



The health care chasm

By Joan Barron - 10/21/2012

The federal Affordable Care Act is the most politicized piece of legislation I can recall in recent years.

As a result, most people are confused about the the federal health care reform law and how it is supposed to work.

I doubt anyone questions the need for some type of health care reform, given the rise in costs. Nor has there been any persuasive argument against providing insurance coverage for people with existing medical conditions, as the ACA does.

The U.S. is the only Western country that lacks a national health care reform system. That's shameful.

Yet I spoke recently to a woman from London, a public health nurse who visits patients in their homes.

She said the British national care system doesn't work well. She told of a patient with diabetes she tried to teach to give himself insulin injections.

He balked and said it was her job to come to his home and give him the shots.

This patient is an example of the "entitlement" mentality we have heard so many rants against during this overly long presidential election campaign.

Two recent interviews demonstrate the chasm in opinion about the ACA.

Michael Tanner, senior fellow with the Cato Institute, an expert on health care and ACA, made it clear that he doesn't like anything about the federal law.

Tanner was in Cheyenne to speak at meeting sponsored by the Wyoming Liberty Group, a conservative political action committee committed to the protection of private rights..

He said the authors and sponsors of the ACA approached it backwards by trying to deal with expanded coverage first, not the cost.

“What they should have done is try to bring down the cost of health care and then more people would get coverage, but they didn’t do that,” Tanner said.

“We find out every day more about it, he added. “It looks like it is not meeting any of its goals.”

First, it will leave about 21 million without insurance, half of them illegal immigrants and the rest people who cannot find affordable coverage.

Tanner said a preferred alternate is to open up the insurance market nationally so consumers could select their health insurance plans from national market, rather than be confined to companies in their own states.

Wyoming insurance companies have a monopoly so there is no competition now, he said.

If the market were opened up to anywhere in the country, it would move payments of insurance back to the individual and encourage competition, he said.

Rather than having a completely government-owned system like Sweden’s or a single payer system like Canada’s, Wyoming could have a private insurance company with rates and services approved by government.

The companies then would compete for customers based on price and quality.

Meanwhile, Senate Minority Leader John Hastert of Green River, late last month attended a meeting in Baltimore on health care reform, hosted by Maryland legislative leaders and the State Legislative Leaders Foundation.

Hastert came back convinced the state needs to consider the ACA as a framework and move forward.

He said he was initially skeptical about the meeting but was intrigued enough to attend. It was billed as a nonpolitical nonpartisan forum.

Although it wasn’t planned, 33 Democrats and 33 Republicans attended.

Hastert was the only legislator from Wyoming.

The meeting featured health care experts at Johns Hopkins Medicine in Baltimore to answer questions.

Someone else might find the presentation slanted, he said, but he did not. The sponsoring foundation is supported by business groups.

“They had faculty from Johns Hopkins and they had some great charts and graphs comparing clear back to what Nixon was proposing.” he said.

He found only “microscopic” differences between those health care plans and the ACA, he said. They all called for mandates and expansion of Medicaid.

It is significant, Hastert said, that the Massachusetts law has withstood several election cycles and different governors with no run at repealing it.

Like many people, Hastert finds the health care debate frustrating.

“There’s just way too much politics in this for me,” he said. “I want what’s in the best interests of the people and the state.”