

Prepare for motion sickness

Washington careening toward wholesale changes in health care

Friday, July 17, 2009

Barack Obama was going to be the Transparency President. Important legislation, he said, would be on a Web site in plenty of time for Americans to digest it before it was voted on.

He said health care reform proposals would fill the air at town hall meetings and such. Let the debate begin!

Well, it's ended before it began.

Obama and the Democratic Congress could make the argument that the economic stimulus bill earlier this year was too much of an emergency to allow extended debate or public viewing. Fine. But it was passed pretty much before anyone had a chance to read it.

That seems to be the strategy: Get major legislation enacted before voters know what's happening to them and the country.

They tried it with "cap and trade," the House-passed energy bill that would give the federal government unprecedented and, frankly, Orwellian powers to regulate emissions and to tax and penalize Americans and coordinate the buying and selling of pollution "permits" across all sectors of the economy.

Thankfully, people are waking up to the scheme, and it has been slowed in the Senate.

They're also trying it with sweeping new "hate crimes" legislation that Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid wants to rush through as an attachment to a war spending bill.

The bill would give certain classes of people a greater weight of legal protection than others -- which would clearly violate the equal protection clause of the Constitution.

But nowhere are we at greater risk from this "Oklahoma land rush" legislative strategy than in health-care reform.

Democratic plans to create a new national health care program to compete with private insurance would cost at least \$1 trillion that we don't have, according to the Congressional Budget Office, and would likely be the beginning of the end of private health insurance. Once a tax-paid option were available, it's likely businesses would drop their plans and encourage employees to jump on Uncle Sam's back.

Yet, President Obama dismisses debate on the issue as "chatter" that's only getting in the way of getting things done. As for debate: The White House considers it over, now that a campaign operative was placed in an audience and allowed to ask a pointed question and get a teary hug from the Consolet in Chief.

Obama this week put us all on notice that this is going to happen, whether we want it or not -- and before Congress' August recess.

"Inaction is not an option," he declared. How dismissive and arrogant is that?

Of course, inaction is always an option -- and, in fact, when faced with a much less savory alternative, it's the best option.

Consider the government's track record on such programs: As the Cato Institute notes, Medicare Plan A was estimated to cost \$9 billion by 1990, and actually ended up costing \$67 billion. Similar gross miscalculations have occurred in subsequent entitlement programs, even on bigger scales.

The CBO estimates the extra trillion would insure 16 million -- or about \$62,500 a person.

The health care system is a huge chunk of our economy, and yet we're rushing headlong into completely changing how it operates. Has this been digested across the country? Of course not.

That's by design. When Hillary Care was considered in the 1990s, we had time to debate it -- and it was dead on arrival. Democrats in Washington don't care so much what their health care reform does as long as it survives, without real debate.

Indeed, voting on the 1,000-page -- now \$1.5 trillion -- bill began swiftly this week.

One dispirited Internet observer said, "I've stopped worrying about slowing this train down. Now I figure that, the sooner the whole thing goes off a cliff, the sooner we can reroute the track."

He may get that chance sooner than he, or the rest of us, may like.

From the Friday, July 17, 2009 edition of the Augusta Chronicle