

COMMENTARY

Billion? trillion? The wonder of incomprehensible sums

I remember when a billion used to be a number so big nobody could comprehend it, though it is still a massive number.

According to Snopes.com, 1 billion seconds equals 31.7 years. A billion seconds have elapsed since 1981.

One billion minutes is equal to 1,901 years — which would take us back, almost, to the time Jesus Christ roamed the Earth.

One billion hours is equal to 114,000 years — which would take us back to the Stone Age.

In more recent times, our inability to comprehend the sheer magnitude of 1 billion has been eclipsed by our inability to comprehend 1 trillion.

One trillion is equal to one thousand billion.

Our federal deficit has been averaging nearly \$1 trillion since the collapse of 2008 — causing us to rack up more than \$5 trillion in new debt.

In order to cover our nearly \$4 trillion annual budget, the U.S. Treasury spends about \$1 billion every two hours — accumulating \$1 billion in new debt about every eight hours.

ABC's Jake Tapper tried to simplify these incomprehensible numbers. He compared America's finances to a typical American's finances. By removing eight zeros from America's \$3.8 trillion budget, he came up with a sum of \$38,000.

Now if you are a retiree, you are probably getting by OK if you are able to spend \$38,000 a year — unless your finances are as messed up as America's.

Though you are spending \$38,000 annually, your income is only \$29,000 — you are growing your debt by \$9,000 every year.

What's worse is that you already owe nearly \$170,000 to creditors. Paying off that amount of debt with \$38,000 in income would be hard under any circumstances.

But of course your income is \$29,000, not \$38,000, so you must borrow about \$175 a week to keep up with your expenses.

In other words, the U.S. government is growing our debt by \$175 billion a week, which is producing around \$1 trillion in new debt every year.

Still not comprehending how much \$1 trillion is? Then you'll like this description by Bill Bryson, one of my favorite au-

thors, from his book "Notes from a Big Country."

Bryson asks his readers to guess how long it would take to initial and count 1 trillion dollar bills if you worked without stopping.

"If you initialed one dollar bill a second," writes Bryson, "you would make \$1,000 every 17

minutes. After 12 days of non-stop effort you would acquire your first million. Thus, it would take you 120 days to accumulate \$10 million, and 1,200 days — something over three years — to reach \$100 million. After 31.7 years you would become a billionaire. But not until 31,709.8 years elapsed would you count your trillionth dollar bill."

We all understand that very large numbers are OK so long as they add up. So long as we have trillions of dollars coming in to the government to balance out the trillions of dollars we have going out, we should be OK.

But that is the frightening part. We are not even close to covering our spending. Our economy has not recovered enough to generate the growth and tax revenue we need to pay our bills.

Piling on new entitlement programs and lots of new regulations, rules and mandates certainly isn't helping the recovery.

And so we limp along racking up debt and our leaders are doing little to address this incredible challenge. In fact, we have racked up more than \$11 trillion in new debt since George W. Bush assumed office in 2002. We are the proud owners of nearly \$17 trillion in debt, a startlingly incomprehensible sum.

Yet too few people worry about it. Who can blame them? After all, \$17 trillion is only 17,000 billion dollars.

• **Tom Purcell, author of "Misadventures of a 1970's Childhood" and "Comical Sense: A Lone Humorist Takes on a World Gone Nutty!" is a nationally syndicated humor columnist. Send comments to Tom at Purcell@caglecartoons.com.**

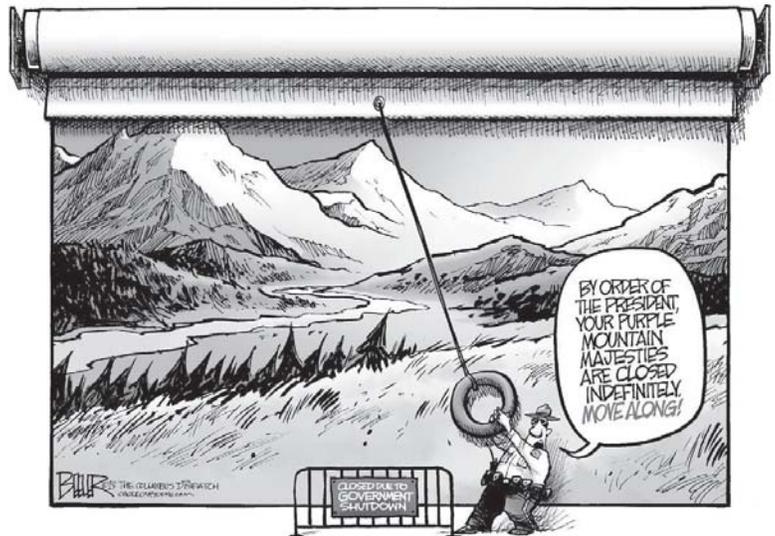


Tom Purcell

Opinion

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COMMENTARY

Bullying Awareness Month: Signs to look for and how you can help

Being a kid can be tough. Add a bully to the mix, and being a kid can become unbearable.

A child can be set up for ridicule, rejection, and even abuse by anything that stands out as different from the rest of his or her peer group. Bullying can happen at school, out in the community, or online through social media. It's estimated that 30 percent of Arizona's children are experiencing bullying.

As the Regional Behavioral Health Authority for Maricopa County, Magellan Health Services is concerned about the long-term behavioral health impacts of bullying on Arizona's children. Children who are bullied are more likely to have symptoms of depression, anxiety and other behavioral health issues that persist well into adulthood. And it's not just the victim that is impacted. Bullying may lead to behavioral health issues for the bully, the victim, and even by-standers who witness the bullying.

October is Bullying Awareness Prevention Month, a national-recognition month to raise awareness and inspire action to prevent and stop bullying. Magellan Health Services of Arizona is working with StopBullyingAZ.org, First Lady of Phoenix Nicole Stanton's anti-bullying program, to raise awareness about bullying.

Awareness is especially important for parents. Often, parents don't even know their child is being bullied. Even if there is gener-

ally good communication between the parent and child, children may not tell their parents they are being bullied because of fear, embarrassment, or not wanting to worry the parent. However, there are behavior changes a parent can look for that may be signs a child is dealing with bullying, such as:

- Refusing to go to school or making excuses for missing school, such as feeling sick when there are no other symptoms of illness.
- Carrying weapons or objects that could be used

as a weapon; if confronted, the child may say he or she needs a weapon for self-defense.

• "Losing" money, valuable possessions, or articles of clothing; possessions may have been taken or coerced from the child by the bully.

• Unexplained bruises or other injuries that the child tries to hide or make unlikely excuses.

• Emotional distress after using a computer or checking a smart phone.

If you suspect your child is being bullied, talk with them. Some tips for talking with a child about bullying include:

- Talk on "neutral ground" or the child's territory, such as his or her room.
- Talk in private. Don't try to have an in-depth conversation while driving or in front of a room full of people.
- Take the time to talk. Don't start the discussion when you are in a hurry.
- Talk with the child, not at him or her. Encourage the child to express feelings and opinions and to contribute ideas for solutions.
- If other people, such as a teacher, need to be involved, work with the child to understand why they need to be involved and how to bring them into the conversation.
- Be calm. Getting angry and threatening revenge against the bully doesn't help and might keep the child from disclosing more to you.
- Be supportive and encouraging. Whatever "difference" your child may have from some of his or her peers is part of what make your child special to you.

For more information about bullying visit: www.StopBullyingAZ.org; or, Magellan's anti-bullying information website at www.takementalhealthtoheart.com or www.stopbullying.gov.

• **Terri Kang, LCSW, LISAC, is the Director of Child and Youth Services for Magellan Health Services.**



Terri Kang