

Republican Liars

by Bill Herbst

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Despite the polarized, tribal divisions of the American public, certain issues exist about which we are essentially unified. One is the guarantee of affordable health insurance coverage, especially for people with prior health conditions.

Sadly, the U.S. is nowhere close to the sanity of a single-payer, universal Medicare system. The for-profit medical and insurance industries won't allow that, since it cuts into their profits, and profits are all they care about. Nonetheless, regular Americans overwhelmingly understand and agree that denial of health coverage to those with pre-existing conditions is just plain wrong.

Suggesting that Obamacare is badly flawed is an understatement, of course, but it's as close as a country with neither compassion nor common sense is likely to get to serving a significant percentage of its population with medical care. The current law of the land is that insurance companies must provide coverage for all Americans, even those with pre-existing conditions.

Support for that doesn't include Republicans, of course. They desperately want to get rid of medical health care coverage for pre-existing conditions and have attempted to do so in Congress time and time again. Thus far, they've failed, but they continue to double-down on their efforts to throw millions of Americans under the health care bus.

For decades, the GOP has presented the American public with false narratives posing as objective truth. Neoliberal economics, corporate welfare, and everything for the rich are the Republican agenda. The Republicans are morally bankrupt, but not stupid. They know that the majority of Americans don't want what they want. They've been incredibly effective, however, in pulling the wool over Americans' eyes (don't get me started on the foolishness of the American public...).

If all you care about is winning — at any cost and in any way — you have a built-in advantage. For the past four decades, Republicans have used their ultra-rich donor base and skill at organization to gain an unfair advantage in winning elections, including in this century the successful tactics of wholesale gerrymandering of Congressional districts and draconian state laws or outright

illegal policies to suppress voter registration, aimed largely at keeping minority voters (who will tend to vote for Democrats) from casting ballots.

None of this is new. Although one can find examples of reprehensible behavior in any arena of human experience, the cesspool of politics is a prime culprit. American political history is replete with shameful scams.

Republicans' current tactic, renewed for the 2018 midterm elections, is testament to how completely their debased party has succumbed to Trumpism. Aside from dirty tricks, fear-mongering, and intimidating threats, the Repugs have nothing to offer that would bring swing voters to their side. So, as the midterm elections near, they have resorted to simply lying to our faces.

Campaign ads proliferating the airwaves for GOP Congressional candidates among both incumbents and hopefuls now contain outright, bald-faced lies about their positions on health care. No longer content to merely go after the Us-Them divide by stoking fear of the immigrant Other or to smear Democrats and the news media as evil, Republicans now make the outrageous claim that they support health care insurance for those with pre-existing conditions.

Were it not so predictable, this would be astonishing mendacity. These days, however, it's standard fare.

Nature appears to regard truth and lies with equanimity. For every example of truthfulness among earth's living creatures, a contrasting example of deception exists. Passing on one's genes is what matters, and that can happen successfully with either strategy. For humans, truth is optional. Some of us hold truthfulness as an ideal; others believe that to be naïve and foolish.

Quite often in the public realm, lies work. A certain percentage of people believe the lies of others wholeheartedly, without question, and frequently despite the damning evidence of facts to the contrary.

I understand that everyone lies sometimes, and for all sorts of reasons. Politicians lie routinely, as do corporations and institutions. Donald Trump has spent his entire life telling lies that he's mostly gotten away with, and one impact of his ascent to the Presidency has been the normalization of lying. Lies from officials and others in power that might have once been considered unacceptable and worthy of public scorn are now routine.

I understand also that in these woe begotten times of tribal echo chambers where confirmation bias reigns supreme, no one's mind is likely to be changed by this commentary. I'm preaching to the choir here, since that's about all anyone can do any more: speak to those who already agree with you. I write what I see and hope that at least some others will be comforted by knowing that they're not alone.

Many Americans are weary to the point of exhaustion by the polarization in our politics and culture. They long for a sense of national unity, for all of us to agree and get along. While I sympathize with those Americans, I think they will be disappointed for a long time to come. The Us-Them distinctions that are programmed into our biology (and about which I've written often over the past year) have grown extreme. The hatred of the Other that accompanies the Us-Them dilemma is based on fear, and fear is not responsive to reason or argument. Fear — whether true or false, accurate or illusory, real or imagined — is instinctive and emotional. It kidnaps our consciousness and cripples any semblance of conscience.

The only successful way I know of bringing *Them* back into the fold of *Us* is by focusing not on issues or policies, but on our common humanity. Although worthwhile, that is a slow and arduous process of listening to others to allow compassion and empathy to develop naturally, achieved one person at a time. If a speedier, easier process of mass reunification exists (other than identifying a new and common enemy to hate as *Them*), I don't know what it is.

So, despite my belief in compassion and empathy, I anticipate that the pitched battle for America's soul now underway will continue. Everything I know, including astrology, tells me this. As in the Civil War that tore this country apart 150 years ago, one side will win eventually and the other will lose, at least for awhile.

If the Republicans and Trumpists win, all of us are in Big Trouble (more than we are already). If they lose, the future may still be dim, but at least we'll have a chance to co-create a little more sanity. The conclusion I've come to — slowly and after much inner resistance — is that before we can restore a common humanity, first we have to win the cruel battles now being waged within our country.