

Strange days indeed

February 27, 2019

It may have been during a speech at the Cato Institute, in which P.J. O'Rourke said, "If you think health care is expensive now, wait till you see what it costs when it's free."

In the aftermath of Obamacare, as in the aftermath of any wreck, we can see where the skid marks head: Health care isn't getting cheaper, folks. And taxpayers are on the hook for more and more of the expense.

The government of Arkansas, for its part, at least requires a work requirement in its expansion of Medicaid.

Two congressmen from opposite sides of the continent--U.S. Rep. Frank Pallone of New Jersey and U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden of Oregon--are shocked, shocked! by any such requirements, and have sent a letter to the feds about the matter. Which is the congressional equivalent of stamping your feet. Read all about it in Andy Davis' story this past weekend in your friendly statewide newspaper.

The two honorables are concerned about how this state's government has created a situation "where thousands of individuals have been forced out or locked out of their Medicaid coverage."

That's one way to look at it. (Both gentlemen are Democrats, but you knew that already.)

Another way to look at it: The state of Arkansas doesn't like to waste tax dollars. And will try to do something about it. As strange as that is to say about any government.

What we have is a governor who cuts taxes, and cuts bureaucracy. It's been in all the papers. The governor's people say of the 18,164 people who lost coverage for non-compliance in 2018 became eligible to re-enroll, but less than 1,500 did so by the end of January. That might mean they moved out of the state or got insurance some other way.

Can we assume that when somebody has health insurance through their employer, or some other private insurance, and they pay part of the premium month after month, when they have changes in their lives and no longer need that insurance--hey, honey, we should get on the great insurance at your new job!--they let the old insurance company know? And stop paying those premiums.

But with "free" insurance from Medicaid, when someone no longer needs to be covered, or moves away, there's no incentive to tell the state of Arkansas. And the state keeps paying the premiums. Thus wasted tax dollars.

Does the state even know when there are no claims on a person's Medicaid insurance for years at a time? Even if somebody in the state kept up with such a thing, such an absence of claims would be no proof that the person didn't still need the insurance. If the state doesn't ask for folks to click a website now and then, and even re-enroll if need be, then how keep up with who's in, who's out?

The work requirement makes sense to some of us. If only to make Medicaid expansion easier, politically, in this dark red state.

Will it last? Depends. There's a lawsuit a-brewing, and a hearing scheduled for next month in Washington, D.C. Soon enough, the courts will make our opinion, and the opinion of the gentlemen from Oregon and New Jersey, moot.

P.J. O'Rourke also once said that politicians are all right as far as they go, so long as they stay away from things they don't understand, such as working for a living. Or, we'd add, work requirements.