

NEW YORK POST

OBAMACARE FOLLIES: A PERILOUS RUSH

By MICHAEL TANNER

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July 27, 2009 --

ON Tuesday, July 14, House Democrats unveiled a health-care-reform bill that was 1,018 pages long. The next day, after all of eight hours of debate, the House Ways and Means Committee passed it. Does anyone believe they actually *read* the bill?

But apparently, that doesn't matter because, as Ways & Means Chairman Charlie Rangel (D-Harlem) said: "There's an urgent need to get *something* done because real lives are at stake."

Now House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is insisting that the full House vote on the bill before they go home for August recess, less than a week from now. House Energy and Commerce Chairman Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) says he may even pull the bill from his own committee and send it directly to the floor. "This can't be an interminable discussion," he says.

President Obama, who admits that he hasn't read the bill either, is also pushing for Congress to act quickly. "Health-care reform can't wait," the president said in a half dozen different variations during his most recent news conference.

Why? What's the rush?

Health care represents one-sixth of the US economy, and some of the most important, personal and private decisions in people's lives. Reform will affect everything from jobs to what treatments your doctor can prescribe. It will cost well over \$1 trillion over the next 10 years, more beyond that, and impose enormous costs on the economy and higher taxes on millions of Americans. If we get health-care reform wrong, it won't be easy to go back and fix it.

Yes, as Chairman Rangel says, lives are at stake. But even if health-care reform passed tomorrow, most provisions of the bill won't go into effect until 2013. And, if lives *are* at stake, isn't that all the more reason why Congress should, say, read the bill? Debate it? Get it right?

The real reason behind this railroad is that the president's political capital is slipping away. A recent Washington Post/ABC News poll showed that four out of five Americans were concerned that Obama's health-care reform would reduce health-care quality, increase costs, limit their choice of doctor and raise

the federal deficit.

And a Gallup poll shows a majority of voters disapproving of the president's handling of the issue. The president understands that if people get beyond the appealing rhetoric of "coverage for everyone" and find out what is actually in the bill, they might object.

After all, this is a health-care plan under which millions of Americans will be forced out of their current health-insurance plan and into a government-run plan. It is a plan that imposes huge new costs on American businesses and makes it more difficult to hire new workers. It is a plan that limits Americans' choices and would almost certainly lead to the eventual rationing of care. It would do nothing to reduce

health-care costs and could increase insurance premiums for millions of Americans. And, it is a plan that the head of the Congressional Budget Office says adds significantly to the federal budget deficit.

We've been on this train before. President Bush insisted that we had to pass the TARP bailout immediately or we'd face an economic crisis. President Obama warned us that if we stopped to debate the stimulus bill, unemployment could top (shudder) 9 percent. And who can forget the headlong plunge into war with Iraq? With hindsight, it has become pretty obvious that maybe, just maybe, we could have done those things a bit better.

Taking the time to get health reform right is not the same thing as doing nothing. Nor is the president's approach the only answer to the problems facing the American health-care system. There are alternatives out there.

Maybe we should just take a deep breath, step back and remember: "Act in haste, repent in leisure."

Michael Tanner is a Cato Institute senior fellow and co-author of "Healthy Competition: What's Holding Back Health Care and How to Free It."

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