

## The Weekly Wrapup

### Opinions from around Georgia

#### The Augusta Chronicle on the Affordable Care Act bandwagon:

Rarely have we seen so many try so hard to cajole others to take something they supposedly want.

If Obamacare is such a great deal, why did Affordable Care Act supporters have to blast emails, stand on streets waving signs and go door-to-door to coax people to enroll before the Sunday midnight deadline?

If it were goods or services people really wanted, there would be no such hoopla.

Ordinary Americans aren't so cheerful. This is the first year many will experience Obamacare's full impact. Most will find out just how expensive it is for those who don't qualify for federal subsidies. And tax-prep giant H&R Block anticipates about 4 million will go uninsured and pay penalties.

At least healthcare.gov is working. Well, mostly. A technical glitch took down the site's income-verification system earlier this month. Shouldn't taxpayers expect a little more, considering they shelled out \$2.2 billion over three years to build and repair the site?

Little about this law has gone as promised, so we fully anticipate an enrollment deadline extension. And another. And another.

Then there's the Medicaid-expansion quandary faced by Georgia, South Carolina and nearly two dozen other conservative states that turned down billions in strings-attached federal dollars when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled Medicaid expansion was optional under ACA in 2012.

The federal share of the federal-state program's expenses under Obamacare is scheduled to fall to 90 percent by 2020. State governors are hesitant — rightly so — to put their taxpayers on the hook when the federal 100-percent "free" money offer expires.

Even at just 10 percent, they say future costs will be too massive to cover.

"I would liken it to putting more people on the deck of the Titanic," says Georgia State Sen. Josh McKoon, R-Columbus. "I mean you're just waiting probably a few more years before the entire system implodes."

Medicaid, which focuses on low-income and disabled people, covers nearly one in five Americans and generally has the lowest physician participation and reimbursement rates.

The White House has tried to show the states how much money they've missed out on by not expanding the plan. Last year it gleefully reported states that expanded Medicare under Obamacare will have "saved" federal taxpayers \$88 billion through 2017, while states that didn't would lose 85,000 jobs.

Be wary of the rosy projections associated with expanding a bloated and mediocre government health care plan, which is precisely what Medicaid is.

Medicaid doesn't provide care, only coverage. Doctors provide care. And for everything Medicaid takes from taxpayers, it doesn't pay doctors much. That's why so many — about three in 10 — refuse to see Medicaid patients, according to a Health Affairs analysis.

Another study, by the New England Journal of Medicine, found Medicaid recipients were six times more likely to be denied appointments and wait twice as long on average to receive care when compared to privately insured patients. Other studies have shown Medicaid recipients actually

have worse health outcomes than those without any coverage at all.

And this is the solution the White House is pushing on Georgia and South Carolina taxpayers?

Obama, of course, would prefer all states expand Medicaid, as that's the source of 60 percent of new Obamacare enrollees.

The total number of Americans receiving Medicaid has soared in the past five years, and analysts see dark clouds on the horizon as more sign up for increasingly scarce services.

"It doesn't require an economic genius to realize what happens when increased demand meets reduced supply ... Waiting lists or rationing," Cato Institute Senior Fellow Michael Tanner wrote in National Review.

Sadly, conservative states are starting to buckle under the pressure as governors acknowledge it makes little sense for their residents to subsidize Medicaid expansions in other states and not receive any benefits in their own. That certainly is true. But when the "benefit" in question happens to be Obamacare, jumping on the bandwagon is just a race to the bottom.

#### The Union-Recorder (Milledgeville) on Craigslist:

The recent deaths of a Marietta couple in Telfair County bring into focus safety and security concerns related to Craigslist exchanges. Now, this week comes news of the death of a 21-year-old Atlanta college student, shot and killed while he was looking to buy an iPhone from a seller on Craigslist.

Three people have been arrested in the Atlanta case and a Telfair County man has been arrested in the murder case of Budd and June Runion.

Criminals preying on the online exchange system, coupled with these recent deaths, raise a number of red flags about the system and consumer safety. These most recent three deaths serve as a tragic reminder with regards to internet exchanges.

Recently, the Baldwin County Sheriff's Office announced that it has joined numerous other law enforcement agencies in promoting safer exchanges by encouraging residents to use the sheriff's office as a meeting place for transactions. The thought behind this effort is that those with ill intentions will be discouraged if buyers insist on meeting at the sheriff's office to carry out exchanges. This is a sound, practical approach that local residents who utilize Craigslist and other online exchanges should use.

For some residents this may seem like an added step, but it's too great a risk not to. Even if residents choose not to meet at the sheriff's office, they should be certain to verify dealer information and agree to meet in a safe, public location. Tell a friend and trust your instincts. Take someone with you if you can. Never meet at your home and always take a cellphone.

While it's true that Craigslist has had billions of safe transactions since it launched and the recent deaths reflect a small percentage of violent crimes, recent events are reason to be mindful and cautious.

Remember — if a deal sounds too good to be true, as the old adage says, it probably is.

Local residents should keep local law enforcement agencies in mind as safe havens for these types of exchanges and tread carefully. Going it alone simply isn't worth the risk.

# Meet Bob Ringer and the new United Way board members

It is my privilege to be surrounded by leaders in our community who over and over again carve out time and resources to create miracles and improve lives. This week was very special at United Way, as we applauded Brian Anderson, our 2014 Campaign chairman and his cabinet for surpassing the pledge goal of \$3.55 million and reaching \$3.6 million. If you see Brian in the community, please give him a high five — he deserves it!

Today, I want to introduce you to our newest United Way board members: Zack Adamson, Engineered Floors, who will serve on the Young Leaders Society steering committee; Dottie Boring, community volunteer and philanthropist; Tom



**Amanda Burt**

Bundros, Dalton Utilities, who will serve on the campaign cabinet; J.T. Finley, Maryville Jewelers, 2015 campaign chair; and Denise Wood, Mohawk Industries and city of Dalton council member, who will continue to serve on United Way's Corporate Volunteer Council. Please join me in welcoming our board class of 2015.

Bob Ringer, innovation leader at Shaw Industries, has stepped up to lead our organization as chairman of the board for 2015. Ringer previously served as our campaign chair in 2013, raising \$3.5 million. He has lived in Dalton and worked for Shaw Industries for 25 years. A native of South Carolina and a graduate of the University of South Carolina, Bob and his wife Jo have a son and a beautiful

granddaughter. In 1977, Bob began working with his company's United Way campaign in South Carolina.

Bob moved to Dalton in 1990 and began seeking out how he could become involved in our local United Way. He saw United Way as an opportunity to get to know his new community better and to meet more people.

In the mid-'90s, he began serving on a community investment panel and saw the need first hand for more resources to maximize the impact. Bob has seen some of our United Way agencies grow from humble beginnings into flourishing agencies serving more individuals and families each year. He began working as a campaign volunteer in 2008. He has been an instrumental part of our campaign team for the past seven years.

Bob states that his guid-

ing principles are to be a giver — not a taker — and to leave each situation and day better than when he encountered it. Over the past 20 years we have seen Bob live out these principles in his work with United Way and the community.

I invite you to join Brenda Knowles, 2014 board chair, at our annual meeting "Game Changers" on March 10 at 3:30 p.m. at Stage 123 in downtown Dalton as she recognizes outstanding donors, advocates and volunteers; unveils United Way's 2025 community impact goals and passes the gavel to Bob Ringer.

Register for the annual meeting and other United Way events at ourunited-way.org or call (706) 226.4357.

*Amanda Burt is the president of United Way of Northwest Georgia.*



## Boehner, Netanyahu helping Iran

What would it look like if politics stopped at the water's edge?

It wouldn't look like the mess that John Boehner created by inviting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to address a session of Congress on March 3.

By allowing Netanyahu to stage what is effectively a campaign event in the U.S. Capitol, congressional Republicans have not only damaged our relations with Israel but threatened our diplomatic negotiations with Iran.

Even for Boehner, who gets a gold star when he doesn't let the government shut down, this is a big screw up.

It's one thing to turn an attack on the U.S. into a partisan drinking word — BENGHAZI!! — but we can all agree that Israel is an important ally, and Iran should never have a nuclear bomb

By trying to one-up Obama, Boehner exposed how much he's willing to put political gamesmanship ahead of adult statesmanship.

With about two weeks before Netanyahu's speech, it's getting tense:

Joe Biden made up an



**Jason Stanford**

excuse about a pre-arranged trip to a country to be named later so it doesn't look like he's taking sides in Israel's upcoming elections.

Haaretz, the leading English-language source for news about Israel, wrote that the Boehner-Netanyahu power play is "sabotaging Israel's most precious asset," that is, close relations with the United States.

The U.S. ambassador has warned Israeli officials that, "Ultimately, this will have a price" if Netanyahu uses the U.S. Capitol as a stage to criticize ongoing U.S.-led diplomatic negotiations.

And though everyone would like this to be about a big partisan slap fight in D.C., the real threat isn't to our relationship with Israel. This is election-year posturing by Netanyahu.

He needs votes, and then he'll need foreign aid. He'll get over it.

The real problem is that by allowing himself to be used as a pawn by Obama's political enemies, Netanyahu is helping Iran.

"Unknowingly, Netanyahu has become the Iranians' secret weapon," wrote Barak Ravid in Haaretz recently. "If he didn't exist, the Iranians would have to invent him.

Destroying the strategic alliance with America would be a real existential threat to Israel, but so far, he's much closer to leaving scorched Earth in Washington than he is to stopping Iran's centrifuges.

In this situation, Iranian leaders don't have to do a thing but sit in front of the television, eat popcorn and laugh."

Oh yeah. Iran.

March is not just when Israelis go to the polls but the next deadline in the diplomatic efforts to keep Iran from building a nuclear bomb.

Right now, the U.S. is leading six countries in seeking a negotiated settlement with Iran that would prevent them from becoming a member of the nuclear club.

This effort, which began under George W. Bush, has kept Iran's nuclear program frozen in place for years.

These countries — Russia, China, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and the U.S. — are using a combination of sanctions, inspections, monitoring and the ever-present threat of having drones move into the neighborhood to pressure Iran into giving up their capacity to enrich uranium. There are signs that we could be getting close to a deal.

But that's not good enough for those who

would oppose breathing if Obama called for clean air. To be fair, conservatives think the only way to make their way in the world is first threatening and then using force.

It's the whole "peace through strength" thing they go on about. Or they just want to forget the whole peace thing and go ahead and bomb Iran.

What they haven't said is how this ends if we do it their way. We can't bomb them into forgetting how to build a nuclear bomb.

Should we disengage from diplomacy and just glare at them?

Do we go to war and then, what, endlessly prop up a moderate government?

The only way to keep Iran from getting the bomb is to negotiate it away.

That's a goal we should all be able to get behind, but by infecting diplomacy with partisanship, congressional Republicans are giving Iranians an excuse to walk away from the table which is exactly why politics should stop at the water's edge.

United we stand, divided we grandstand.

*Jason Stanford is a Democratic consultant who writes columns for the Austin American-Statesman and The Quorum Report. He can be reached at stanford@oppresearch.com.*