

CARE

From Page 03

the state health department struggle to meet those goals? Do you want to see the stats regarding South Dakota women receiving prenatal care take a huge dip? We believe, if you have a good head on your shoulders, that you don't. But that's exactly what will happen if state lawmakers ultimately deny prenatal care services because of cost or women's citizenship status.

All you have to do is take a look at what happened in Nebraska in recent years. That state disqualified low-income women from Medicaid coverage in 2010.

Last year, however, a contingent of Nebraska lawmakers fought to restore state-funded prenatal care services. It turned out to be one of the most emotionally charged debates for Nebraska lawmakers.

Gov. Dave Heineman opposed restoring the prenatal care. Senators narrowly overrode his veto and reinstated the benefit for low-income women, many of whom were illegal immigrants.

Six months after Nebraska restored prenatal care services, health clinics are reporting an uptick in the percentage of women seeking medical care in the crucial first trimester of pregnancy.

The percentage of pregnant woman who seek first-trimester care during their first visit to the OneWorld Community Health Center in Omaha has increased from an average of 78 percent before the coverage was available to

85 percent in the last four months of 2012.

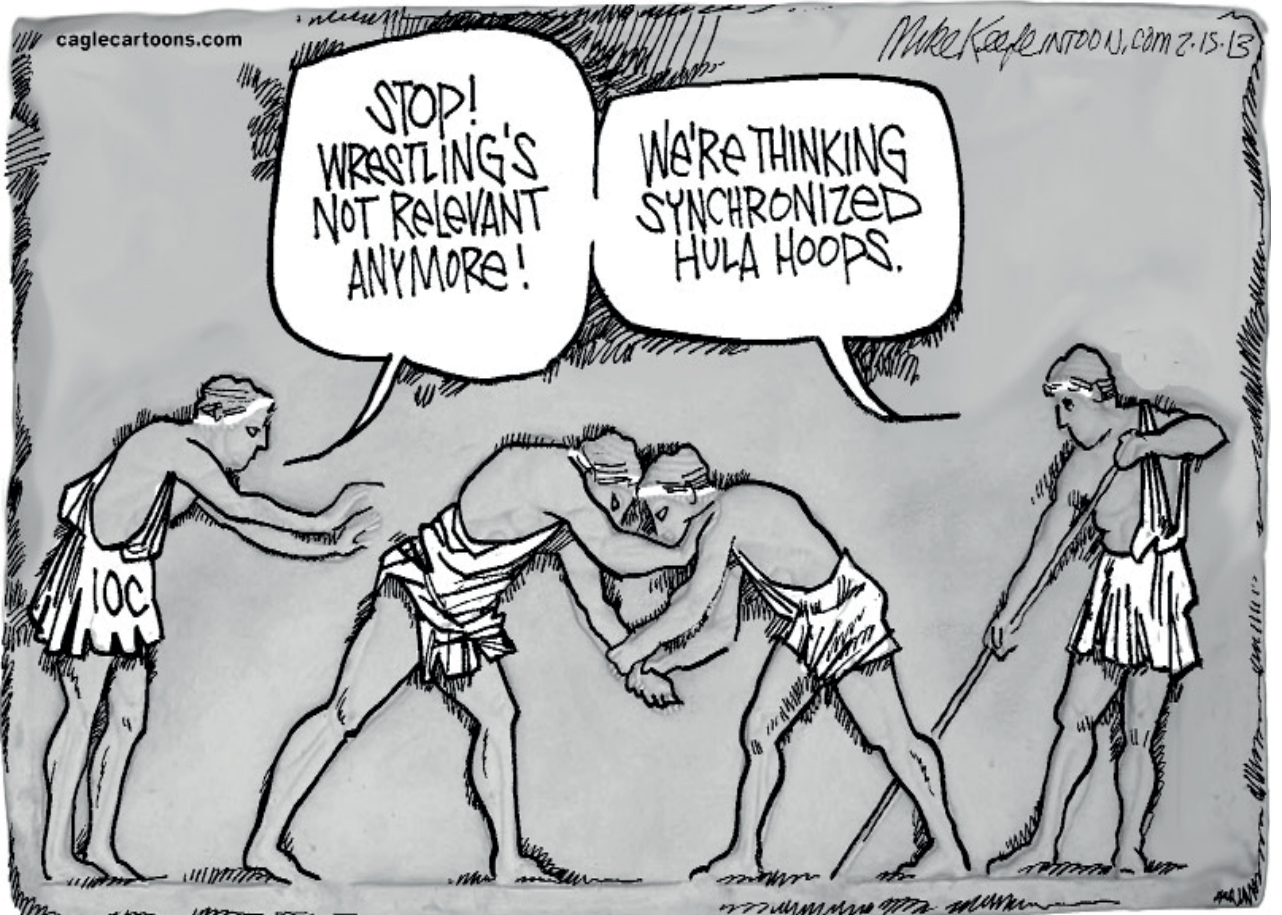
That uptick in services to women and their unborn babies in Nebraska is under threat again. Sen. Charlie Janssen, of Fremont, NE, a vocal opponent of illegal immigration, has introduced a bill this year to repeal the law. And in his proposed two-year budget to lawmakers, Heineman recommends pulling \$786,000 in yearly funding for the services.

The South Dakota Senate should work to avoid similar turmoil and approve the prenatal care legislation. No doubt legislators may hear arguments opposing such action. They'll be told that allowing the benefits at public expense rewards illegal behavior and diverts money from services for legal residents.

That "public expense," in our thinking, is worth it. Offering prenatal care to all low-income women is highly cost-effective.

The Kids Count study from 2011 notes: "As the population of racial and ethnic minorities continues to climb, efforts must be directed at closing the gap in health and health care. Early and adequate prenatal care is a relatively simple and cost-effective measure that allows the physician to monitor the growing fetus, provide support and advice on issues such as smoking cessation or proper nutrition to the mother, and educate the mother what she should expect."

South Dakota, in making an effort to try to do everything it can to support all pregnant women, will be making a smart investment by approving this legislation.



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