

# Opinions

## The First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.



## For US-Saudi relationship to thaw, MBS needs to answer on Khashoggi

WASHINGTON – It has been nearly six months since Jamal Khashoggi was brutally murdered inside Saudi Arabia’s consulate in Istanbul, but the aftershocks continue. The U.S.-Saudi defense and intelligence partnership has been rocked. The future of the relationship is on hold, pending answers from Riyadh.

The bottom line is that unless the crown prince takes ownership of this issue and accepts blame for murderous deeds done in his name, his relationship with the United States will remain broken. Saudi officials claim that Mohammed bin Salman, or MBS as he is known, has made changes, firing Saud al-Qah-tani, his former covert-operations coordinator.

MBS took a small step toward placating critics Thursday when the kingdom released three female human-rights activists from prison, while they await trial. Eight other women who campaigned for women to drive and other issues remain in detention.

Among the previously undisclosed findings:

■ Some members of the Saudi strike team that was sent to Istanbul received training in the United States, according to U.S. and Saudi sources. The CIA has cautioned other government agencies that some of this special-operations training might have been conducted by Tier 1 Group, an Arkansas-based company, under a State Department license.

■ A U.S. plan to train and modernize the Saudi intelligence service is also on hold, pending State Department approval of a license. This project was developed by Culpeper National Security Solutions, a unit of DynCorp, with help from some prominent former CIA officials. No work on the project has been done.

■ Michael Morell, former acting director of the CIA, was publicly identified as Culpeper’s chairman of the board in 2017, but he no longer holds that position. A source said Morell withdrew within days of Khashoggi’s murder because of his concern about the direction Saudi Arabia was heading. Morell declined to comment.

Tier 1 Group and DynCorp are both owned by affiliates of Cerberus Capital Management, based in New York. The company wouldn’t confirm or deny whether any of the 17 perpetrators of the Khashoggi killing who were sanctioned by the Treasury Department had been trained under the Tier 1 contract.

■ NSO Group, an Israeli-founded company that provides sophisticated tools for hacking cellphones, has reviewed and modified its relationship with Saudi Arabia, according to a Saudi source, because of concerns that its technology might have been misused. The company wouldn’t confirm or deny this account.

The best narrative of Khashoggi’s murder seems to come via a bug planted in the consulate by Turkish intelligence. A Saudi who has carefully read a transcript of that illegal surveillance described its contents. He said it indicates the team planned to kidnap Khashoggi and bring him back home for detention and interrogation – but that the plan was botched and Khashoggi was killed. His body was then dismembered and disposed of.

The transcript, as described by the Saudi source, is chilling. Maher Mutreb, the Saudi team leader, tells Khashoggi: “You’re coming back with us.”

What happened next remains conjecture. The Saudi source says there is a note in the transcript indicating that Khashoggi was given an injection.

A bag was then placed over Khashoggi’s head, and he screamed: “I can’t breathe. I have asthma. Don’t do this.” He died soon after – possibly from a sedative overdose, choking or asphyxiation.

Khashoggi wrote often about his fervent desire for modernization and rule of law in the kingdom. In his last moments, he pleaded that he couldn’t breathe, but his murder may yet give oxygen to his demand for reform.

Follow David Ignatius on Twitter: @IgnatiusPost.



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Educate yourself on Healthcare for all

Recent articles published in the Citizen Times have illustrated how fragile many Americans’ access to affordable healthcare is. The GOP court challenge to dismantle the Affordable Care Act only heightens concerns.

People in Western North Carolina are rightly anxious about how these possible changes would affect their healthcare. One local health advocacy organization, Healthcare for All WNC, has responded to citizen anxieties by arranging for a national critic of for-profit medical corporations to speak in Asheville.

On Wednesday, April 10, Wendell Potter, former VP of Communications for health insurance giant Cigna, will speak on “Transforming Healthcare in America” at two public forums in Asheville. These free events will occur at 2 - 3:30 p.m. at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 1 Edwin Place, and 7 - 8:30 p.m. at the Lenoir-Rhyne University Conference Room, 36 Montford Avenue (COC building).

Potter is president of Business Initiative for Health Policy. His best-selling book, “Deadly Spin,” discloses how insurance companies maximize profits by restricting care and use deceptive tactics to undermine health care reform.

Also, at noon of April 10, Wendell Potter will also be interviewed by Frank Stasio on NPR’s “The State of Things.” This national program is broadcast on FM 88.1 every Wednesday in Asheville.

Anyone concerned about the availability of universal affordable healthcare needs to learn more about “healthcare for all” as an option to our failing for-profit system. New legislation is being introduced in both the NC legislature and US Congress to expand Medicaid and fund “Improved Medicare for All” respectively.

Frank L. Fox, Asheville

### Passengers shouldn’t foot the AVL bill

Asheville is booming, and as demonstrated by a recent article (Asheville airport officials want terminal to double in size. How will they pay for it?), airlines have been eager to add new routes to the city.

Funding an airport expansion is not unique to Asheville. Cities all across America are expanding and improving their airports – and doing so without raising fees and taxes on travelers.

That’s why it’s disappointing that local officials want to make Asheville a less appealing place to visit by increasing the Passenger Facility Charge (PFC), a passenger tax that travelers pay on each and every leg of a flight.

Asheville Regional Airport is already collecting record levels of revenue, including PFCs, and any increase in this tax comes straight of the pocket of air travelers. There’s no need for a tax increase. With little to no debt and healthy cash reserves, the Asheville airport is well-positioned to fund an expansion through existing resources and access to the bond market at preferred rates, just as other growing cities are doing.

Passengers are already paying their fair share to help Asheville grow, and politicians should reject a tax increase that could make the city a less attractive place to fly.

Vaughn Jennings, Vice President, Communications, Airlines for America

### Repeal without a plan to replace?

President Trump abruptly announced that he supports the court’s efforts to eliminate Obama Care. This would fulfill one half of the thus far unrealized Republican promise to repeal and replace. That is, the courts would repeal Obama Care without a plan to replace it. For those who think there’s no way that could happen, think again. Despite the promises and years of rhetoric, Republicans are not even close to a transition plan, let alone a replacement.

If the courts prevail, it would eliminate healthcare for tens of millions. A huge chunk of the insurance industry would go away with nothing to fill the void. The healthcare payment system could just implode.

**No matter how many times the refrain “The Republicans are the party of healthcare” is repeated, it just isn’t true. They’re just empty words. If you believe like I do - that quality, affordable health care is the right of every citizen, not a privilege reserved for those fortunate enough to have it - take a look at the evidence and remember who is really working to make healthcare a universal right for all.**

We all know that Obama Care has problems, not the least of which are premium costs, high deductibles, and limited choice especially in rural areas like ours. Democrats in the House of Representatives are now hard at work creating legislation fix Obama Care. Legislation aims to close loopholes, mitigate current weaknesses, and bring costs down to a level where health insurance affordable for every day Americans.

No matter how many times the refrain “The Republicans are the party of healthcare” is repeated, it just isn’t true. They’re just empty words. If you believe like I do - that quality, affordable health care is the right of every citizen, not a privilege reserved for those fortunate enough to have it - take a look at the evidence and remember who is really working to make healthcare a universal right for all. We can make it happen with your support.

Elaine Slocumb, Bryson City

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