

# OPINION

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COLUMN | TOM REED AND GARY MERVIS

## Priorities and putting children first

As parents, so many of us have personal stories of how diseases and various disorders have impacted our children and the lives of our families. We are constantly looking for ways to promote awareness and research to the best of our ability. When our children are suffering, we have a duty to help them and Congress has a role to play.

We're excited to be joining forces again in support of another important initiative for children's health: the Kids First Research Act of 2013. The bill invests \$130 million in scientific research for pediatric diseases and disorders like autism, juvenile diabetes, and children's cancer.

With limited federal resources, each and every taxpayer dollar must be scrutinized. That's why this bill carefully prioritizes

those dollars where they are needed: investing in our children. We've taken the initiative in placing children's health ahead of politics by eliminating taxpayer financing of presidential campaigns and party conventions and expanding pediatric research through the National Institutes of Health.

The legislation eliminates the Presidential Election Campaign Fund (PECF) not used by presidential candidates and pools the remaining funds with taxpayer dollars previously financing Republican and Democratic party conventions. With this legislation we are looking at expanding research for pediatric diseases by as much as \$130 million.

Kids First is a great example of bipartisanship in the House, with more than 100 co-sponsors adding their name and committing to put our children above

political parties and conventions. We also have a host of organizations that have voiced their strong support for the Kids First Research Act, organizations like Autism Speaks, the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, National Fragile X Foundation, the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, and the National Down Syndrome Society, and Camp Good Days and Special Times.

Earlier this spring, we partnered to introduce the Clinical Trials Cancer Mission 2020 Act of 2013, to help make research data more readily available. By strengthening reporting requirements and encouraging data sharing to find a cure, our common goal is to help give patients a fair chance at having a good quality of life and making cancer a chronic illness.

Treating cancer alone costs the

United States over \$130 billion each year. If we can prevent taxpayer dollars going to fund duplicative research, we can fund more studies and increase the chances of finding cures. We will continue to engage in this conversation of how to prioritize federal dollars because our children are too important and hardworking taxpayers deserve accountability from the federal government on how their tax dollars are being spent.

In our opinion, aside from helping those in need, the best part about this legislation is that it is something we can all gather around to support: Republicans, Democrats, and everyone in between. We want to put medical research at the top of the Congressional priority list and also in the forefront of everyone's minds. It's the right thing to do for our children, the savings to taxpayers

are significant, and we can start to bring health care costs down.

Our children are our greatest resource. Research could mean medical breakthroughs which could result in cures. At the end of the day, children's health is more important than a campaign or a political convention. At the end of the day, their health is all that matters. Congress can help with that goal, and it should.

*Congressman Tom Reed represents the 23rd District of New York in the House of Representatives and is a co-sponsor of the Kids First Research Act. Gary Mervis is chairman and founder of Camp Good Days and Special Times. For more information on both the Kids First Research Act and the Clinical Trials Cancer Mission 2020 Act, visit Reed's website at [www.Reed.house.gov](http://www.Reed.house.gov).*

COLUMN | BARBARA SHELLY

## Where's the Obamacare train wreck?

Sorry to interrupt the incessant drone about the "failure" of Obamacare, but from the state of New York comes news that insurance policies in the individual market could cost as much as 50 percent less when the marketplaces called for in the Affordable Care Act get started next year.

Here's how a front-page story in The New York Times describes the situation:

"State insurance regulators say they have approved rates for 2014 that are at least 50 percent lower on average than those currently available in New York. Beginning in October, individuals in New York City who now pay \$1,000 a month or more for coverage will be able to shop for health insurance for as little as \$308 monthly. With federal subsidies, the cost will be even lower."

Only about 17,000 people in New York currently purchase insurance on their own, according to The Times. That leaves about 2.6 million uninsured. The federal Affordable Care Act requires everyone to purchase an insurance policy, which will create a deeper and wider pool, and enable insurers to reduce rates.

New York probably isn't typical of how things will work in all states. Its policies on the individual market are the most expensive in the nation. Why? Because the state requires insurers to offer people policies regardless of pre-existing conditions, but has no mandate that everyone must purchase insurance. That's a formula for sky high rates and lots of uninsured people. And it's exactly what Republican politicians are asking for when they demand that the White House postpone the controversial individual mandate.

So in New York, prices have nowhere to go but down.

But other states that are

working hard to set up insurance exchanges, like California, Oregon, Washington, Maryland and Vermont, are also reporting encouraging news about competition among insurers and competitive rates in the marketplaces.

Not exactly the imaginary "train wreck" that has the U.S. House preparing to vote to repeal Obamacare for, what, the 38th time?

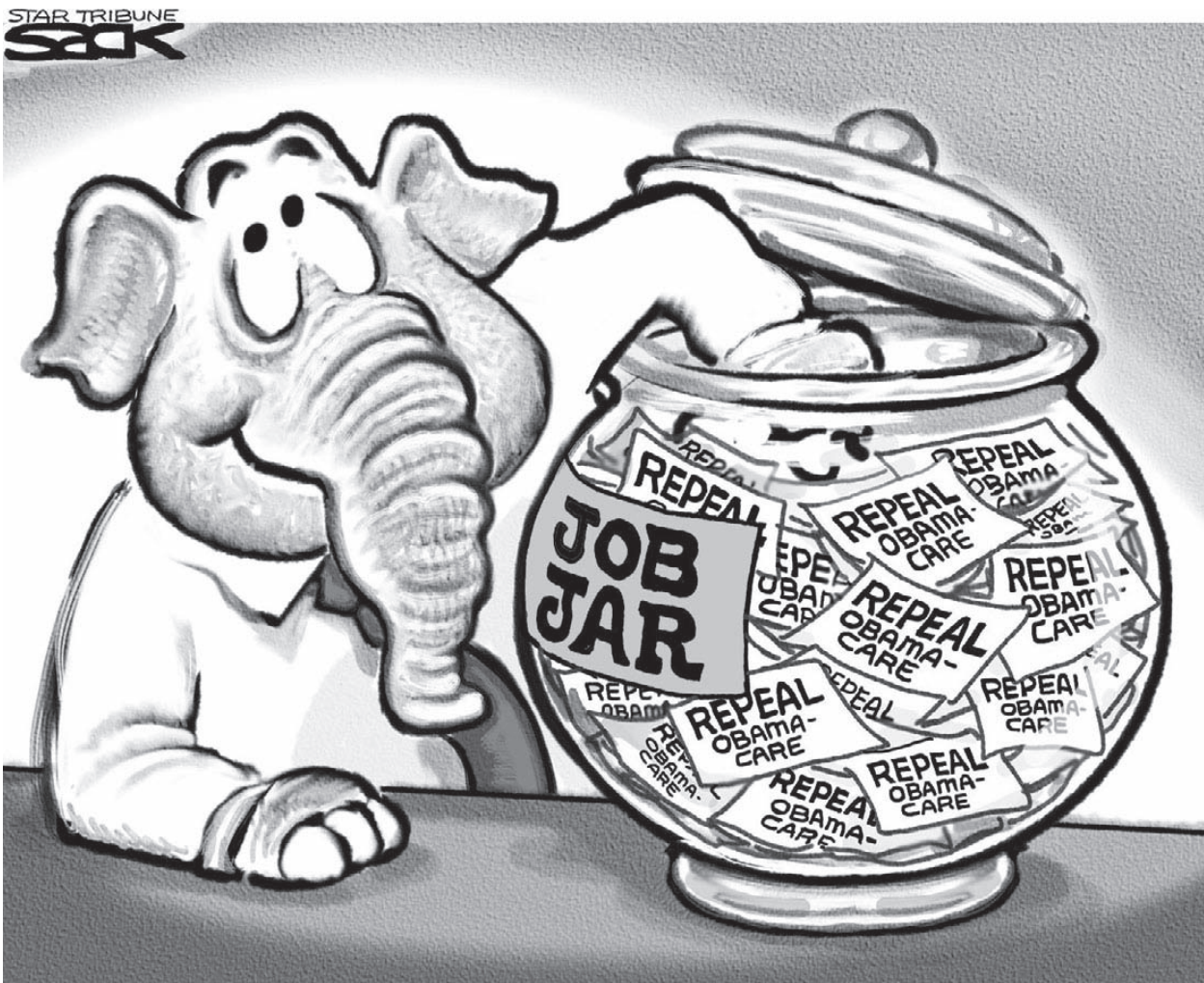
Obamacare opponents, for their part, are touting a new survey by a strident foe of the health care law, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which found that two-thirds of employers surveyed said they weren't ready for the law's new mandates. And 71 percent said they'd be less likely to hire because of the law, which requires companies with 50 or more full-time employees to offer health insurance or pay a fine.

Is a small business ever ready for a new mandate? I think not. Really, it's surprising that a third of the employers surveyed said they were prepared. This is beginning to sound like the way most Americans approach the Christmas holiday. We know it's coming; it's right there on the calendar. Yet we're never ready for it. And somehow we always get by.

As for the threats to hire fewer workers and cut others to part time, remember that no employer covered by the Affordable Care Act's mandate is currently required to provide health insurance to workers, but more than nine of 10 of them do. Health insurance is a tax-free form of compensation that enables companies to recruit and retain good workers. None of that is going to change.

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ANOTHER VIEW



POLITICS | SEN. TOM O'MARA

## It's summer! Read, read, read

According to "Making Summer Count," a 2011 report from the RAND Corporation on the importance of summer reading and other learning programs, "Rigorous studies of voluntary summer programs, mandatory summer programs, and programs that encourage students to read at home in the summer have all found positive effects on student achievement."

Of course the RAND Corp. study is just one among many over the decades which have clearly and consistently made this point: children who engage in summer reading make greater academic gains than children who do not. Many of the research findings on the so-called "summer slide" nearly jump off the page, including that students can lose up to 25 percent of their reading level over the summer. By the end of grade 6, children who lose reading skills during the summer are, on average, two years behind their peers.

All of the numbers help tell the story, but sometimes the word themselves are the most

powerful testimony of all about the importance – and the joys – of reading.

"There is more treasure in books than in all the pirate's loot on Treasure Island," said Walt Disney.

One of the finest of all writers, William Faulkner, said, simply, "Read, read, read."

The importance of summer reading just can't be understated. That's why my Senate colleagues and I are so grateful this summer to have the opportunity to team up with the New York State Library and public libraries statewide, including so many throughout the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions, to promote an on-line summer reading program called "Dig Into Reading."

At its most basic level, summarizing the range of research on the importance of summer reading for students can be stated as simply as this: it's about getting books into the hands of kids. According to Scholastic, a few of the keys to successful summer reading are letting kids choose the books they want to read (91% of children say they're more likely to



TOM O'MARA

finish a book if they've picked it out themselves), encouraging kids to read four or more books, and, very straightforwardly, providing easy access to books.

The underlying importance of access, of course, points directly to the critical role played by our public libraries to encourage students and their families to read, and as the gateway for making books and other reading materials and programs available throughout our communities.

New York State Education Commissioner John B. King, Jr. stressed the fact that summer reading programs enable young people to maintain educational advances when not in school.

"Summer reading programs provided at public libraries throughout the state – supported by the State Library in

conjunction with our partners in the State Assembly and Senate – give children great tools to stay academically sharp for school in the fall," the commissioner said.

Additional information on the importance of summer reading can be found at: <http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/libdev/summer/research.htm>.

So throughout July and August, I'm proud to join so many local public libraries and other groups and organizations seeking to encourage summer reading. The Senate's on-line summer reading program offers a convenient opportunity for students and their parents to enjoy the benefits and the rewards of summer reading together. Our region is incredibly fortunate to have such an outstanding network of public libraries providing access to books and other reading activities, materials and opportunities.

To participate, students and parents can visit my Senate website, [www.omara.nysenate.gov](http://www.omara.nysenate.gov), and click on the "Dig Into Reading!" logo in the left-hand column of the homepage.