



State delegation feigns ignorance

"Insurers must balance expenses and revenues. So if the government prohibits them from capping annual and lifetime benefits, and orders them to insure people with highest medical risk, create standard policies that cover most conditions and therapies, and pay a greater share of Americans' out-of-pocket health-care expenses, they must be able to raise premiums across the board. But if the government forbids that, as the president seems to be saying, then insurers must lose money and eventually go out of business or be absorbed by the government. Which, we suppose, is the whole idea."

— Republican-American editorial, "Health care in fantasy land," Sept. 12, 2009

Welcome to the reality that Congress' health-insurance fantasy begat. Sen. Christopher Dodd, D-Conn., and the state's five Democratic congressional representatives are furious that Connecticut health insurers are seeking immediate premium increases, some exceeding 20 percent. In their filings, the insurers cite rising medical costs and the Obamacare legislation as drivers of the need to increase their revenues.

The lawmakers, all of whom voted for Obamacare, pretend their votes had nothing to do with the requests for premium increases. Sen. Dodd, noting insurers have submitted similar filings in the past, called their requests "reprehensible and dishonest." In a letter to state Insurance Commissioner Thomas Sullivan asking that the requests be rejected, the five House members, all Democrats, largely absolve themselves of culpability: "While we understand that requiring additional benefits may come with some extra costs, empirical evidence suggests that the costs for these specific changes are relatively low, and in some cases negligible."

State Sen. Sam Caligiuri, R-Waterbury, challenging Rep. Christopher Murphy, D-5th District, in the Nov. 2 election, called the points made in the letter "too little, too late. Murphy is asking someone else to solve the problem he helped to create. He should have been vigilant about the rising health-care premiums economists warned were coming as a result of Obamacare before he so strongly supported it."

Indeed, just two days before Sen. Dodd's Sept. 15 outburst, Michael Tanner, senior fellow at the libertarian Cato Institute, wrote in the New York Post: "... (A) new report from the government's own actuaries concludes that total U.S. health-care spending will rise faster as a result of the new law than if we had done nothing. The result is that insurance premiums will jump as much as 9 percent next year, especially in the individual and small-group markets. Some customers could see hikes of 20 percent or more."

So, were we prescient when we penned our editorial a year ago? Did Mr. Tanner know something Sen. Dodd, Rep. Murphy et al. didn't? Not really. It's been out there for all to see for more than a year.

If the outraged lawmakers have their way, look for the last two sentences of the Sept. 12, 2009 editorial to come true as well, to the enormous detriment of the nation's economic and physical health in general, and to Connecticut's insurance industry in particular.