

Obamacare: prelude to "public option"

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President Barack Obama says that his health care program will cut costs and give Americans better coverage and more choices. Obviously, these are concepts which should sell extremely well in a country where we place a premium on savings and selection. Of course, the actual substance of Obama's \$1.5 trillion socialized medicine plan stands in stark contrast to the capitalist-sounding, fiscally-responsible rhetoric that's being used to promote it - which is probably why Obama is encountering such serious resistance in selling even members of his own party on the plan.

Far from expanding individual choices, Obama's proposal is designed specifically to eliminate competition and put one provider in charge of health care – the government. And instead of cutting costs, Obama's plan would force millions of Americans to use the same low-quality government health care options that have spawned the unsustainable growth rates that we're now supposed to be "reducing."

In other words, if "Obamacare" passes, costs would go up, choice would be eliminated and coverage would diminish – which is ironically the opposite of everything Obama claims his plan would accomplish.

Sadly, Obama and his supporters are ignoring literally dozens of common sense reforms in their effort to impose government's flawed, demonstrably ineffective philosophy on the rest of the health care industry.

Rather than pushing for private, portable health savings accounts (while simultaneously combating fraud, cutting administrative costs and reforming eligibility in Medicaid), Obama instead wants to put the failed government model of high costs, zero accountability and rampant administrative inefficiency in control of everything.

Of course, Obama is much too politically astute to simply hand over the nation's health care system to government bureaucrats, which is why his plan creates an intermediate step – a so-called "exchange" system where consumers are driven to lower-quality government care by artificially-established premiums at both ends of the spectrum.

All this does, however, is delay the inevitable, as government simply manipulates the market to create artificially-high premiums for private plans and artificially-low premiums for its own offerings.

The end result of all this so-called "choice?" According to a recent study by the Cato Institute, Obama's plan would "reduce competition by driving lower-cost private health plans out of business."

"President Obama's vision of a health insurance exchange is not a market, but a prelude to a government takeover of the health care sector," the report continues. "In the process, millions of Americans would be ousted from their existing health plans."

Additionally, the tax hike that is supposed to pay for \$540 billion of Obama's "cost-saving" plan will itself cost an estimated 4.7 million jobs, according to a recent report by the National Federation of Independent Businesses (NFIB). How, exactly, would these massive layoffs reduce the cost of coverage, to say nothing of assisting in our nation's "economic recovery?"

Ask yourself honestly - when was the last time a monopoly wound up cutting costs? Or producing a better product or service? And when was the last time you can remember government running a business better or more efficiently than the private sector?

Given these concerns, the "socialized medicine" stigma is one that Obamacare backers are desperately seeking to avoid. In fact, just last week a Texas Congressman was prohibited from using the term "government-run health care" as he attempted to advise his constituents of a telephone town hall meeting on the proposal.

Congressional leaders informed him that "public option health plan" was the term he must use.

Far from creating options, though, "Obamacare" is truly socialized medicine at its worst – a manipulative effort to get rid of choice in the marketplace and exert government control over yet another facet of our daily lives.

Passing it will only make our nation's health care problems exponentially worse.

The author is chairman of Americans for Limited Government.