

Hospital lobby has a friend in Democratic Congress

Timothy P. Carney

February 19, 2021

It's always hard to tell whether hospitals are the good guys or the bad guys. During the Obamacare debates before, during, and after passage, the media and the Democrats heralded hospitals as good guys.

So trusted were the hospitals that the industry's support of Obamacare and opposition to repeal efforts were taken by journalists as proof of the law's virtues.

"Obamacare is working," one writer argued. "There's no better evidence of this than a brief filed on behalf of the government in *King* by the Hospital Corporation of America, better known as HCA, the largest health care provider in the country."

Frequently, though, hospitals are seen as callous, uncaring, profit-seeking monopolies.

During COVID-times, though, hospital workers are "heroes," and hospitals are exalted. Seeing the opportunity this creates, the hospital lobby is going all-out in their asks of Congress, as reported by Rachel Cohrs at *StatNews*.

And one interesting detail here is how friendly the Democratic majority is to the hospital lobby.

For one, their policies are largely aligned. Democrats a decade ago made Obamacare very hospital-friendly. It wasn't only the subsidies, which, of course, hospitals liked. It was also the costly mandates that drove consolidation. That protects existing (and growing) hospitals from competition and helps them swallow up smaller practices.

Cohrs reports that this won't change in the current Congress:

"One of the most important committees in that process is the House tax-writing committee, which is chaired by Rep. Richard Neal (D-Mass.), an unabashed advocate for hospitals' interests."

"Neal virtually single-handedly forced Congress' surprise billing reform in a more provider-friendly direction, and the American Hospital Association backed Neal when he faced a progressive primary challenge."

There's more in the article, and Cato Institute health scholar Michael Cannon pulls out some of the important parts in this thread: