

Title: Brass Tacks from Rural Iowa: So much for Iowa Nice

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I've disagreed with Sen. Joni Ernst and her policies before. But I've never felt more insulted and embarrassed for Iowa by her actions than I was on May 31 by her non-apology for saying "we all are going to die" at a town hall in Parkersburg.



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Saying we're all going to die is something you might say in casual conversation (but hopefully not often!) or a philosophy class. But Ernst wasn't in a philosophy class or having a casual conversation. She knew exactly where she was, who she was talking with (her constituents), and the topic at hand (not one of musings on life and the universe).

That's why her "apology" is tone deaf. It's also insulting to Iowans of all political stripes. Instead of showing empathy to the real concerns of the constituents in her town hall, she thought it would be funny to sarcastically claim that some of them didn't know life would eventually cease to exist. Well, it is not funny. But it does seem to show that Ernst feels her constituents, the people she is supposed to represent, are beneath her or unintelligent simpletons.

Maybe she has spent too much time away from Iowa in D.C. with billionaires like Elon Musk and other wealthy elites who don't need to worry about going to the doctor, the cost of prescription drugs, or how they'll be able to feed their family. I don't know what else would lead her to abandon Iowa values of lending a helping hand, being kind to one another, and certainly not calling each other stupid.

Republicans, Democrats, Independents... all of us have reason to be concerned with what is shaping up to be a "big, terrible, no good" bill out of D.C. Estimates point that this bill, as currently written, will result in anywhere from 57,000 to 94,000 Iowans losing their healthcare coverage. These are real people. They're folks in between jobs or working part-time, caring for a loved one, in a nursing home. These people are our neighbors.

Despite what Joni Ernst implies, we're not sim-

ple-minded, and we know when a crisis is brewing. And there's trouble on the horizon for our healthcare system. Private equity groups are buying up nursing homes. Medicare Advantage promises the moon then drives us into the ground. Health insurance companies deny our claims at an alarming rate. It's not a pretty picture. Kicking people off Medicaid would only make it worse.

Ernst's job is to engage her constituents on their concerns, and ideally pass policies that improve our quality of life. Yes, we're all going to die. But dying after living a full life while receiving good healthcare coverage is different from dying because you can't access basic care.

Too many elected officials these days say and do things that don't make a lick of sense. I didn't expect Sen. Ernst to be a staunch defender of Medicaid, SNAP, and other safety net programs that lift people and our communities up. But I sure didn't expect her to insult and demean Iowans who simply want to know how our government is working for us instead of corporations and billionaire interests.

Barb Kalbach lives in Adair County, Iowa. She is a 4th-generation family farmer, a registered nurse, and board president of Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement. Barb can be reached at barbnealkalbach@gmail.com.