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## Opinion: In response to articles on national debt

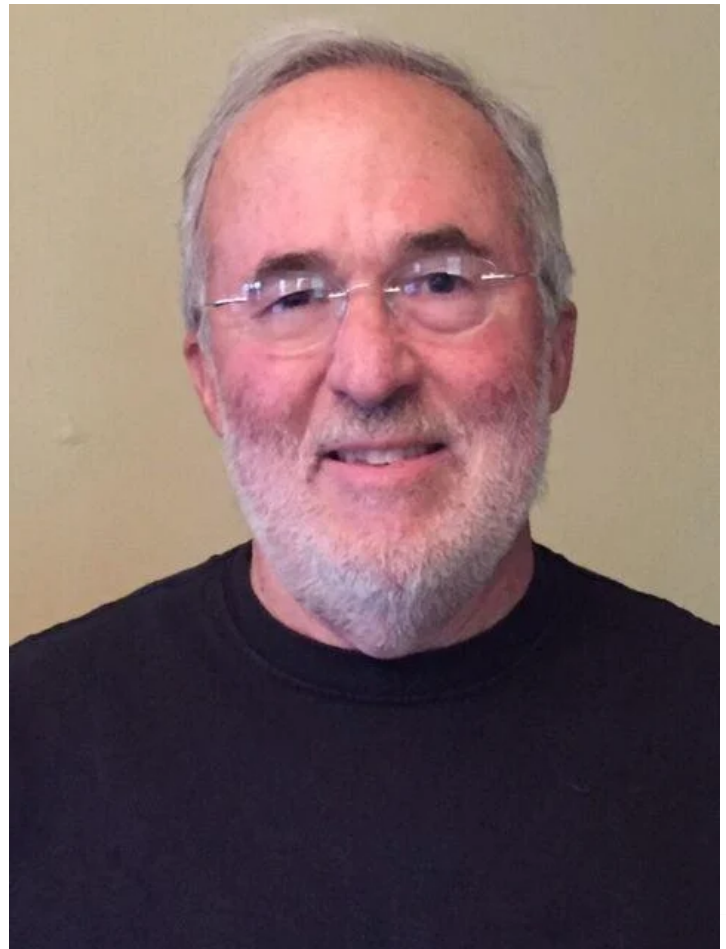
By DON HERBST | Guest columnist

Jan 8, 2023

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On Dec. 6 and 7, the Post Register ran a two-part article about our national debt. There are a few problems. Comparing nominal dollar amounts between years and between different countries is invalid because inflation distorts the values, and the sizes of the economies are very different. Economists prefer to compare amounts between years or between countries as a percent of gross domestic product. Most of the article is an exercise in this kind of invalid and misleading comparison.

The article is also notable for what it didn't say. Non-interest federal spending excluding Social Security and Medicare was 14% of GDP in 1980 and for 2019 was 11.1% of GDP. With the exception of stimulus spending following the 2008 economic crash and the 2020 pandemic economic crash, this spending has remained below 1980 spending levels. Most economists agree that stimulus spending was necessary. Social Security has never added to the national debt since it is separately funded. Medicare and Medicaid spending increased from 1.4% of GDP in 1980 to 5.2% of GDP in 2022 because Republicans refuse any attempt to reform an unsustainably



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expensive for-profit health care system and are ideologically incapable of admitting that government-managed single-payer systems provide better health care at half the cost for every other developed country on earth.

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