

We Missed Chance at a Cure

PRESIDENT OBAMA opened a door to a better health care system and then slammed it in our faces. There are so many things wrong with the self-styled health care "reform" bill that it may seem hard to choose the worst. Not so. The hands-down winner is opportunity cost. Before seeing why, look at the other contenders for first-place failure.

We can begin with inequity. Why are Medicaid and Medicare patients treated differently in Nebraska, Nevada and Louisiana? Answer: because those senators sold their votes for more pork than other senators. ...

Another element that fails the smell test, apparently lost in the horse-trading frenzy, is the fact that tens of millions will remain without coverage. These are mostly people who qualify right now for government programs but choose not to enroll. How does so-called health care reform try to get them into the system? Answer: by tax penalties, if the government can find them. Result: millions will remain uninsured, need emergency care and get it at some ER, while the reform bill does nothing to deal with the necessary cost-shifting.

Then there is the shell game. The bill may increase health insurance for some. What it certainly will do is reduce care for all: there will be fewer dollars, and fewer nurses, doctors and hospitals to provide services. ...

Every time you hear some advocate of so-called health care reform wax eloquent about how she or he is reducing costs, just substitute the word services for costs and see if you still like the bill. ...

What will the self-styled reform bill do? Increase spending by about \$1 trillion dollars. This is the exact opposite of cost-saving. Worse, they are spending money we do not have. This increases the deficit, slows (stops?) our financial recovery, weakens our competitiveness globally, and further encumbers our children's future.

By reducing payments to Medicare and Medicaid, the bill will actually increase costs by not avoiding future costs. Ever since New Mexico balanced its 2003 budget by eliminating asthma prevention programs, it has spent more every year paying to treat acute asthma attacks and resulting hospital admissions, large costs that could have been avoided.

By signing ObamaCare, the president is accepting a quick and easy political solution that will fail to cure a system with a medical problem fixable only by practicing good medicine on it. He created a great opportunity to discuss root causes and decide what we want our health care system to do — and then he wasted it. ...

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What was actually submitted to the ABO Journal:

The Opportunity Cost—An Opportunity Lost

President Obama opened a door—to a better healthcare system—and then slammed it in our faces. There are so many things wrong with the self-styled healthcare 'reform' Bill (H.R. with its latest #) that it may seem hard to choose the worst. Not so. The hands-down winner is opportunity cost. Before seeing why, look at the other contenders for first-place failure.

We can begin with inequity. Why are MediCaid and MediCare patients treated differently in Nebraska, Nevada and Louisiana? Answer: because those Senators sold their votes for more pork than other Senators. Why should poor and old people get worse care in the other 47 States? Is that what we sent our 'Representatives' to Congress to do?

Another element that fails the smell test, apparently lost in the horse-trading frenzy, is the fact that tens of millions will remain without coverage. These are mostly people who qualify right now for Government programs but choose not to enroll. How does so-called healthcare reform try to get them into the system? Answer: by tax penalties, if the Government can find them. Result: millions will remain uninsured, will need emergency care and get it at some local ER, while the reform Bill does nothing to deal with the necessary cost-shifting.

Then there is the shell game. The Bill *may* increase health INSURANCE (for some). What it certainly *will do* is reduce CARE for all: there will be fewer dollars, and fewer nurses, doctors and hospitals to provide services. The way Congress is 'fixing' things, increased coverage will come with reduced care.

Before we get to costs—direct, avoided and opportunity—keep in mind that "cost cutting and "MediCare savings" neither cuts costs nor saves money. When the Government cuts ITS short-term outlay and saves ITS budgetary balance, it reduces payments to providers. This reduces services. Every time you hear some advocate of so-called healthcare reform wax eloquent about how she or he is reducing costs, just substitute the word services for costs and see if you still like the Bill.

Direct cost refers to what we spend, now. Unsupportable national healthcare spending was what started the whole conversation. (The President conveniently ignored the fact that the largest expense in all healthcare spending is the "waste of the middle," the bureaucracy, aka the Federal Government.)

What will the self-styled reform Bill do? Answer: increase spending by about \$1 trillion dollars. This is the exact opposite of cost-saving. Worse, they are spending money we do not have and therefore they must print dollars. This increases the deficit, slows (stops?) our financial recovery, weakens our competitiveness globally, and further encumbers our children's future.

Avoided cost is what we do not pay in the future by spending some money now. In healthcare, this is generally money spent on preventative and maintenance care. By reducing payments to MediCare and MediCaid, the Bill will actually increase costs by not AVOIDING future costs. Ever since my home State of New Mexico balanced its 2003 budget by eliminating asthma prevention programs, it has spent more every year paying to treat acute asthma attacks and resulting hospital admissions, large costs that could have been avoided.

An opportunity cost is a possibility we must give up when we choose a different option. By signing ObamaCare, the President is accepting a quick and easy, *political* solution that will fail to cure a system with a *medical* problem fixable only by *practicing good medicine* on it. He created a great opportunity—to discuss root causes and decide what we want our healthcare system to do—and then he wasted it.

The most egregious part of the self-styled healthcare 'reform' Bill is its opportunity cost.

At the climax of the movie "The American President," Michael Douglas playing the President, says before a packed press conference room that the Bill he has been watering down, twisting arms and making deals to pass is fundamentally flawed; he is withdrawing it to write something that makes sense and will work. Maybe, as a belated Christmas present, our real President will see the light, veto this monstrosity, and give us back the **chance to really fix healthcare**: the opportunity cost—an opportunity lost.