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A CIVIL DISCOURSE

Our goal is to maintain a civil tone. With that in mind, when writing letters, discourse should be cordial and people should be referred to in a respectful manner.

FOCUS ON THE ISSUE

Letters in response to other letter writers should address the issue at hand and, rather than mentioning the writer by name, should refer to the headline and date the letter was published. Letters on news stories should also note the headline and publication date.

LETTER REQUIREMENTS

Letters for publication should be no longer than 300 words and must include the writer's address and daytime telephone number. Only the writer's name and hometown will be published. For mailed submissions, writers must sign the letter.

SENDING LETTERS

Mail or email letters to ...

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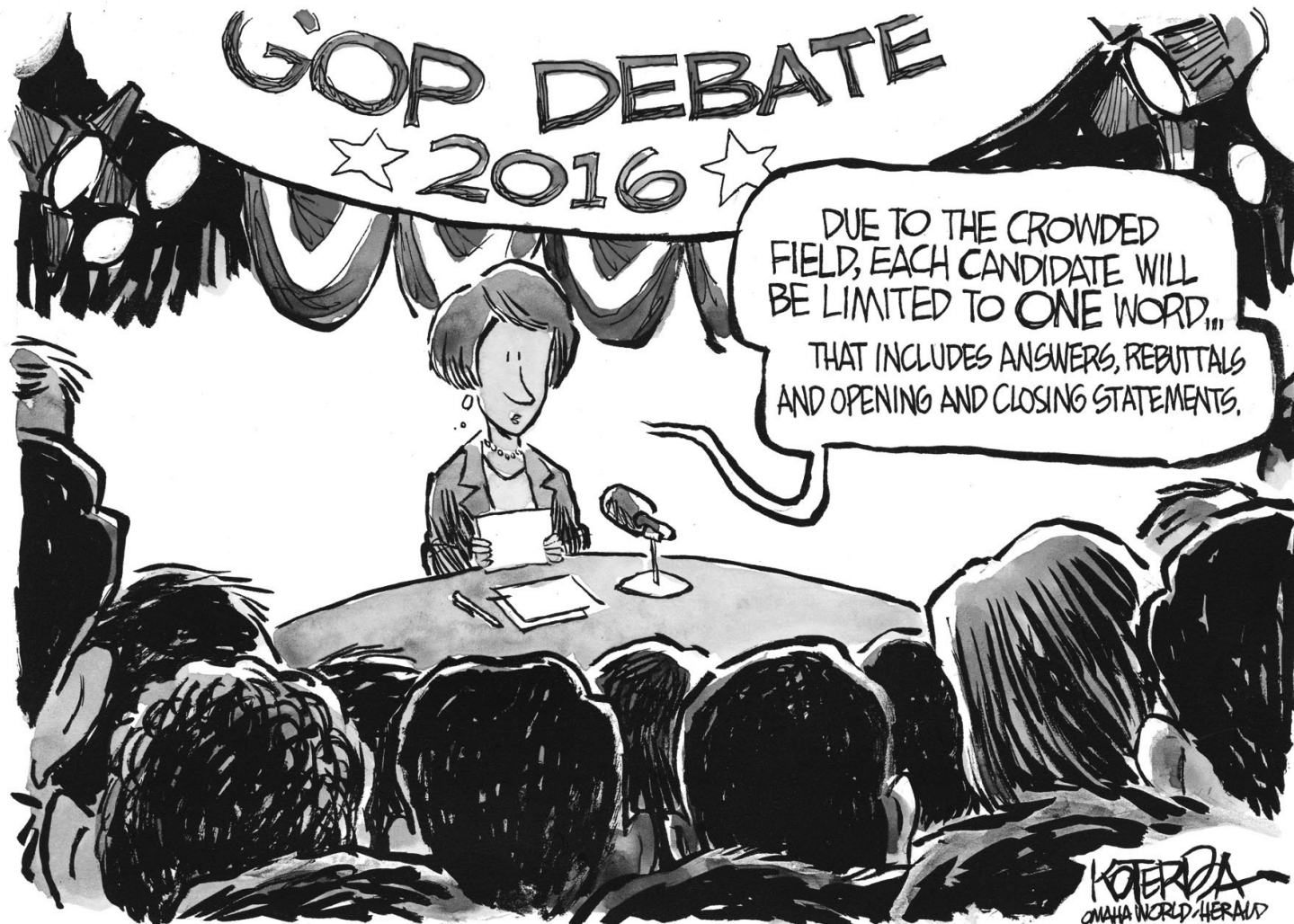
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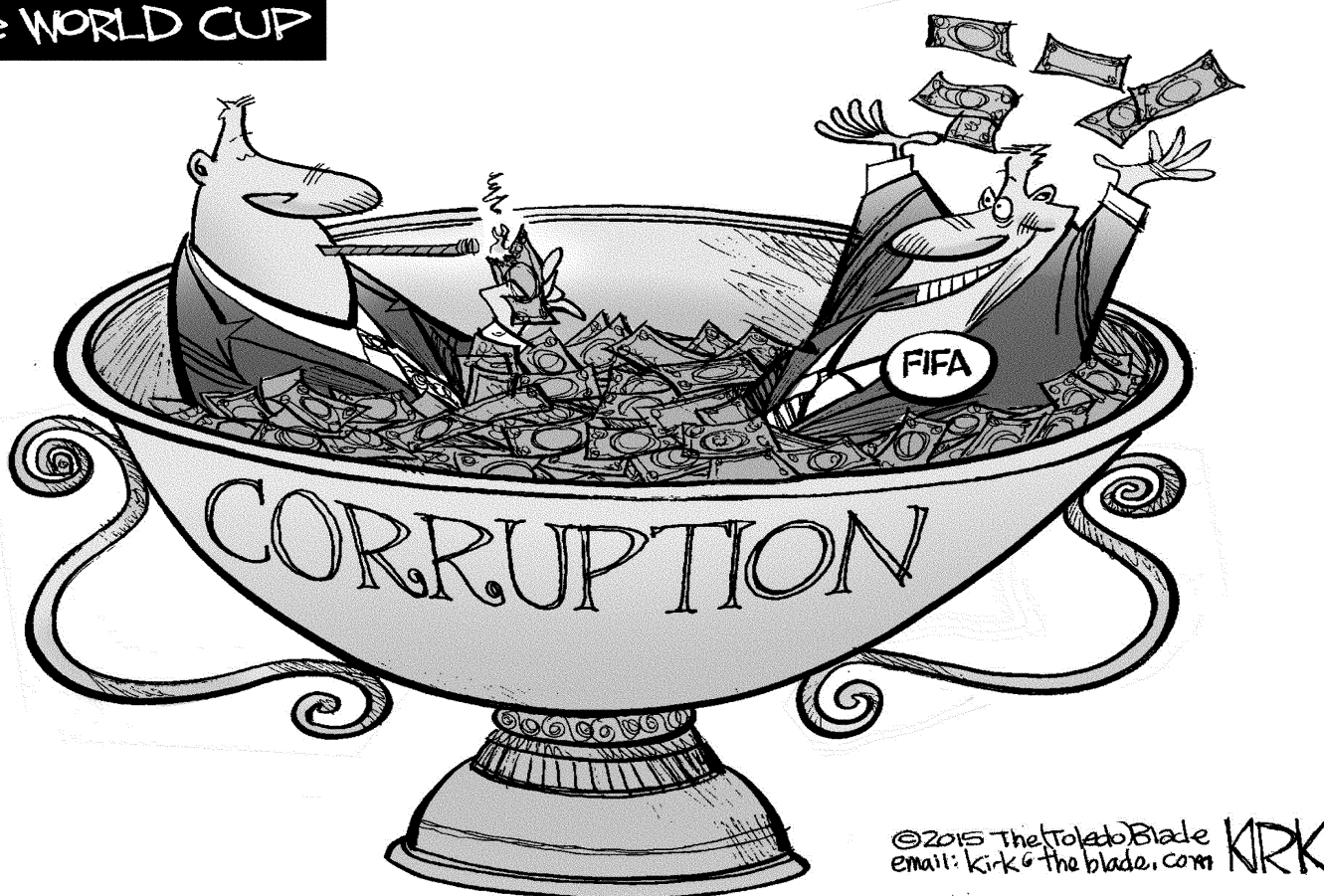
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THE VILLAGES DAILY SUN SALUTES

Villages Health Award Proves Efforts are Changing Health Care

We'd like to offer congratulations to The Villages Health for a job well done when it comes to patient care and satisfaction ratings.

In case you missed it, the local health care organization, which was formed in 2012, has a new badge of honor to display – UnitedHealthcare's Patient Service Excellence Award. That distinction clearly identifies The Villages Health as the best in Florida and among the top 4 percent nationwide in UnitedHealthcare's vast network of physician groups across the country.

The award, which was presented last week, was based on a variety of successes, including the ability to close care gaps for Medicare Advantage members with important preventive health care services.

A large part of the criteria for the award also was based on national rankings, such as the Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems survey and the Health Care Effectiveness Data and Information Set – a standard set of measurements that primarily are focused around screenings and used by more than 90 percent of America's health plans to measure performance.

According to Pete Clarkson, chief executive officer of North/Central Florida for UnitedHealthcare Medicare & Retirement, The Villages Health scored a 9.2 rating out of a possible 10 in the CAHPS patient satisfaction survey. And the organization exceeded targets in 14 of 17 HEDIS measures – 12 of which were superior five-star ratings.

"For a newly organized physician group – a group of physicians that are working together for the first time in a coordinated-care program – to be able to achieve these kinds of results is unheard of," Clarkson said, pointing out that the data used was from 2014 – the first year The Villages Health was graded in the national rankings.

The numbers also were impressive to Steve Nelson, CEO of UnitedHealthcare Medicare & Retirement, who made a special trip to Florida's Friendliest Hometown to present the award.

"We have partnerships all over the place with all kinds of unique health care systems," Nelson said. "But this has produced amongst the highest health outcomes and patient satisfaction and health experience of any partnership we have, anywhere in America."

All told, UnitedHealth Group boasts 70 million customers and nearly 1 in 5 Medicare beneficiaries. The company also is the largest Medicare Advantage provider in the country, with networks and partnerships located in all 50 states. So, for an organization that stresses patient-centered care and the importance of preventive measures to be ranked No. 1 in the Sunshine State and among the best nationwide clearly is validation that the health care initiative here is on the right track, Nelson said.

"What we're doing here is exactly the right thing to do," he added. "That's why I'm really excited about the future."

Physicians like Dr. Joe Hildner, director of medical affairs for The Villages Health, also are quite excited about the future.

"This is a good example to show there's another way to do this doctoring thing," he said. "If you focus on keeping people healthy and well, there's reward in that."

Dr. Robert Reilly, medical director of the Creekside Care Center, agreed.

"There's a lot of pride," Reilly said. "This is an amazing accomplishment for a very short period of time."

Dr. Saul Rosenblum, medical director of the Santa Barbara Care Center, was quick to point out that the honor is a validation that Medicare Advantage, which stresses preventive care through screenings and other methods, is good for seniors.

"This is tremendous," he said. "It's a recognition of what we've tried to accomplish. It's support and nourishment for what we want to do as physicians and health care providers."

Dr. Laura Cloukey, medical director of the Pinellas Care Center, echoed that sentiment, adding that she believes improved health care outcomes that are measurable will become the standard nationally that others try to achieve.

"You can't be healthy without preventive care because if you can't catch it before it hits, there's no prevention at all," she said. "Then you're stuck with a disease. That limits you in what you can and cannot do. And then there goes your whole dream."

Hildner, whose Family Doctors of Belleview practice merged with The Villages Health in 2012, might have summed it up best.

"It's no longer an idea that we're talking about happening one day," he said. "We are already demonstrably and measurably doing a better job than anybody else in Florida. That's kind of special."

Special, indeed. We've had the pleasure of watching this grassroots health care initiative grow into the organization that it is today. Along the way, we've talked to many different patients who all tell us the same thing – they're thrilled with the patient-centered care they receive and they appreciate the great amount of time they get to spend with their doctors at each visit.

As we said earlier, our hats are off to the more than 300 Villages Health medical providers and staff members who are working extremely hard to make The Villages America's Healthiest Hometown. This prestigious award is validation that you are on the right path – a path we're confident will one day soon change the face of health care across America.



LARRY D. CROOM

DAILY SUN OMBUDSMAN