

OPINION

OUR VIEW

Time to give on Obamacare

Holding Americans hostage over a particular law some in Congress do not support just doesn't make sense.

We hope by the time our readers view this opinion, the first federal government shutdown in 17 years is over and considered a pothole in the road to a compromise.

Nationally, about 800,000 federal workers began unpaid furloughs Tuesday at an immeasurable cost to the nation.

Locally, 35 people working for Minnesota's only national park based in Borderland went home Tuesday without knowing when they will be called back to work to earn a paycheck.

Those are the paychecks spent in local grocery stores, gas stations and other stores in the small and struggling communities adjacent to Voyageurs National Park.

The timing for the park and Borderland makes the shutdown even more difficult. The shutdown comes on the day the planned termination of 265 workers at Boise Inc.'s paper mill in International Falls were completed, adding to the paychecks that will not be spent locally.

Duties important to the health and welfare of the park facilities will be conducted by the handful or so of VNP enforcement rangers, considered essential because of their police and emergency work.

Clearly, the Republicans so opposed to the Affordable Care Act need to see the big picture when it comes to paying what Congress has already spent and approve a budget.

Shutting down the government could cost the federal government more than \$2 billion dollars if it is similar to the last shutdowns in 1995-1996.The Office of Management and Budget estimates two government shutdowns in 1995 and 1996,

totaling 27 days, cost the federal government \$1.4 billion. That's more than \$2 billion in today's dollars spent on costs like back pay to furloughed federal workers and uncollected fines and taxes, according to news reports.

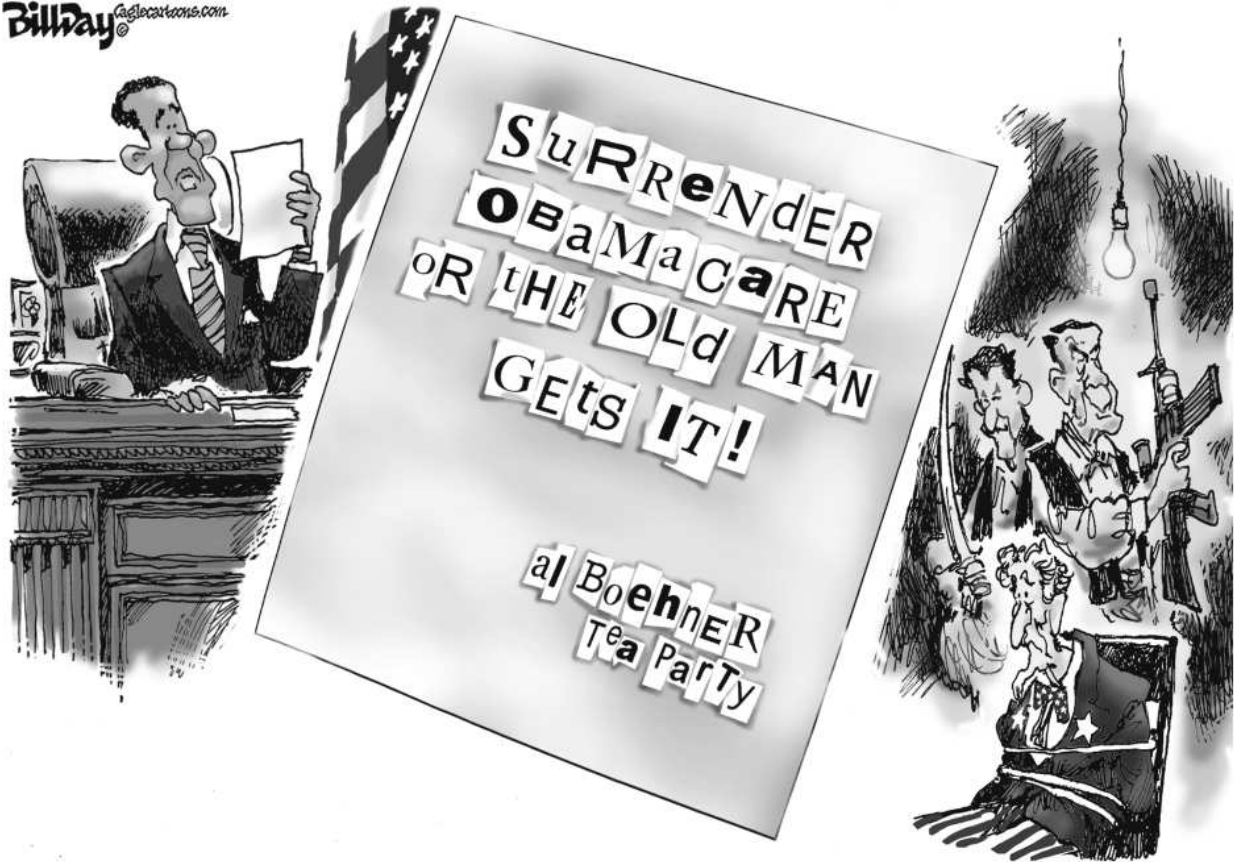
But \$2 billion doesn't take into account how the economy would be harmed in additional ways, such as worker morale and productivity, that are nearly impossible to measure.

Frustrated is how VNP Superintendent Mike Ward described the mood of the staff Tuesday. He pointed to the far reaching effect of furloughing staff who are involved in numerous local efforts and projects that add to the local economy and knowledge of the resources.

Clearly, a result of the shutdown, and American frustration about it, may be expressed in next year's elections. The 2011 Minnesota government shutdown was followed by 2012 elections that ousted Minnesota Republicans from power by giving control of both chambers of the state Legislature to the DFL.

Like it or not, Obamacare is the law of the land. While many other government operations were halted Tuesday, it did not end the ACA, largely funded through mandatory spending and multi-year appropriations that continue through a government shutdown. While Democrats are unwilling to include any provisions to scale back Obamacare in a government spending bill, they have agreed in the short term to the sequester-level spending levels called for by Republicans.

Until there are enough votes to change Obamacare, now is the time for Republicans to compromise to allow federal workers to return to their jobs that allow them to earn and spend their paychecks in their local economies.



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

America means choices

To the editor,
I am so glad it was you who responded to my letter, Mr. Paul Eklund.

You, sir, either have selective hearing or memory loss. When you came to my house campaigning for mayor, we had a very long talk on all subjects concerning the town. And you, sir, agreed with everything I had to say. Unless of course you were there on false pretenses. In fact, you said you appreciate people

who voice their opinions. But apparently that meant when it didn't concern you.

This is America, which means it's my choice to attend city council meetings, my choice to be a coach, my choice to voice my opinion. I didn't know I had to ask for your permission.

Just like it was your choice to go into politics. So as a politician you will be criticized and held accountable for your actions by the taxpayers who

pay your wage.

The taxpayers and voters made it very clear at the polls who they wanted to be mayor. And it was most definitely not you.

But, I'm a fair man and I would be more than happy to sit down with you and have a chat. Oh, and by the way, you have never seen me angry. Hey, thanks for proving my point.

Darren Wallen
International Falls, MN

Size of government matters

Q: Is the government too big and powerful? Does a one-legged duck swim in circles?

A: Ah, yes, you speak of a recent Gallup survey that found 60 percent of Americans think the federal government has too much power — a full percentage point higher than the previous high recorded in September 2010. Gallup's Joy Wilke did a fine job breaking down the survey data.

Q: Yeah, and I'll bet that percentage has jumped lots more over the past few decades.

A: You are correct. In 2005, about 50 percent of Americans felt the government was getting too big and powerful — 10 percent less than now.

Q: What I want to know is who are the 40 percent or so who do NOT think the government has gotten too big?

A: That's an interesting question. Thirty-two percent now say the government has the right amount of power and 7 percent say it doesn't have enough.

Q: Not enough! Who the heck are the 7-percenters?

A: There are always some people who think the government can solve all our problems. Thankfully, their numbers are not growing. They have been at 7 percent since Gallup started tracking this big-government issue.

Q: I'll bet the survey reflects a high level of division among conservatives, moderates and liberals.

A: That is also correct. Republicans tend to think government is doing too much, whereas Democrats tend to agree that government can do good. Of course, Republicans and Democrats have gotten mighty polarized since President Obama took office in 2009.



Tom
PURCELL

Q: That makes sense. Obama embraced all the big-government security initiatives of President Bush, then gave us a massive new entitlement program, ObamaCare.

A: Yes, and these measures have the country more divided than ever. However, Republicans' and Democrats' views have generally become more polarized since Obama took office. In 2002, the two parties were about equally likely to view the federal government as too powerful, at 36 percent and 35 percent, respectively, with independents, at 45 percent, most likely to say this.

Q: And now?

A: Right now, 81 percent of Republicans think the government is too powerful. But 38 percent of Democrats agree that the government is too powerful — the highest percentage since President Obama took office.

Q: I can see how politics factors in, but hopefully, the data reveal that some people don't let their political views affect their concerns?

A: Thankfully, that is true with some. As Bush grew the government in the war on terror, both Republicans and Democrats began reporting

increasing unease about government gaining too much power — with the NSA and other government agencies now out of control, there is good reason to be concerned.

Q: If so many Americans are concerned that the government is getting too big and powerful, why do so many keep voting for bigger government?

A: Arthur Brooks, president of the American Enterprise Institute, offers some interesting insights on that in his book "Gross National Happiness." After mining reams of data, he found very different viewpoints among conservatives and liberals.

Q: What did the data reveal?

A: They showed that conservatives hold more traditional values — faith, marriage, family, freedom, hard work. They believe in the individual and just want to be left alone.

Q: And liberals were the reverse?

A: That is correct. Liberals see government as a way to right perceived wrongs. And they vote for politicians who promise to impose more rules, regulations and mandates on the people who make them unhappy. But you have to admit, Republican politicians these days are just as likely to use the largess of the federal trough to promise voters goodies in return for their votes.

Q: Our federal government is going to keep getting bigger and more powerful, isn't it?

A: Does a one-legged duck swim in circles?

Purcell is a Pittsburgh Tribune-Review humor columnist and is nationally syndicated exclusively by Cagle Cartoons Inc.

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