

We are not prepared for elderly care

Millions of Americans care for beloved relatives who are running out of money

BY FROMA HARROP

It often starts off easy. For me it did. An elderly friend needed some help with food shopping and dealing with the cable company. He has no family to speak of, and his close friends have died. Pushing 90, his thinking had obviously slowed, but he could still shave, bathe and dress.

So I volunteered to run some errands. No big deal. I'd drive him to doctors' appointments and pick up drugs. When he was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, I started taking him to the cancer center for infusions.

But as his three prescriptions swelled to seven prescriptions (he also has heart issues), he needed someone to manage the medications. That became me. I was soon tracking them, ordering refills and filling the pill organizer. My friend now swallows 77 pills a week, on top of the cancer infusions.

As time has moved on, the demands have grown. My friend currently suffers periodic bouts

of confusion, diarrhea, serious pain and fatigue. Is it the cancer? Is it the meds? Age? Something else? No one seems to know. Several of the medications list the same side effects. Same goes for the conditions themselves. On low-energy weeks, I find myself also doing his laundry and cleaning the house.

I have no legal obligation to do this. I took on providing this elder care because my friend is a great old guy. But also — to be very honest — because I had no idea what I was getting into.

Millions of Americans are taking care of their beloved elders, many stuck in situations far more agonizing than mine. Some are dealing with dementia, whereby the afflicted can't do anything for themselves.

Caregivers are known to suffer depression, insomnia, anxiety and loneliness. Any time away requires exhaustive planning. (Try to find someone willing to take over changing an adult's diapers for a weekend.) And as people will keep telling you, it will only get harder.



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Millions take care of their beloved elders, many in difficult situations.

Also, it could go on for 10 years. New treatments for incurable conditions can greatly extend lives while burdening patients, especially the older ones, with debilitating side effects.

Money helps, of course, but for extended elder care, that money has to come by the tanker load. Medicare covers only a few specialized nursing services.

The disappearing corporate pension, unexpected crises (floods, fire, sick family mem-

bers) and poor financial planning have left many elderly broke at retirement's door — except for Social Security. Meanwhile, grown children often give up paying work to care for their parents.

The median cost for a private room in a nursing home hovers around \$100,000 a year, according to Genworth Financial. The lucky ones can sell their house and use the proceeds to go into independent or assisted living communities. For those who stay put, hiring 24/7 home

health care aides easily costs \$80,000 a year. How many American families have budgeted a half-million dollars for years of elder care?

An illuminating piece in *Baron's* described how these demands can shock even experts on the subject. One was AARP's Amy Goyer. Her parents were relatively well-prepared. They had pensions and long-term care insurance. But when Goyer's mother suffered a stroke and her father was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, their continuing-care retirement center would no longer keep them.

Goyer moved to Phoenix to tend to her parents at their home. Her mother died, but she was still taking care of her father 12 years later.

As my friend needs more and more help, I'm hoping he will sell his house and move into an assisted living arrangement. The equity would pay for a few years there.

And after that? I don't even want to think about it.



Froma Harrop is a columnist with *Creators Syndicate*.



President Donald Trump with Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis, second from right, at Saturday's Army-Navy game in Philadelphia.

tis will be left from that group to protect this country from an impulsive, disastrous decision by Trump. Of course, past presidents had multiple staff changes. But the exodus from Trump's staff in less than two years speaks volumes about the chaos in the White House.

Our country always has been divided politically, but this cur-

rent division is not about healthy differences of opinion. It is downright venomous. I fear the next two years, with constant investigations, special counsel reports and impeachment talk, will create a very unhealthy and dangerous situation. All without the adults in the room.

Jim Kiernan, *Holbrook*

Two editorial cartoons went too far

I take offense to the Nov. 28 Matt Davies' editorial cartoon that depicted the U.S. border wall with the words "keep out."

As one whose great-great grandparents came to America from distant countries, I believe America is still a shining city on the hill. This country is here for almost anyone who chooses to enter legally. Countries, the United States included, have borders and immigration laws and procedures for good reasons.

We are told the potential emigres from Central America are seeking to escape violence, unemployment, and substandard education and health care. They should not seek to enter illegally or use confrontational means.

George Hodge, *Southampton*

A Mike Luckovich cartoon in the Dec. 8 opinion-page roundup showed the Holy Fam-

ily at the U.S. border, with tear gas thrown their way. Maybe you should do a little research before publishing such a ludicrous cartoon. Joseph and his family were not in Bethlehem illegally; they were on their way to take part in a government-ordered census. An apology is warranted for such a thoughtless cartoon. Not amused.

Jo-Ann Buonomo, *Islip Terrace*

Tell readers more about Pearl Harbor

While Newsday published a story to mark the 77th anniversary of Pearl Harbor ["Carrying on for a hero," *News*, Dec. 7], I was disappointed that it did not write more.

The anniversary of the 1941 attack should be a national holiday, and flags should fly at half staff. Young people need to know about the attack by Japan, how World War II affected people at home, and the men and women

we lost. Always remember.

Betty Sudmann, *Lindhurst*

White-line infractions on roads aren't trivial

I enjoyed your letters about traffic tickets ["The local traffic ticket cash cow," Dec. 10], but I object in the strongest possible terms to a letter that complained about white-line tickets. A basic rule is that a driver must stop before the white line — not on top or over it. Those lines often mark crosswalks, another area where vehicles are not allowed to stop.

Tickets for this infraction aren't money grabbers. We'd all be safer on the roads if motorists followed the law.

Lenny G. Ancona, *Centereach*

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