



Ambrose: The harm of Obamacare does not justify a shutdown

JAY AMBROSE - September 24, 2013

"First, do no harm." That's a phrase doctors learn as step one in ethical behavior, and members of Congress ought to have to repeat it when sworn into office. They don't, and while they should grasp the concept nevertheless, many don't do that, either. As a result, we the people are inflicted with overly ambitious laws like Obamacare, which is assured to do harm left, right and in between.

This health care act, which already has contributed mightily to the lousiest economic recovery since World War II, was as much as designed to hurt us all and to hurt us badly. It was 2,049 pages of initially incomprehensible, clumsily contrived interventions, mandates, taxes and subsidies meant to refashion a massive, slowly evolved hunk of our civilization all at once.

"I believe the Affordable Care Act is probably the most complex piece of legislation ever passed by the United States Congress," said Sen. Jay Rockefeller, D.-W.Va., and even cheerleading Kathleen Sebelius, secretary of Health and Human Services, has said no one anticipated that implementation would be as "confusing" as it has turned out to be.

It doesn't help guide her to clarity that, on top of the exhaustive law, we now have 10,000 pages of Obamacare regulations. One way to describe them is as dictating, micromanaging details without any conceivable chance their bureaucratic creators could have known enough to exercise such far-reaching control halfway intelligently.

Out of all of this, there are intended consequences enough to make you cringe, such as \$1.2 trillion in new taxes, but hang on because here come the inevitable unintended consequences. They are bad enough to have made House Republicans vote to defund the whole kit and caboodle for the 41st time.

We've already experienced one of those consequences as a result of costly new instructions to employers about what their health insurance obligations for employees are soon going to be. Gallup did a poll showing that 41 percent of small businesses delayed plans to hire new workers because of cost trepidations. A Cato Institute analyst, citing this figure, notes, too, that 88 percent of all new jobs created since 2009 are part-time, no doubt at least partly as a result of the law not requiring part-time employees be covered by employers. It's a small wonder President Barack Obama has put off implementation of the employer mandate until after the 2014 election year has passed.

Other unintended consequences? Let's mention one that the Heritage Foundation and others have been underlining — that millions will lose their present coverage contrary to political promises. Scarier is what might happen to health costs over the next 10 years. A contributor to Forbes online says Medicare's actuary experts predict a \$621 billion increase because of Obamacare.

There's more bad stuff along with some positives that could have been accomplished one small, prudent, inexpensive step at a time. What the House Republicans are saying is they are willing to negotiate on what stays and what goes. What the Democrats are saying is that they will not pass a continuing resolution without funds for all that Obamacare needs. If neither side bends, the government shuts down, the economy is punished, millions of innocent Americans are punished and ultimately, in elections to come, the Republicans will be punished.

That's true, in my opinion, because news reports will reflect worse on Republicans than on Democrats and the public does not like this kind of politics, anyway. I can understand Republican angst. If Obamacare does get fully implemented over the next couple of years, repeal will be next to impossible. But if Republicans miss a chance to take the Senate in 2014 and lose ground significantly in the House, they will also be weakened in preventing further Obama mischief and might lose a chance to do some serious reforming of Obamacare from a position of increased power.

The ancient Greeks, who gave us the maxim of first doing no harm in the Hippocratic Oath, may have had a role in another wise saying: The best is enemy of the good.