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If You Like It, You CAN'T Keep It

JUNE 17TH 2011 BY NEWS

If You Like It, You CAN'T Keep It

By Jo Ann Emerson

One of the most-repeated assurances of the great health care debate was that Americans who liked their health insurance could keep it. People who viewed that promise with skepticism, like me, have a new report to confirm their suspicions.

Now, a new report by McKinsey and Company, reported on in The Wall Street Journal, indicates that 78 million Americans with employer-provided health insurance could be forced out of their coverage. Half of employers surveyed said they would probably or definitely make changes to their health plans when the health care law goes fully into effect in 2014.

Some 158 million Americans get their health insurance at work. In many cases, health insurance for entire families is tied to the employment of one person in the household. Tax advantages and group buying power have always posed incentives for insurers, employers and workers to cooperate. This model comprises a substantial part of our insurance system, and the health insurance law on the horizon is poised to do great harm to this model.

The driving rationale for Obamacare was to expand access to insurance, but once again we are talking about how insurance will be changed, limited and cancelled as a result of the law. Although no one can say with complete certainty what the state of the insurance market will be in 2014, we do know that Americans who get their insurance at work have

reason to be concerned. So do senior citizens who have supplemental Medicare insurance. And the vast majority of Americans will sooner or later fall into one of these two categories, if not both of them. And it is not just McKinsey cautioning Americans about the availability of insurance. The non-partisan Congressional Budget Office reported in March that seven million Americans used to getting their insurance through their employer will likely no longer have that option. Benefits for workers will simply no longer include insurance for those unlucky millions and their families.

And in many more cases, keeping a health insurance plan will depend directly on Americans' ability to afford it. A plan with premiums that increase 50 percent isn't really the same plan as it was when your family could afford it, especially for Americans without a steady source of income. In order to have an effective market for health insurance, Americans deserve choices which are in close competition with one another. Employer plans are a crucial part of the insurance continuum. Benefits are important not only to employees, no matter if the company they work for is large or small, but also to the employers. Everyone wants healthy, happy workers.

We should also want a healthy insurance system, one with low administrative costs, plenty of choice and a priority on patient care. It is true we do not have that today, but it is also unfortunately clear that access to the insurance we have today will not be possible in the future if the health care law is allowed to take full effect.

The debate has run full-circle. A bill to expand access to health insurance has become a law which will take insurance away from working families.

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

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Protecting Our Grand Old Flag

JUNE 03RD 2011 BY NEWS

Protecting Our Grand Old Flag

BY Jo Ann Emerson

Every June 14th, Flag Day passes without much fanfare. There is no three-day weekend, no fireworks, and no parade down Main Street. But Flag Day must be one of the most important, if overlooked, celebrations of the year. More than 20 years have passed since the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1989 that the desecration of the American flag is protected speech under the First Amendment. That decision overruled laws protecting the flag in 48 states and the District of Columbia. Almost immediately after the ruling, landslide votes in the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate affirmed the Flag Protection Act, which was again struck down by the Supreme Court.

The most fitting way to resolve the impasse over whether we should protect our flag is to take up a constitutional amendment. With approval by the Congress, the President and states, an amendment would impress on our nation's rule of law the sanctity of the American flag. I've authored legislation in Congress to accomplish this goal. Others will argue against an amendment on free speech grounds, but I don't think they realize how hurtful an action it is to desecrate the American flag. Throughout our Southern Missouri communities, we have veterans' organizations, service groups and educational programs which open and close their meetings with a salute to our flag and the Pledge of Allegiance. It's how each day begins in the House of Representatives. I've never been to a baseball game without pausing for a moment of quiet reflection on the greatness of our

nation and our promise to keep her free.

Generations of Americans have fought and died under the banner of our country, and our servicemembers risk life and limb with the flag emblazoned on the sleeve of their uniform. No court, no public building, no classroom is complete without our flag. Aside from the many locations where you see the American flag and its many uses in our civic life, the meaning of our national banner cannot be understated. For those who served in uniform, the flag represents the nation for which they made untold sacrifices. Their compatriots who fell on the field of battle were wrapped in the flag at their funerals back home.

The field of stars on our flag represents the union of the 50 states, and each stripe harkens us back to the Founders and their colonies – united in a dream of freedom. Some say our flag can be desecrated because it represents the very freedom to burn the flag. But this argument is too misguided for me and for the vast majority of Americans. If we destroy the symbols of our freedoms, we are also destroying our freedoms.

No political statement is worth insulting the tradition of liberty upon which our American enterprise is founded. We are free because we choose to be free, and if we value our freedom we will be sure our flag endures.

Every state and most of our elected officials would agree with that premise and affirm the need to protect our American flag. With my legislation, I am giving them a chance to give our flag the same comfort and security we Americans enjoy as free people endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights.

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

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The Pill That Works Is The One You Can Afford

MAY 21ST 2011 BY NEWS

The Pill That Works Is The One You Can Afford

Calls to improve the efficiency and accountability of our country's health care system aren't new, but they shouldn't always cause political division. The political treatment yields few outcomes and precludes many – including, too often, compromise. Yet good public policy is important to take care of patients. We need a new national discussion about getting the most out of the medicines we consume.

Congress could immediately begin to reduce excessive spending on prescription drugs and help to lower drug premiums for beneficiaries in Medicare and Medicaid. This is possible by increasing the use of high-quality, affordable medications.

The value of expanding access to affordable medications is apparent when consumers pay less over the counter at the pharmacy or pay a much lower co-payment on prescriptions. They immediately become more likely to finish their entire course of treatment, to not split or skip pills, and to consult more frequently with their health care providers.

And for their part, health care providers, as well as purchasers and consumers, also have come to recognize and depend upon the enormous therapeutic and economic value of affordable pharmaceuticals to the nation's health. Everyone understands that affordable pharmaceuticals provide quality medical care, while also enabling investment in other aspects of care: new medical technologies, IT, and innovative therapies and research.

Proper and complete regimens of affordable medicines — whether brand name or generic — keep Americans healthy and stave off costly medical and surgical interventions. Affordable health care is necessary to expand access to the system to all Americans as well as to reduce the need for expensive treatments of preventable late-stage illnesses and conditions. At a time when changes to Medicare and Medicaid seem imminent in order to secure the future of these programs, why not start with the most reasonable solutions?

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services has estimated, for example, that even as little as a two percent increase in generic utilization by Medicaid would save the program more than \$1.3 billion. A 5 percent increase could save nearly \$3.3 billion. With governors across the country being forced to make difficult choices to balance state budgets, billions of dollars in savings are simply left on the table.

Today, thousands of affordable medications are available, and all are manufactured and inspected under the FDA's strict quality guidelines. Such drugs account for 78 percent of all prescriptions dispensed in the United States, yet only 25 percent of all dollars spent on prescriptions.

The non-partisan Congressional Budget Office estimates that dispensing affordable medications reduced total prescription drug costs in Medicare Part D by about \$33 billion in 2007 alone.

As more Americans turn to affordable medications to obtain the beneficial results they have come to expect, our government health care programs should do the same. We must fully realize the enormous therapeutic and economic value affordable medications offer the nation's health care system. It's a worthy and achievable goal.

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

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The Floodwaters Recede

MAY 13TH 2011 BY NEWS

The Floodwaters Recede

The Mississippi River crest has passed, our rivers are slowly moving back within their banks, and the enormous task ahead of us is being revealed as the floodwaters recede.

Across Missouri, federal and state officials are assessing the damage from these storms and floods. A major federal disaster has been declared in the counties hardest-hit, and more may be added before the month ends. Homes have been swept away, farmland scoured of its topsoil, highways washed out and one enormous levee blown to smithereens.

The Mississippi River flood is to Pinhook, Missouri, as Hurricane Katrina was to New Orleans. The town today is empty, totally evacuated, and no one knows when families will be able to return home. The cries from environmental extremists are the same now as they were then. “Don’t rebuild New Orleans” has become “don’t rebuild Pinhook.” But we can’t ask these Americans to permanently surrender their property rights in a place which was their home. And we can no more ask people in New Madrid and Mississippi Counties to live without the protection of a levee than we can ask people in St. Louis and Memphis to do so.

In Mississippi County, the productive ground of the New Madrid floodway grew roughly

half of the crops in 2010. In 2011, that likely means the county's agriculture economy will shrink by 50 percent at a cost of \$60-70 million. The economic effect of this disaster is potentially devastating.

Although the floodway is the single-biggest disaster in our congressional district, there are many more instances where the destruction of a home, a road or a local economy is nearly total.

In Morehouse, an effort to save Highway 60 from being washed out by floodwaters resulted in middle-of-the-night evacuations for hundreds of residents. Some didn't even get the notice. And dozens of homes and thousands of acres of farmland were put several feet underwater for days. Just as in New Orleans, mold is starting to grow inside flooded structures.

In Wayne County, historic levels at the Wappapello Dam resulted in 400 feet of Highway T being totally washed out, and a key transportation route in our congressional district becoming impassable for months.

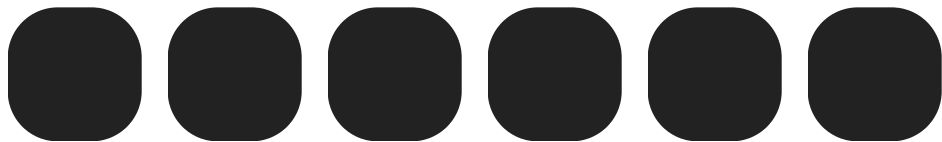
Rivers and lakes throughout our district have spilled over into nearby communities, washing out culverts, covering roads, and menacing the local economy. In most cases, the evidence of the flood is in debris, in a waterline, in visible erosion to a roadbed. In many cases, local communities have set things to rights in short order. In others, the resources to make needed repairs are not yet in place. Our role, however, is to be advocates for our region until the response to this disaster is complete. Region-wide, the Flood of 2011 tested the flood control infrastructure which protects 4 million Americans and hundreds of billions of dollars of economic activity. We must also use this historic flood to make the much-needed case that modernization and maintenance of our flood protection system has never in the history of our nation been more important. To do anything less is to tempt an awful fate.

As the floodwaters recede, the memory of the disaster will stay with us. Recovery will take months in many cases, years in others. It will demand perseverance and insist that we all work together to assure that the communities we love will continue to be wonderful places where we make our homes, earn our living, raise our children, and provide for our nation. Two things are in our favor: we're not alone, and we're up to the task.

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

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Big River - Little City

MAY 06TH 2011 BY NEWS

Big River - Little City

By Jo Ann Emerson

The floods which have ravaged the Eighth Congressional District in Missouri and the midsection of the entire country are serious business. These storms and floods have killed hundreds of people, injured hundreds more, destroyed homes and businesses, and forever changed the topography of our part of the nation.

Entire communities are besieged by floodwaters, the flood protection system up and down the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers is under unprecedented strain, and we face a disaster of major proportion.

To read big-city newspapers, however, is to grossly misunderstand what is happening in our congressional district. They leave readers with the impression that flooding along the Mississippi River is the only cause for concern, leaving out inland floods like those along

the White River, the Black River, and at Wappapello and Clearwater Lakes. Our congressional district is half the size of the state of Indiana, but today it is more appropriate to phrase the comparison differently: we are twice the size of Lake Erie.

Another simplification common to the national press coverage of the flooding of the New Madrid floodway is that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers faced a choice between saving people in Cairo, Illinois and farmland in Missouri. By that math, the choice ought to be easy, right? But in fact, there are communities in the New Madrid floodway where families make their homes, people go to work, and businesses have buildings and assets. From the agricultural activities in the New Madrid floodway, hundreds of millions of dollars in economic value is added to our state.

A blogger/reporter from Time magazine even went so far as to say that blowing up the Birds Point levee and flooding 130,000 acres in Missouri was a good thing because “predominantly white and well-off landowners” would suffer while “predominantly black and poor residents of Cairo” would be saved. In Michael Grunwald’s ill-considered words, “This is a welcome reversal.” The word despicable comes to mind, but those remarks also sadden me for the residents of Pinhook, Missouri, the African-American community which is home to most all of the residents in the New Madrid floodway. For years and years, we have been fighting to improve the levees that would keep annual floodwaters out of Pinhook, water that forces children there to ride to school in flatbed trailers rather than buses. When Mr. Grunwald’s “justice” was served, their homes were destroyed. There is no better advertisement for the ignorance and insensitivity of mainstream media.

Finally, you might be tempted to believe from the headlines that the danger has passed, and this is not the case, either. Floodwaters remain at historic levels for historic durations. We will be anxiously watching weather forecasts for home and for upriver in weeks and maybe months to come. It will be a long time before floodwaters recede. Most serious is the fact that a strained flood protection system made up of levees, locks and dams is even further challenged by its age. The reluctance to modernize our system is the result of tough times for state, local and federal budgets, but the zealotry of environmental extremists who would rather revert our floodplain to fish habitat plays a role in public policy, too.

Fish and big-city newspapers are a pretty good pair. Maybe that’s how the “fish-wrap” got its name.

Photo Above: Jo Ann Emerson listened - and watched - intently as Maj. Gen. Michael

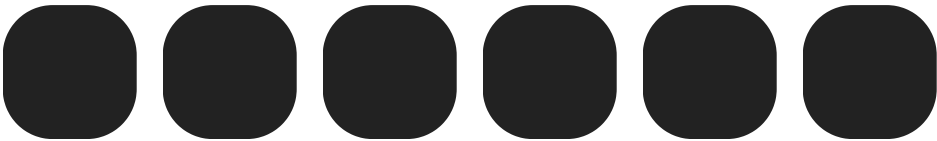
Walsh of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers announced he had issued the order that activated floodway and blew a breach in the river levee.

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

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