

OPINION

Find out where candidates stand on Medicaid expansion

The 2020 election is picking up steam in Jackson County; mail-in voting has begun, and the on-site early voting period starts Feb. 13.

As voters begin wading through the ocean of candidates vying for seats on the state level, we would urge they look at their stance on Medicaid expansion.

The battle over Medicaid expansion in North Carolina has led to a budget impasse that will face the General Assembly when they return to session in April.

Medicaid expansion may not be the solution to all the health challenges facing the state, but it would, no pun intended, cure a host of ills.

It would also put North Carolina back on track with most of the rest of the country. Kansas recently became the 37th state to endorse Medicaid expansion. Under the Affordable Care Act, 90 percent of the cost would be shouldered by the federal government. According to Gov. Roy Cooper, the remaining 10 percent would be covered by insurance plans and hospitals.

Expansion would help close the coverage gap in North Carolina for those ineligible for Medicaid by the previous rules but don't earn enough to qualify for ACA's subsidies and credits designed to help middle-class Americans obtain health insurance.

The main arguments critics make regarding Medicaid expansion is that the federal government might someday not cover its share. There's always that risk, we suppose, but the federal government not ponying up never seems to be an argument regarding other spending, like road projects or going to war.

At any rate, Medicaid expansion wouldn't mean more taxes, since North Carolinians are paying those taxes anyway but not getting the return of the benefits of expansion.

For Jackson County, those benefits would include more citizens covered, more jobs and a boost to tax coffers.

But more, it would be a huge boost to the bottom line of the county's health and those on the front lines of dealing with the opioid and mental health crises.

Steve Heatherly, who serves as president and CEO of Harris Regional Hospital and Swain Community Hospital, said "Medicaid expansion would aid in the coverage issue for at-risk populations we serve and are disproportionate to rural areas.

"Substance abuse in general is at epidemic proportions, and that's directly linked to the behavioral health crisis; one begets the other. We're seeing it every day in both ER departments, folks who do not have enough access to behavioral health professionals, not enough of a connection with primary care ... you get a subset of patients who never get the treatment they need, they don't get it in a proactive manner, and those patients end up in crisis. Folks with no resources for preventative medicine show up really, really sick."

Again, Medicaid expansion won't solve all the problems we face in health care today, but it can provide more people with coverage and provide the all-important touchstone between a person and the health care system, a touchstone that can fend off a person spinning into crisis. It's the old "ounce of prevention, pound of cure" argument.

So, when heading off to the polls, be sure to know where your candidate stands on Medicaid expansion. If they're against it, find out why.

And find out what their own plans are to deal with lack of insurance coverage and how to get basic care to people.

Working together for forest restoration

If good things do indeed come to those who wait, the soon to be released draft management plan for the Pisgah and Nantahala forests is going to be special. The plan will provide the framework for how the 1.1 million acres of the forest in the Southern Appalachia and their resources will be managed for the next 20 years.

For seven years, a collaborative group called the Nantahala-Pisgah Forest Partnership (NPF) has worked through the U.S. Forest Service's (USFS) public process to assist them in the formation of their management goals and objectives. NPF partners consist of diverse groups representing wildlife, recreation, forest products, conservation interests and county governments that are seeking common ground, while recognizing that our national forests are utilized by a diverse community with many different needs.

Over the seven years, the NPF has spent countless hours around the table. Member groups who are historically at odds with each other and whose values are sometimes in conflict, dug deep to find common ground and together made important recommendations to the Forest Service.

Through a better understanding of each other's views, NPF members began to see a path forward that reflected the need to use timber harvests to restore forested ecosystems that are threatened by a lack of biodiversity, while at the same time protecting special places and rare species.

NPF recognized that there is so much restoration needed within the 1.1 million acres of forestland, that by choosing specific areas to work within, they could keep conflict at bay over the lifetime of the plan and beyond.

In October 2017, the public submitted final comments to the USFS before they began writing the draft plan and environmental assessment required for integration of the different management plan options. The NPF worked diligently, meeting for full days once a month, to comprehensively match stakeholder values with planning that would achieve recreation, conservation and restoration goals. You can read what the NPF submitted to the Forest Service and read their consensus statements at <https://npforestpartnership.org/draft-plan>. NPF members realized that of the acreage up for debate, the members agreed on 83 percent of the forestland while the diverse interests did not intersect in a way that caused tension to rise above reason. Even on those few remaining contentious places



Lang Hornthal

COMMENTARY



Kevin Colburn

across the forests, we strive for balance.

An example of how a collaborative approach to land management can provide multi-beneficial results can be observed in the USFS ongoing 12 Mile Project. The project combines the need for elk habitat, timber revenue, wildlife corridors and recreational trails with the conserving of old growth habitat and restoring open woodlands. The scale of this 2,300-acre project, the largest ever on either forest, is the type of collaborative land management success story for which the NPF advocates.

The NPF has put in the time to find consensus and an approach to managing forests that will appeal to the largest majority of the citizens who own it. We are about to see if the USFS is listening.

When the USFS releases the draft management plan, NPF members and affiliates will be reading the draft documents, supporting the many areas that pave the way for collaborative management and, perhaps, disagreeing with those things we feel allow for or inspire unnecessary conflict on the forest. We encourage you to do the same and provide comments, attend community events and fully participate

within the 90-day period that will follow. This is the time for everyone to stand united for a plan that is in the best interest of the health and longevity of our National Forests. If we truly want the Pisgah and Nantahala to remain special for everyone, we must work together. Keep your eyes open for when the drafts are released and reach out to your colleagues to learn more about how they are participating in the 90-day comment period. Learn more from the NPF website, www.npforestpartnership.org.

The NPF continues to meet monthly, as there is still work to be done and our job will not end once the plan is finalized. Our members are committed to the implementation of the final plan and finding ways to leverage resources and ideas in support of projects like 12 Mile. The NPF is thankful for our Forest Service and all their hard work throughout this cumbersome process. We are optimistic about the future of Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests.

Lang Hornthal is the communications director with the nonprofit forest management group EcoForesters, and Kevin Colburn is the national stewardship director for American Whitewater. Both are members of the Nantahala Pisgah Forest Partnership.

Letters to the Editor

New video board fails to deliver

To the Editor:

There was an article published in the Jan. 2 Sylva Herald that described the new video board coming to the Ramsey Center. We arrived in Cullowhee in time for the 1966-67 basketball season. And yes, we did see Henry Logan play in Reid Gym for two years and he was the best small player we have ever seen and we have been basketball fans of Western Carolina ever since.

A four-sided video board sounded great. Imagine my disappointment when I attended the WCU vs. Mercer game on Jan. 11. Mind you, I sit about the 10th row up from the floor and about opposite the top of the three-point line. Much of the information on the video board is in such small letters/numbers that I cannot read the info.

I don't need to watch the game on the video board when I can see it on the floor. Have you noticed those who show up for WCU games when the students don't? Probably well over 50 percent, based on the gray hair in the crowd, are well over 50.

Why would anyone design a video board like that when so many in the audience can't read it? I checked with others whose vision is better than mine and they had the same issue. Sorry to be so critical, but maybe input from a cross section of the attending population would have been prudent. I'm certain we'll have to live with this video board for some time. Guess I'll just have to bring some binoculars so I won't have to keep asking my husband who made that foul and what is the score.

Marcia Woosley,
Sylva

Second Amendment issues in context

To the Editor:

Firearm legislation proposed in Virginia would ban assault weapons, bump stocks, high-capacity magazines, require background checks on all gun sales (91 percent of Virginians support this), limit handgun purchases to one a month, increase the penalty for leaving unsecured firearms near children, require that a lost or stolen firearm be reported in 24 hours and allow courts to temporarily prohibit access to firearms by someone found to pose a danger to themselves or others.

In light of the gun violence in the U.S., don't most of these ideas seem like common sense? A fabricated quote is circulating stating that "the Virginia governor says he intends to raid your house and kill you when you don't give him what he wants." The governor didn't say that! This is fearmongering, as is "they want to abolish the Second Amendment" and "the government's gonna get your guns."

Really? How could that happen with the millions of privately owned firearms in the country? In early colonial days firearms were used for hunting and fighting native Americans. Prior to the Revolution, all colonies except Pennsylvania required most able-bodied men to own firearms, to be called for training and to defend their communities from attack.

These were the earliest U.S. militia. The Sons of Liberty included Samuel Adams, John Hancock and Paul Revere. They were grassroots instigators who used civil disobedi-

ence, threats and some violence to intimidate those loyalists and to push moderate colonial leaders to confront England.

The Boston Massacre was in 1770 when more than 2,000 British troops occupied Boston to enforce tax laws. The confrontation resulted in five dead colonists and six wounded. The Boston Tea Party of 1774 was followed by the birth of the Minutemen - reorganized militia who were trained so they could "turn out" at a minute's notice. When George Washington arrived near Boston following the Battle of Bunker Hill (June 17, 1775) he developed the militia he found there into a regular army. The Continental Army, under Washington, was established by Congress that same year.

The Second Amendment was adopted in 1787. James Madison, father of our Constitution, wrote in 1789 that "a well regulated-militia, composed of the body of the people, trained to arms, is the best and most natural defense of a free country." He went on to explain that well-regulated means trained. How many who own military-style firearms are well trained in their use? Do they use them for hunting? The purpose of bearing arms and having a militia was defending the country The country, not individuals! The colonists were fighting against foreign domination. Prior to 1775 there was no Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines or Coast Guard. Please check facts and understand context. Like the folks in Richmond on MLK Day, if we disagree let us disagree agreeably without violence.

Last year there were more than 400 mass shootings. North Carolina ranks 21st in gun deaths That is our current context.

Gene Tunnell,
Sylva

Performance of SPD draws praise

To the Editor:

I would like to start by thanking everyone who attended the Sylva Women's March on Jan. 18 despite the cold and wet weather. We had a great lineup of speakers that warmed our hearts despite the cold outside.

I also would like to highlight the work of Chris Hatton, our new Sylva Police chief, and the police department. The department has been professional and a real pleasure to work with.

Their hard work has shown us what community policing should look like. Community policing requires the police department to build ties and work closely with members of the community. Chief Hatton and his department did just that. He attended a planning meeting prior to our march to discuss safety and the best march route. On the day of the event he and his staff were available and close by and patrolled the area in the rain with a smile.

We are lucky to live in a town where the residents have a good relationship with their police department and where we citizens can approach the chief without any trepidation. They have been true to their vision that is "to inspire trust from our community to protect all of those we serve" and their mission "to serve the community with the highest level of police services with integrity, professionalism, respect and transparency."

Thank you Chief Hatton and your dedicated staff for a job well done.

Nilofer Couture,
Cullowhee

Acts of Kindness

We want to honor the generosity of people in our community. Let us know what you have witnessed.



Jackson's generosity

I am writing to thank Jackson County's residents for sharing the true meaning of Christmas with children around the world. The generosity of Jackson County and the Western North Carolina Area Team enabled us to collect over 18,900 gift-filled shoeboxes - over 1,800 from Jackson County - for Operation Christmas Child, a project of international Christian relief organization Samaritan's Purse. U.S. and international efforts, including Germany, Australia, Canada, U.K., and other sending countries, resulted in shoebox gifts for 10.5 million children around the world.

June Trull, WNC Area Coordinator,
Operation Christmas Child

Send letters to news@thesylvaherald.com.
Tell us about good deeds and acts of kindness that you have seen.

sponsored by

GARY MILLER ATTORNEY AT LAW

18 Colonial Square, Sylva NC
828-586-0020 • www.gmiller.com

AREAS OF PRACTICE: Business & Commercial Law, Residential & Commercial Real Estate Law

Visit www.thesylvaherald.com