

Medicaid is what keeps the tractor running

BY DR. CHRISTOPHER R. CROSSETT
DNP, MBA, MSN, RN, CRRN

If you want to understand Medicaid, don't start in Washington. Start at the end of a gravel road, beside a tin machine shed, where a 63-year-old farmer is recovering from shoulder surgery and can't milk 40-head without help. Or sit at a kitchen table with a woman trying to keep the farm afloat while caring for a husband still regaining speech after a stroke.

That's where Medicaid lives. Not in policy memos—but in the everyday labor, worry, and grit of rural life.

And that's why the federal budget bill now advancing in Congress is more than just a spreadsheet. For communities like Kalona, it's a warning.

The bill threatens to remove more than 7 million Americans from Medicaid and could trigger automatic Medicare cuts under PAYGO rules. That's the equivalent of every man, woman, and child in Iowa—twice over. These aren't abstract numbers. They're neighbors, grandparents, and farmworkers—people whose health makes or breaks a season.

Iowa's rural towns have already lost dozens of maternity wards, mental health clinics, and critical access hospitals over the past decade. If these cuts go into effect, more Iowans will be forced to travel farther for care—if they can find it at all. What happens when the nearest emergency room is 90 minutes away and the gravel roads are iced over?

People forget that family farmers often fall into what we call the “missing middle”—

earning too much for ongoing public benefits, but not enough to absorb a sudden medical crisis. Medicaid steps in during these moments: after an accident, a diagnosis, or an injury in the barn. It helps cover rehab, in-home care, or hospital bills that would otherwise sink the season—or the farm.

It also keeps rural clinics open. It helps fund the nurse practitioner on the edge of town and the ambulance that shows up at the hog barn in the middle of a heart attack. Medicaid, in short, is what keeps the rural healthcare engine running—and with it, the farms and families who keep Iowa alive.

Cutting it may look like a budget win in Washington. But out here, where tractors don't start themselves and rehab doesn't happen on its own, it feels like betrayal.

Rural Iowans didn't cause the national debt. They shouldn't be the ones paying for it—with their health, their farms, or their futures.

We're not asking for special treatment. We're asking not to be forgotten.

Christopher R. Crossett, DNP, MBA, MSN, RN, CRRN, is a board-certified rehabilitation nurse and doctor of nursing practice specializing in health systems leadership. Based in eastern Iowa, he advocates for equitable healthcare policy, with a focus on Medicare, Medicaid, and access to post-acute care. Dr. Crossett combines clinical expertise with systems-level insight to promote accountability, ethical governance, and patient-centered reform.



More in common than I thought

My father and I didn't have a lot in common and that fact began to show up in our relationship when I was about 12 years old.

The age labeled “pre-teen” is difficult for the pre-teen and his/her parent. In my case, it began a time of being many things my father wasn't.

Please don't misunderstand: my father was a good, hard-working, God-fearing man. He worked hard, brought home his paycheck every week and loved our mother.

What I was becoming, however, was something Dad wasn't. Being the oldest of his six children, I came to realize those differences created some discomfort for him.

The initial sign of difference was my mouth. I had a big one and began challenging my father on a variety of subjects. The first and only time I heard my father swear was an evening when I was 13-years-old. We disagreed about something and I mouthed off to him. Dad exclaimed, “I am so damn sick and tired of your big mouth.”

Hearing my father cuss was scary. I was toast.

Dad was a devout Christian. I loved Jesus, too, but didn't feel the call to be in church every time the lights were on like he did. Dad believed everything the preacher said. I didn't. I had questions; lots of questions (and opinions) about church and faith-related matters and I wasn't reticent in sharing them. That was a burr under my father's saddle.

Dad was uncomfortable talking with his sons about sex.

A few times when I was helping my father sweep-up

at the end of the day at the feed mill where he worked, he did tell me about some of the shocking cautionary films about venereal disease he had seen while training for service in the Army. At age 15 I wanted to assure my father that at the rate his country bumpkin son was going, VD was of no concern. Instead, I just muttered, “Wow!”

As a farm boy from northern Iowa who had seen at least some of the world at the end of World War II, I think my father was puzzled by my eclectic interests, none of which coincided with his. I enjoyed and read about electronics, photography, politics and other unrelated subjects. I was a bookworm; a teenage nerd.

At school I enjoyed drama, competitive speech and student government. In 1964 I became active in the Young Democrats and campaigned for LBJ. If such were available at that time, I suspect my father would have had me take a DNA test to determine my parentage.

Dad and I didn't see eye-to-eye on community size. In my very early teens we moved from a community of 1,200 to a town of about 200. Meanwhile, my cousin Cheryl lived in a Des Moines suburb and I coveted all the amenities at her disposal. When I was an adult my wife and I moved to Sioux City and enjoyed life in a metro area of nearly 150,000.

Fast forward to the mid-1980s and my parents' big four-bedroom house was becoming a burden. We suggested they consider moving to a smaller home in their 8,000 population nearby county seat town. Dad



Arvid Huisman
Country Roads

indicated he didn't want to live in a city. With some encouragement and assistance they eventually moved back to the town of 1,200.

When Dad's health dictated a move to a nursing home it was my brother, Dave, and I who were tasked to do the deed. Dad, of course, resisted the idea but on the morning of the move he displayed a sense of acceptance that surprised me.

As I helped Dad shave that morning he began to cry. I asked what was wrong and he simply replied, “I'm so lucky to have kids who love me.”

And there it was: a moment when my father and I were in complete agreement. We saw that matter in the same way. His kids, including his first born, truly did love their father.

While physically resembling my father, my personality is much more like that of my mother. Yet my life reflects important things I learned from my dad - integrity, faithfulness to my wife and children, love of a conversation (even with a total stranger,) the joy of a simple meat and potatoes meal and a relationship with Jesus.

Maybe my father and I had more in common than I thought.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Retiring paras valued by Mid-Prairie community

Monday evening, the Mid-Prairie School Board honored two retiring special education paraprofessionals. I had the pleasure and honor of working with both of them. Paraprofessionals face challenging responsibilities. No two days are alike, and flexibility and patience are continually necessary.

Jodi Kahler worked at Mid-Prairie for 15 years across various district buildings. She passionately advocates for her students and actively seeks better ways to support them. Her sense of humor has helped alleviate even the most chaotic

situations.

Julie Frieden was a Kalona/East Elementary Paraprofessional for 30 years. This longevity as a paraprofessional is a rarity and speaks to her loyalty. Julie's calm and kind demeanor is her superpower. Julie always puts the students' needs above her own.

These individuals deserve commendation for their selfless dedication, competence, and compassion. They exemplify professionalism, and our district is better because of them.

*Mark Schneider
Mid-Prairie Retired
Superintendent*

FLYSOUP

BY MICHAEL D. DAVIS



"Janet! Three down, smells like a wet lamb; any ideas?"



"IT'S ONLY THE FIRST WEEK OF SUMMER VACATION AND THEY'RE ALREADY ACTING LIKE TRUMP & MUSK."

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