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Washington Post Article on 'Broken Health System' Also Broken

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President Obama is making his big health insurance push and The Washington Post is right there beside him, helping make his “ambitious” case. The June 9 Post detailed the “inequities, shortcomings, waste and even dangers in the hodgepodge of uncoordinated medical services that consume nearly one-fifth of the nation’s economy.”

The Ceci Connolly article argued everyone agrees the health-care system must be changed. “On that point there is rare unanimity among Washington decision makers: The U.S. health system needs a major overhaul,” she wrote.

Connolly certainly made it seem that way, including only two conservative voices who also argued for sweeping changes to our health insurance system. One of those two, Sen. Judd Gregg (R-N.H.), was originally nominated Obama’s Commerce Secretary.

There were other problems with Connolly’s story, including some of the other facts she used in her article, such as the number of Americans in need of health insurance. “Today, about 46 million Americans have no health insurance, so they go without or wait in emergency rooms for expensive, belated care,” she wrote, mischaracterizing the actual total by 10 million people or more.

The number 46 million and similar totals are used a lot by the media and politicians when speaking of the health-care situation in America. But that claim isn’t even close [1]. The tally also includes many non-citizens, those who can afford to pay on their own, as well as people who have failed to file for government coverage.

The majority of Connolly’s article focused on shredding any link between the amount of money spent on healthcare and the level of the quality. She reached the conclusion, along with spine surgeon James N. Weinstein whom she quoted as saying, “Less is more, and more isn’t better,” that throwing money at the problem is not the solution.

Connolly said the public pays for the “46 million Americans” who do not have coverage: “Everyone else helps pay for that Band-Aid fix in the form of higher taxes and an extra \$1,000 a year in insurance premiums.” Yet she left out the massive costs Obama’s new plan would include or any substantial argument in opposition to such a proposal.

Another key flaw in Connolly’s article was her random labeling of the think tanks and organizations which she cited. The only think tanks and institutes which she labeled were the “libertarian Cato Institute” and the “independent Massachusetts based Institute for Healthcare Improvement.” Several others, including the liberal Center for American Progress went unexplained.

Connolly also highlighted what she portrayed as a reason for physicians to not provide the finest care: the fee-for-service payment system. According to the story, “bright young physicians” become more “like assembly-line workers of the past, are paid on a piecemeal basis, earning more money not by doing better but simply by doing more.”

Later in her article, she cited the president of the National Quality Forum, Janet Corrigan to hammer home that position. “Because the fee-for-service payment system rewards quantity over quality, there is little incentive – and there are even disincentives – for doctors, nurses, and hospitals to improve, Corrigan said.”

Connolly neglected, however, to mention other possible “disincentives” that could come with future health plans, including the decrease in doctors’ pay that might well come with nationalized health care.

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