

## Standard online reader survey



**Q: Do you think drugmakers should be held legally liable for the opioid epidemic?**

**YES or NO**

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## GUEST EDITORIAL

### Is there too much made on war to stop?

One line continues to be repeated during the discussion between the White House and Congress, from both Republican and Democratic sides, over the budget and the partial government shutdown drama: Action is essential so as not to leave Department of Defense financing up in the air.

This particular chord usually also has a note in it about the importance of U.S. national defense and another about supporting our soldiers.

There is no reason to quarrel about either point, although focus on those two relevant factors usually leaves out two others, which should be looked at more vigorously.

The first is that American arms manufacturers and defense-related contractors take away buckets of taxpayer money from America's wars. The second is that the wars that gobble up this money are seemingly endless. In addition, virtually nothing is being done by the U.S. government to bring the wars to a conclusion, thus bringing to an end the bloody conflict and the risk to life and limb involved for our sons and daughters. Less important but nonetheless relevant is the high level of government expenditure that goes into perpet-

uating these wars. Is this incidental or deliberate? The colossal size of the U.S. defense budget has almost come to be taken for granted. At some \$600 billion, it dwarfs the budgets over every other nation in the world.

The money is particularly important when it is understood that the overall budget covers not only defense expenditures, but also money for Medicaid, Medicare and Social Security, not to mention the tax cuts. Do we really want to see big bites taken out of these programs, most of which benefit American children, disabled and old people, to keep U.S. involvement in wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Syria and Yemen going?

The Afghanistan War started in 2001; Iraq in 1991, to be continued in 2003; Libya in 2011; Somalia in 1992; Syria in 2012; and Yemen in 2015.

Are none of these wars susceptible to a constructive effort on America's part to bring them to an end?

Or are some sectors of American society making too much money from them, to our shame?

**Pittsburgh Post-Gazette**

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### Wow, there can be compromise

Can the center hold? That's the most intriguing question to emerge from the partisan standoff that closed the federal government for three days.

Two dozen moderates from both parties brokered a deal with two parts: Democrats voted to resume government funding, and Republicans leaders promised a floor vote on legislation protecting "Dreamers" -- about 800,000 young people brought here illegally as children, who could face deportation if Congress doesn't act.

Liberal activists were rightly skeptical of the deal. Promising to hold a vote is not the same as promising to pass a bill. And nothing the Senate does binds the House, where anti-immigrant hardliners oppose virtually any concession to the Dreamers.

Still, it is cause for hope senators from both parties actually talked to each other, respected each other, trusted each other. So many senators wanted to join the bipartisan meetings hosted by Sen. Susan Collins, a Maine Republican, "that we were running out of chairs," she said.

For years, Congress has been dominated by extremists on both sides, who denounce any concession to the other party as betrayal -- or even treason. The senators who crammed into Collins' office were rebelling against that wrong-headed notion. And they were reasserting a basic truth: effective legislating requires compromise.

These senators have taken a step, a very small step, toward returning reason and realism to Capitol Hill. If that

step leads to more conversations, and more compromises, the long-term impact could be highly significant.

There are plenty of reasons to be cautious here. In 2013, an immigration reform bill passed the Senate with strong bipartisan support, then got buried in the House without even a vote. The same fate could meet any Senate measure for Dreamers.

The two chambers are very different. Senators run statewide and as a result, they're forced to listen to dis-senting minorities. Republicans like Cory Gardner of Colorado and Dean Heller of Nevada have growing

Latino constituencies to consider, while Democrats like Heidi Heitkamp of North Dakota have to survive in very red states. Inevitably, that makes them more responsive and flexible.

House members, by contrast, have small districts that are often tailored to protect one party. That reduces their incentive to consult the other side to almost zero. Their biggest political fear is often a primary challenge from an even more hardline rival.

This statement from the *Washington Post* editorial board got it right: "From here, that core group of moderate, deal-making lawmakers should feel empowered. The broad middle in both houses of Congress should no longer wait for direction from a chaotic White House or spineless congressional leadership."

That really would be "something we have not seen for years." Steve and Cokie Roberts can be contacted by email at [stevecokie@gmail.com](mailto:stevecokie@gmail.com).



**COLUMNISTS**  
**STEVE & COKIE ROBERTS**

### Understanding 'life' issues

In his days as a youth pastor, Republican Sen. James Lankford of Oklahoma spent lots of time begging church members to teach Sunday school. After hearing this plea over and over, one woman pulled him aside and quietly shared her painful reason for declining, said Lankford at last week's Evangelicals For Life conference.

The woman told him: "James, I had an abortion years ago. I cannot be used by God." After apologizing for "pounding on her" to volunteer, Lankford said he responded: "Is there any action God cannot forgive?"

Lankford said the woman's response was unforgettable: "I'm not sure yet."

Debates about the dignity of human life take place in all kinds of settings, from Capitol Hill and the U.S. Supreme Court to church fellowship halls and streets packed with marchers. Arguments about abortion create headlines, fuel fundraising letters and rattle politicians left and right.

Just before this year's March for Life -- marking the 45th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade* -- the U.S. House voted 241-183 to pass the Born-alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act, which protects children who survive abortion procedures.

What happens in courts and legislatures is important, said Lankford. However, he said the most important discussions of right-to-life issues occur during personal encounters with ordinary people wrestling with hard questions in real life.

At some point, Americans will need to find common ground, he said.

"Where do we find the common-ground issues? Where do we get into those conversations? I will typically start with people who have ques-

tions about life with one simple question: Where is your boundary with where life begins?"

Debates about the beginning of life combine politics and theology, science and constitutional law. These days, said Lankford, advanced forms of ultrasound technology are providing a clearer window into the lives of unborn children, as they yawn, stretch, make faces and suck their thumbs. Only four nations allow abortion after 25 weeks of pregnancy -- China, Vietnam, North Korea and the United States.

These are tough issues for many people to discuss, Lankford admitted, but it's crucial to keep asking: "Where is your boundary? Where do you define life?"

Christians are supposed to believe that "all persons are worthy of value, worthy of dignity and worthy of importance,"

said Daniel Akin, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Religious believers have to remember that politics alone cannot solve any of these problems, stressed Republican Sen. Ben Sasse of Nebraska. Protecting life always requires love and compassion.

"Ultimately, as evangelicals, you know the line between good and evil runs through your heart, it runs through my heart," he said. "When I'm going to try and persuade somebody about the dignity of babies, I'm going to start by thinking about them as a whole person, not as somebody who's wearing a tribal jersey -- because (news) cameras are on and that's the partisan-primary, they-got-elected-into-this-lame-job drill."

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**ON RELIGION**  
**TERRY MATTINGLY**



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