

Opinion & Politics

Letters

Ernst’s comment uncalled for

Dear Editor:

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says heart disease and cancer are the two leading causes of death in the U.S.

I’d like to add a third one: Iowa Senator Joni Ernst. Her flippant “we all are going to die” comment at a May 30 town hall is one to remember as we look ahead to November 2026.

Ernst was trying to justify the huge Medicaid cuts in the House-passed budget bill, which analysts say would cause 7.6 million Americans to lose their health insurance coverage.

That’s a scary proposition for a lot of people. And yes, life threatening. Seems like Ernst has been infected with the Trump virus, a fairly common disease nowadays that makes people – especially elected officials – say and do stupid things.

—Hugh Espey, Des Moines

Brass Tacks from Rural Iowa

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So much for Iowa Nice

I’ve disagreed with Senator Joni Ernst and her policies before. But I’ve never felt more insulted and embarrassed for Iowa by her actions than I was on May 31 by her non-apology for saying “we all are going to die” at a town hall in Parkersburg.

Saying we’re all going to die is something you might say in casual conversation (but hopefully not often!) or a philosophy class. But Ernst wasn’t in a philosophy class or having a casual conversation. She knew exactly where she was, who she was talking with (her constituents), and the topic at hand (not one of musings on life and the universe).

That’s why her “apology” is tone deaf. It’s also insulting to Iowans of all political stripes. Instead of showing empathy to the real concerns of the constituents in her town hall, she thought it would be funny to sarcastically claim that some of them didn’t know life would eventually cease to exist. Well, it is not funny. But it does seem to show that Ernst feels her constituents, the people she is supposed to represent, are beneath her or unintelligent simpletons.

Maybe Joni has spent too much time away from Iowa in D.C. with billionaires like Elon Musk and other wealthy elites who don’t need to worry about going to the doctor, the cost of prescription drugs, or how they’ll be able to feed their family. I don’t know what else would lead her to abandon Iowa values of lending a helping hand, being kind to one another, and

certainly not calling each other stupid.

Republicans, Democrats, Independents... all of us have reason to be concerned with what is shaping up to be a “big, terrible, no good” bill out of D.C. Estimates point that this bill, as currently written, will result in anywhere from 57,000 to 94,000 Iowans losing their healthcare coverage. These are real people. They’re folks in between jobs or working part-time, caring for a loved one, in a nursing home. These people are our neighbors.

Despite what Joni Ernst implies, we’re not simple-minded, and we know when a crisis is brewing. And there’s trouble on the horizon for our healthcare system. Private equity groups are buying up nursing homes. Medicare Advantage promises the moon then drives us into the ground. Health insurance companies deny our claims at an alarming rate. It’s not a pretty picture. Kicking people off Medicaid would only make it worse.

Ernst’s job is to engage her constituents on their concerns, and ideally pass policies that improve our quality of life. Yes, we’re all going to die. But dying after living a full life while receiving good healthcare coverage is different than dying because you can’t access basic care.

Too many elected officials these days say and do things that don’t make a lick of sense. I didn’t expect Senator Ernst to be a staunch defender of Medicaid, SNAP, and other safety net programs that lift people and our communities up. But I sure didn’t expect her to insult and demean Iowans who simply want to know how our government is working for us instead of corporations and billionaire interests.

Barb Kalbach is a 4th generation family farmer, Registered Nurse, and Iowa CCI Board member in Adair County.

Relatively Minor

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Laughter does not have to come from a major source. It could indeed be ... relatively minor.

...

The Missing Piece

Lately, I’ve been feeling quite puzzled. Solving a mystery can be particularly challenging, especially when it involves 100 pieces. Each evening, I find myself sitting alone on our worn leather couch, which has been damaged by my youngest dog’s chewing — holes and exposed stuffing are everywhere. However, if I stay focused, everything will eventually come together.

I have rekindled my passion for assembling 100-piece jigsaw puzzles online. While it may seem mindless, each piece requires careful consideration of its shape and color. My index finger maneuvers the pieces into place to complete the image. While I’m engaged in this activity, my brain stays alert enough to toss a tennis ball into the air for my dog, who eagerly waits behind our loveseat to catch it and bring it back for another round. I can see the puzzle pieces at the bottom of my tablet, so I don’t worry about them falling to the floor. After all, if even one piece is missing, the puzzle feels incomplete — something I know all too well from experience.

Years ago, I tried to complete a puzzle featuring numerous polar bears, each wearing bright hats, scarves, or mittens. This colorful design made it easier to identify the pieces, unlike trying to find a polar bear in a snowstorm. My husband and I would take turns fitting together a few pieces whenever we walked by the card table, and we nearly completed the top half of the puzzle.

One day, a puzzle piece fell onto the carpet, and one of our dogs ate it. I was still able to finish the puzzle despite that missing piece. However, when another piece fell to the floor, that was the last straw. Reluctantly, I boxed up the puzzle and threw it away. Since then, I haven’t tried to complete another one.

The best part about online puzzles is that there are no missing pieces, no chewed corners, and the only thing my dog can ruin now is my concentration, which frankly didn’t stand a chance anyway.

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The Winterset Madisonian (USPS 687-260) is published weekly on Wednesdays by MadCoMedia Group, Inc. Periodical Postage paid at Winterset, Iowa 50273. Entered as Periodical at the Post Office at Winterset, under the Act of Congress of March 3, 1879.

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One year in Madison and surrounding counties (Clarke, Union, Adair, Dallas, Polk, and Warren) \$48.00.

Elsewhere in Iowa \$52.00.

Elsewhere in the United States \$53.00 per year;

Half-year subscriptions also available. Temporary Changes of Address \$2.

Postmaster: Send all changes of address to:

The Winterset Madisonian, P.O. Box 350, Winterset, IA 50273-1506

Phone: 515-462-2101 • Fax: 515-462-2102