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Cato Forum: Don't Repeat Mass. Health Care Failure

Posted by Brett Banker on 6/23/09 • Categorized as Health Care 2009, News



The Massachusetts State House

Government-run health care has failed in Massachusetts and will fail nationwide if Congress does not heed the lessons of the Bay State's three-year-old health care experiment, three health care experts at a forum hosted by the libertarian-leaning Cato Institute warned yesterday.

In April 2006, then-Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney signed into law a controversial state health care reform bill. The bill mandates that individuals purchase health insurance and that employers with 10

or more employees provide health insurance for their workers. Under the plan, the State of Massachusetts runs a statewide health insurance exchange and provides health care subsidies for families with incomes up to 300% of the poverty line.

“Massachusetts’ biggest mistake was that they made universal coverage the cornerstone of the system,” Cato senior fellow Michael Tanner said.

Tanner recently published a report that outlines what he says are the five unintended consequences of Massachusetts’ health care reform: a lack of universal coverage, health care costs that remain above the national average, new regulations and bureaucracy, uncontrollable cost growth and increased waiting times for medical care.

Another panelist, Greg D’Angelo, a health care policy analyst for the Heritage Foundation, argued that Massachusetts’ health care system is poorly run and, ultimately, unsustainable. He specifically criticized Massachusetts’ employer mandate.

“[The employer mandate] sets a bad precedent and opens the door for government intervention,” D’Angelo said.

Employer mandates, along with several other controversial aspects of the Massachusetts system, will likely be included in the health care legislation that Congress is expected to pass later this year. According to D’Angelo and Tanner, that would be a mistake.

Instead of borrowing from Massachusetts’ health care system, Tanner argued, we should be drawing lessons from its shortcomings.

“I think there is a lot we can learn from that failure,” Tanner said.

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