

Members of Congress are cowards on Health Care reform

Written by George Curry, NNPA Columnist
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Health care reform, especially with the rising number of Americans losing their jobs and health benefits, is one of the more pressing public policy issues of the day. Yet, to borrow a phrase from Attorney General Eric Holder, too many Democrats and Republicans are cowards when it comes to taking on the powerful insurance and health care lobby.

Some have weak-knees because they are in the pockets of industries that have the most to lose if the U.S. adopted universal health care. In those cases, large and regular campaign donations have bought their complicity. In some other instances, members of Congress have argued that a national health plan would amount to socialism. That's just plain ignorant. And a third group was waiting for an excuse – any excuse – to back away from health reform. That group got that excuse recently with estimates that universal health care is likely to be more costly than the Obama administration had projected.

The non-partisan Congressional Budget Office said two competing plans would cost either \$1 trillion or \$1.5 trillion over the next decade. Though that figure was expected, the drawback is that under one of those scenarios, only 16 million of the uninsured would be covered, about a third of the pool that would need assistance.

Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina predicted on ABC's "This Week" that the report might spell the end to efforts to reform the health care system.

"This idea's unnerving to the members of the Senate," he said. "I think this idea needs to go away."

Sen. Charles E. Grassley of Iowa, ranking Republican on the Senate Finance Committee, expressed similar sentiment on CNN's "State of the Union." "So, we're in the position of dialing down some of our expectations to get the costs down so that it's affordable and, most importantly, so that it's paid for," he said. "Because we can't go to the point where we are now of not paying for something when we have trillions of dollars of debt."

Even some liberal Democrats are proving that they, too, are cowards on this issue.

For example, Sen. Dianne Feinstein of California called the question of cost "a very major and difficult subject." Speaking on CNN, she said, "I think there's a lot of concern in the Democratic caucus."

The concern should not be over the financial cost of action, but the human cost of inaction.

In the world's richest country, we have elderly people who are forced to choose between buying their medicines and eating. We have states willing to pay high costs on the back end of the system rather than investing less on the front end to prevent serious illnesses. And yes, we have a health care system that derives healthy – often exorbitant – profits as a result of people being sick.

Rather than having the guts to face this issue squarely, the cowards make the ridiculous assertion that universal health care amounts to socialism.

Is England a socialist country? What about Israel? And don't forget our "socialist" neighbor to the north, Canada. The undisputed fact is that every industrialized country in the world, except

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the United States, offers universal health care. We spend more money on health care than any other country yet have little to show for it. According to the World Health Organization, our health standard ranks 37th in the world.

"What we know is that cost currently is crushing families and businesses," Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Kathleen Sebelius said recently on "Good Morning America." "Unless we do something, we won't be able to afford the health care we have, the health care we need," she said.

And most Americans agree.

According to the latest New York Times/CBS News poll released Sunday, 72 percent of Americans favor a national health insurance program.

"The polling data backs up our subjective view that to make health care reform work, you need a public option," Rep. Charles Schumer told the Associated Press.

Some politicians don't spend much time reading or writing, but they can count. And since they are cowards and don't have the backbone to do the right thing, everyone should contact their elected officials and insist that they pass a national health care plan. And do this before the July 4th congressional break.

One of the most disappointing things about Democrats as a group is that they are such political cowards. Love them or hate them, Republicans have a clear political vision. It is a perverted view but at least it's a point of view. Democrats, on the other hand, are all over the place. And they grow even more scattered when they try to compromise with a group of Republicans hell-bent on opposing President Obama, regardless of the issue.

For once, Democrats need to summon the courage to stand tall on this issue. It would be a good move politically and, more important, it would be good for the country. This would be a true Contract with America.

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