurance which is contained in the health care bill.

It is the first in my many efforts to prevent the health care law from being implemented, coming between patients and their doctors, hurting jobs and directing a windfall to the name-brand pharmaceuticals and big insurance companies who lobbied so hard to get this bill.

Why start at the IRS? A look at President Obama's FY 2012 budget request for the IRS offers ample evidence. U.S. News and World Report found that the budget asks for \$359 million and 1,054 new employees at the IRS to fund the requirements of the health care

bill – and that is just for 2012. And the IRS freely admits that the Affordable Care Act contains the biggest set of changes to the tax law in more than 20 years.

The provision of the health care law dealing only with an additional tax on Americans who visit tanning salons will cause the IRS to hire 81 new full time employees at a cost of \$11.5 million. Their job description will be to focus on the tax reporting of 25,000 U.S. tanning salons – many of them small businesses. Yes, the IRS is targeting individual sectors of our economy for enforcement of the health care law.

But the individual mandate enables the IRS to do to ordinary Americans the same basic thing it plans to do in individual economic sectors. Thousands of IRS agents will be directed to the task of filtering through Americans' individual tax returns to discover whether or not they are in compliance with the health care law. They will audit documents and question taxpayers, and their authority to do so rests on a single point of policy contained in the law: American citizens are required to buy this product, and can be punished by the federal government with taxes if they do not.

This is a new thing in our laws, and we do not yet know if the Constitution even allows it. Regardless of what the courts decide, we do know that this part of the law has already been ruled upon by the American people. We do not want and will not suffer a mandate from government to engage in specific economic activity. We will not give up our freedoms, surrender our free choices, or part with our hard-earned money to support a system of health care designed by and operated by a maze of governmental offices, boards, committees, commissions and bureaucracies.

Smaller government starts with less intrusion into the daily lives of U.S. citizens. The health care measure is exactly the opposite: more intrusion, more regulations, more power. The bill is a Goliath, to be sure, but amendments like mine to end the individual mandate may well be the best stone we've got.

Jo Ann Emerson, R-Cape Girardeau, represents the Eighth Congressional District of Missouri in the United States House of Representatives.

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Government ... For The People

FEBRUARY 11TH 2011 BY UNKNOWN

Government ... For The People

By Jo Ann Emerson

I take great pride in representing Southern Missouri in the U.S. House of Representatives. It is an honor to have earned the trust of those I represent and I work hard every day to keep it. An important part of my job as a Member of Congress is traveling to the 28 counties that make up the Eighth District to hear firsthand from those I represent. I enjoy visiting with those who live and work in our communities and listening to their challenges and concerns so I can better represent them.

Shared concerns I continue to hear from employers, small businesses, farmers and those working throughout Southern Missouri are the newly imposed burdens hoisted on them by the growing size and scope of our federal government. Burdens placed on our citizens by federal regulations as well as increasing uncertainty are creating significant challenges and barriers to job creation at a time when we should be encouraging economic growth. Unfortunately, these concerns, expressed best during conversations at coffee shops and storefronts across the nation, are often lost on the appointed, isolated officials creating new policies “inside the Beltway.”

Take for example the 43 new major regulations the Administration introduced last fiscal year alone. It is estimated these regulations would have cost our economy \$26.5 billion. Moreover, a recent report by Senator James Inhofe, of Oklahoma, projected the number of jobs at risk from EPA regulations at 800,000. These regulations represent a significant threat to recent job growth and remain a major source of uncertainty. It is discouraging that when we should be doing everything possible to improve our economic climate, unchecked federal regulatory agencies continue to explore and promulgate new rules and regulations, seemingly answerable only to special interest bureaucrats, not the people who hold the true power of governance.

In last year's House of Representatives, the voice of the people was often ignored. For instance, when EPA proposed expanding the Clean Air Act to unilaterally regulate greenhouse gases, I worked on a bipartisan legislative proposal with Rep. Skelton, of Missouri, and Rep. Peterson, of Minnesota, to stop this unnecessary threat to jobs and our economy. Unfortunately, our proposal to reverse these onerous regulations was never given consideration. However, November brought change and legislative proposals to reign in harmful regulatory proposals will now be considered.

Last week, the House considered a resolution that directs individual committees to review existing, pending, and proposed regulations with a special emphasis on evaluating their effect on jobs and the economy. Strong accountability is essential to better inform the people and aid their representatives in their effort to halt job destroying regulations; an effort which is likely to lead to the Appropriations Committee and Congress's power of the purse.

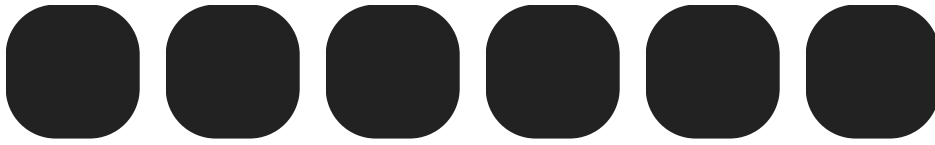
No one better understands the effect that unnecessary, burdensome and often duplicative regulations have on Southern Missouri's economy more than our small business owners, farmers, workers and local officials. And think about this, when was the last time you saw a federal regulator visiting your community to listen to your concerns? As Lincoln eulogized the dead at Gettysburg, he recommitted our government to be of, by, and for the people. This House should not hesitate to remind unelected decision makers in government of that fact.

Jo Ann Emerson, R-Cape Girardeau, represents the Eighth Congressional District of Missouri in the United States House of Representatives.

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Reconsidering the Health Care Law

FEBRUARY 05TH 2011 BY UNKNOWN

Reconsidering the Health Care Law

By Jo Ann Emerson

An effort to repeal the health care law failed in a Senate vote, but a second ruling that the measure is unconstitutional sent the signal last week that something will have to give. We cannot preserve this law which costs too much, expands government too far, and places too much unnecessary strain on employers in our American economy.

In the past year, the health care law has been both attacked and defended as a tax measure, which administration officials agree that it both is and is not. Small businesses have wondered that this law can promise health insurance for all, but cause them to drop insurance coverage for their workers. And Americans have watched the U.S. court system closely as it attempts to stop the federal government from penalizing them for choosing to not engage in the economic activity of purchasing an insurance plan.

It is apparent that the premise and the approach of the health care law were flawed, which is why we are now wrestling in Congress with this imperfect product. By limiting choices in the private market, adding costs and using the tax code for enforcement, the federal

government cannot create a system of health care that coexists with a free society and free markets.

By reforming the law, however, I think we can create a free market system which emphasizes access, cost-effectiveness and fairness. We can promote affordable private insurance and prescription drugs, expand coverage, and keep our status as the world's leading innovator in new health care strategies and technologies.

How do we accomplish this? There are some things we must have, and some things we must not have. First, instead of an individual mandate to carry health insurance through heavily-subsidized government-controlled policies, we should have a system of truly competitive insurance which is flexible, portable and fair. Part of the approach should be incentives for regular checkups and preventative medicine – practices that detect problems early when they are most treatable (saving the patient's health and saving the public's money on expensive, less-effective late stage treatments). The fairness in private insurance comes from reasonable requirements for policies to cover the dependents of their customers up to a certain age, to write policies for individuals even if they have pre-existing conditions, and to maintain coverage even if their customers change jobs, move to a new state, or retire early.

Second, instead of providing special deals to boost profits in the name-brand pharmaceutical industry, our health care system should promote competition and generic alternatives to costly treatments. The approval of a generic drug should not take longer at FDA than the approval of the original name-brand product years before, and patent protections should not be extended simply because the pill is a different shape or color. Even more important, where the health law encourages Medicare Part D beneficiaries to buy name-brands instead of generics in order to get their drug costs covered, we should instead have incentives for Americans who conscientiously attempt to keep their drug costs down, just as they would if they paying were the full cost for their own medicines.

Finally, in order to assure future generations of American retirees have access to health care, we must prevent fiscal shortfalls in the Medicare program without reducing benefits. Accomplishing savings this way will not be easy, but we must address the impending crisis in Medicare which could leave millions of future American seniors without adequate insurance when they will need it most.

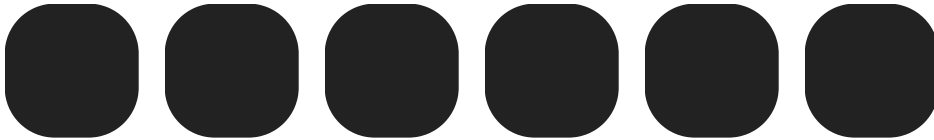
With these outcomes in mind, Congress should start making commonsense changes today to a health care law that has broken trust with the American people and will not pass the tests applied to it in U.S. courts of law.

Jo Ann Emerson, R-Cape Girardeau, represents the Eighth Congressional District of Missouri in the United States House of Representatives.

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