commentary

from other pens...

U.S. seeking countries for millennimum aid

It seemed like manna from heaven to the world's poorest nations, this promise the United States would give extra money to countries that clean up their economic and political acts.

Several countries began to shed dysfunction so they could qualify. The Philippines actively courted consideration, stressing its role in the anti-terror war. The prime minister of Sri Lanka said he was sure his country would make the cut.

Getting the Millennium Challenge Account off the ground will be a struggle. President Bush is asking Congress to create an independent entity to run it, rather than routing it through existing channels.

And the administration has set criteria that could give an edge to the best performers, rather than the neediest, among the world's 79 poorest nations. That means only 10 to 20 countries stand to benefit, and only if Congress allocates the \$1.5 billion Bush is seeking in 2004.

'They have raised expectations enormously," said Brookings Institute scholar Susan Rice, an undersecretary of state during the Clinton administration. "There is a seriously significant possibility Congress won't fund it fully, and also Congress could balk at the eligibility requirements and send them back to square one."

Plus, Rice said, countries that have enjoyed substantial U.S. assistance in the past might find themselves left out if overall aid money is cut and they don't receive a share of the new funding.

In March, Bush proposed increasing the amount of core foreign aid by \$5 billion over the current amount during the next three years. He said the assistance would go to those countries that are fighting corruption, heeding the rule of law, and trying hard to build up their economies.

The extra \$5 billion is far less than developing nations need, but it could spur countries that don't receive it to improve at a much faster rate, said Mark Malloch Brown, administrator of the U.N. Development Program.

In crafting criteria for eligibility, the Bush administration settled on factors such as inflation, overall government efficiency, the amounts spent on health and education, how much it cost to start a new business, immunization rates, trade policy and safeguards on civil liberties.

Top consideration would be given to the fight against corruption. A stellar performance in other categories would not matter if a country fell down in that area, administration officials said.

The nonpartisan Center for Global Development, which researches the impact of wealthy nations' policies on poorer ones, applied criteria similar to the Bush administration's to economic data from 2000, and estimated about 20 countries might meet Millennium Challenge standards.

Of those 20, nine are in sub-Saharan Africa, seven in Asia and four in Latin America. The 20 include Sri Lanka — whose prime minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, emerged from a July meeting with Bush declaring, "Sri Lanka has all the criteria necessary to succeed."

The Philippines, which expressed high hopes of qualifying in September, is a question mark. Its eligibility hinges on where the Bush administration sets the income level, said Steve Radelet, an economic growth expert at the center.

"They will almost certainly score better on these indicators, thereby they can replace some of the lesser performers," Radelet said. "The more likely you allow countries like the Philippines or Thailand, the more likely they are going to bump out countries like Mozambique or Tanzania."

Mozambique and Tanzania are on the center's list. So is India, but not Pakistan, which has been instrumental in the fight against terrorism.

Leaving anti-terror cooperation out of the equation is the best approach. Brown said, because the United States "got into terrible trouble" in the past letting geopolitical concerns get in the way.

"I'm afraid they're back there with some kind of funky formula with all kinds of coefficients," Rice said. "Sometimes, it's better to get out and acknowledge there is some element of subjectivity EDITOR'S NOTE - Sonya Ross is the AP World Services editor in Washington.



Using smoke and funhouse mirrors

I am not saying we should take cigarettes off the market, so hold the angry e-mail.

But I am raising the question. There was yet another sledgehammer judgment

against cigarette manufacturers last month. A Los Angeles jury found that cigarettes caused the plaintiff's terminal cancer and awarded \$28 billion in compensatory damages.

This comes on the heels of dozens of similar suits. Juries around the country have been reaching the same conclusion: When used simply as the manufacturers intend, cigarettes are addictive and lethal, killing approximately 400,000 people a year.

No other legal product, including alcohol, can be similarly described. Alcohol must be abused to be lethal, whether from liver or heart disease after many years of excessive drinking, or from driving a car while drunk.

The harm caused by cigarettes is considered so clear-cut — "smoking causes serious diseases," states R.J. Reynolds' own Web site ---- that the at-torneys general in almost every state sued the tobacco industry two years ago. They wanted to recover their states' Medicaid costs of caring for uninsured smokers suffering from cigarette-related illnesses.

The cigarette-makers, in response to the suits, struck an agreement to pay \$243 billion to 46 states over the next 25 years. Of course, the only way for tobacco companies to pay the Medicaid bills for the people already harmed by cigarettes is to sell more cigarettes, thereby guaranteeing a steady

As he considers what kind of "single payer"

national health system to advocate, former Vice

President Al Gore ought to look at Medicare's

Physicians are considering abandoning Medi-

care patients in droves because the federal govern-

ment is about to cut their reimbursement rate again

and Congress seems unwilling to do anything

It's a warning of what could happen if the entire

Gore told a New York audience last week, "I

think we've reached a point where the entire health

care system is in impending crisis. I have reluc-

tantly come to the conclusion that we should be-

gin drafting a single-payer national health insur-

Gore's use of the term "single payer" seems to

signal that on yet another issue — like Iraq, cor-

porate corruption and, lately, terrorism — the

Democrats' 2000 presidential nominee intends to run in 2004 by going to the left of the rest of the

After the 1991 Persian Gulf War, Gore favored

Yet, even though he considers terrorism

toppling Saddam Hussein. Now he does not favor

it, at least until after the war on terrorism is won.

America's top security threat, he told National

Public Radio this week that the Bush administration is endangering basic U.S. liberties to fight it.

And he's served notice that he's going to press

field and of his own prior record.

U.S. health system is government-dominated —

impending doctor crisis and be warned.

and, ultimately, politicized.

about it.

ance plan."



flow of new Medicaid patients in perpetuity.

'This is the irony of the whole thing," says San Francisco attorney Madelyn Chaber, who four years ago filed, and won, the first suit against the tobacco industry in California.

Most product liability cases do not follow this pattern. Generally, when a product is found to be harmful, indeed deadly, the goal is to remove it from the market so it cannot cause more harm.

Consider, for example, the Firestone case two years ago. The National Highway Safety and Traffic Board began investigating 46 deaths from accidents that appeared to be the result of treads separating on Firestone tires. Firestone ended up paying out millions in lawsuits.

More important, it took the 6.5 million tires off the market. If Firestone followed the tobacco companies' lead, it would have continued not only to sell the tires, but to vigorously advertise them (along with a fine-print government warning), and then create a fund for the deaths they would cause.

The reason cigarettes stay on the market, the tobacco companies argue, is consumer demand. People want cigarettes and they are only hurting themselves, the argument goes, especially in Cali- joanryan@sfgate.com.

fornia where second-hand smoke has been virtually eliminated by a ban on smoking in public places.

Heavens knows we don't need the government to be any more paternalistic. But by the tobacco industry's logic, we'd make legal heroin, crack and all other individually harmful drugs.

Cigarettes continue to be sold because tobacco companies have enough money to be powerful influences on our legislators. They continue to be sold because the tobacco companies have enough money to counter the death-and-disease statistics with cool, glamorous, fun images that attract people in their teens and 20s. Then the addictive ingredients in the product do the rest, creating a new generation of customers who will provide the much-repeated, aforementioned "consumer demand."

A ban on cigarettes would lead to black markets and smuggling and criminalization of people whose only crime was to get addicted to a once-legal product.

But I wonder how long we'd have to contend with these negative consequences before smoking became too much trouble and too expensive and thus faded into history. 20 years? 25?

Where will WE be in 25 years if we continue as we have? The Medicaid rolls will still be filled with smoking-damaged patients - and in 25 years the tobacco-settlement money will be gone.

- Which future makes more sense?
- Just raising the question.

Joan Ryan is a columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle. Send comments to her e-mail an

Gore should hesitate to go left on health

The Goodland Daily News

(USPS No. 222-460. ISSN 0893-0562) Member: Kansas Press Association The Associated Press Inland Press Association Colorado Press Association National Newspaper Association e-mail: daily@nwkansas.com



Steve Haynes, President *Tom Betz*, Editor/Editorial Page Rachel Hixson, Managing Editor Pat Schiefen, Copy Editor **Sports Editor**

Sharon Corcoran, Society Editor Eric Yonkey, Bill Wagoner, Advertising Sales Sheila Smith, Office Manager Skilar Boland, Adv. Production

Nor'west Press

Jim Bowker, General Manager Richard Westfahl Ron VanLoenen Mary Jo Tapparo Betty Morris *Teneile Lovelace*

Judy McKnight Lana Westfahl John Lapka

🛅 nwkansas.com

N.T. Betz, Director of Internet Services (nbetz@nwkansas.com) Evan Barnum, Systems Admin.(support@nwkansas.com)

Published daily except Saturday and Sunday and the day observed for New Year's Day, Memorial Day, Fourth of July, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day, at 1205 Main St., Goodland, Kan. 67735

Kan., Post Office under the Act of Congress of March 8, 1878.

Main St., Goodland, Kan. 67735

TELEPHONE: (785) 899-2338. Editorial e-mail: daily@nwkansas.com. Advertising questions can be sent to: gdnadv@nwkansas.com

The Goodland Daily News assumes no liability for mistakes or omissions in advertising or failure to publish beyond the actual cost of the ad.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: In Sherman County and adjacent counties: three months, \$25; six months, \$42; 12 months, \$79. Out of area, weekly mailing of five issues: three months, \$30; six months, \$45; 12 months, \$80. By mail daily in Kansas, Colorado: 12 months, \$115. (All tax included.)



Haynes Publishing Company

forward with the populist theme of his 2000 Demo-

cratic National Convention speech, in which he depicted American politics in class-warfare terms

Periodicals postage paid at Goodland, Kan. 67735; entered at the Goodland,

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Goodland Daily News, 1205

- "the people against the powerful." Gore is right to say that the current health sys-

tem is approaching crisis, with the ranks of the uninsured surpassing 41 million, costs rising at 15 percent a year and higher, and workers increasingly forced to pay more of their insurance premiums themselves.

> Former aides who have talked to Gore say that he has not settled on any specific "single payer" national health formula and that he wants one that will achieve consensus among doctors and other providers, employers and consumers.

> That suggests to these aides that he does not have in mind a system like Canada's or the U.S. Medicare system for seniors. In both, government decides what services and procedures will be covered and at what cost. Private insurers are basically cut out.

> It would be good if Gore avoids the Canada-Medicare model, but it would be a disappointment



morton kondracke

commentary

to most advocates of single-payer plans, who claim that government programs are more efficient than the current private-insurance system that covers most Americans.

But their view is disputed by critics, who point out that neither Canada's health system nor Medicare — but almost all private insurers — cover prescription drugs, the basis of much of modern medicine.

Critical researchers also assert that Canada's system has produced long waits for elective surgery, biopsies, visits to specialists and magnetic resonance imaging - and increasing travel to the United States for care.

In the May-June 2002 issue of the journal Health Affairs, researchers reported that in surveys conducted in 1988 and 1990, 56 percent of Canadians thought their health system needed "only minor changes."

But in 2001, 59 percent said that it needed "fundamental changes" - a somewhat higher percentage than in the United States, where 51 percent called for basic change.

The current U.S. crisis in Medicare arises from a government underestimate of participation on HMO programs and a huge miscalculation of the money needed to reimburse doctors.

As a result, the government cut doctor reimbursements by 5.4 percent last year. Another 4.4 percent cut is scheduled for January. Over the next three years, doctors are due for a total cut of 12 percent.

As a result of the cuts, doctors are increasingly avoiding new Medicare patients and some are refusing to treat Medicare patients at all.

In a survey by the California Medical Association, 58 percent of doctors said that new cuts would lead them to not take new patients and 20 percent said they would drop Medicare patients.

The House last week passed a bill allowing the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to cancel the new doctor cuts administratively without fear of lawsuits from other providers — including hospitals, HMOs and nursing homes — that want reimbursement increases.

However, the Senate Finance Committee is not likely to pass the measure because key senators want other providers, especially rural health centers, to get payment increases.

There are comprehensive alternatives to government-run medicine, which Gore ought to consider.

One is the plan proposed in 2000 by his Democratic rival, former Sen. Bill Bradley (N.J.), allowing all Americans to buy into the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program.

Bradley's proposal provided a tax credit to enable lower-income persons to participate in the FEHB program and eliminated the state-managed Medicaid program — a point over which Gore savaged him in the 2000 campaign.

The FEHB program is not really a "single payer," however. It negotiates with private insurance companies to provide federal workers with an array of reduced-premium private plans to choose from.

With variations, the late Sen. Paul Wellstone (D-Minn.) advocated an FEHB plan and so do many "New Democrats" and some Republicans.

Some former Gore aides think he might come up with such a plan, too. That would be good. If he insisted on calling it "single payer," though, it would be populist positioning.

Morton Kondracke is executive editor of Roll Call, the newspaper of Capitol Hill.

berry's world

