

Saturday, October 3, 2009

Obamacare unredeemed

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The U.S. Senate Finance Committee's Obamacare legislation is as interesting for what it lacks as for what it contains.

On Tuesday, committee members rejected two amendments that would have created a government option for health insurance. These decisions - in which five Democrats voted with Republicans - lower the pulse on a full-scale federal takeover of the health care industry. However, the House or Senate suddenly could defibrillate this concept. So, advocates of limited-government health care reform must remain vigilant. Unfortunately, Finance Committee Democrats have rejected numerous Republican amendments that would have infused this bill with a modicum of fiscal restraint and common sense. As a group, the specific amendments that nearly all Democrats have dismissed preview how Obamacare might look in practice, if enacted:

c Rather than save taxpayers money by asking women to finance their abortions without federal dollars (as the Hyde Amendment has mandated since 1976), Finance Committee Democrats (minus North Dakota's Sen. Kent G. Conrad) rejected Utah Republican Sen. Orrin G. Hatch's amendment to prevent Obamacare's budget from funding elective abortions or health plans that cover feticide. In the Age of Obama, Uncle Sam pays for everything.

c Sen. John L. Kyl, Arizona Republican, offered an amendment to assure that senior citizens not suffer health care rationing under the Physicians Feedback Program. On a party-line vote, Democrats crushed Mr. Kyl's language and paved the road for

rationing the treatment of elderly Americans under Obamacare.

c Iowa Republican Sen. Charles E. Grassley's amendment offered great potential for reducing fraud and assuring that federal health dollars reach actual poor people, not those ineligible for assistance - or outright thieves. Mr. Grassley proposed that individuals show government-issued photo identification when applying for Medicaid or the State Child Health Insurance Program. On a party-line vote, Democrats killed Mr. Grassley's measure and helped the undeserving snatch everyone else's hard-earned tax dollars.

c Democrats enshrined waste, fraud and abuse when their party-line vote squelched Texas Republican Sen. John Cornyn's amendment to reduce waste, fraud and abuse in Medicaid.

c Democrats torpedoed Idaho Republican Sen. Michael D. Crapo's amendment to block any Medicaid expansion that imposes unfunded mandates on the states.

c Sen. Pat Roberts, Kansas Republican, tried to secure flexibility and choice for Americans with Health Savings Accounts, Flexible Savings Accounts and other financial instruments that foster personal responsibility. He tried to remove a draft provision that prohibits reimbursing such accounts for purchases of over-the-counter medicine. Finance Committee chairman Sen. Max S. Baucus, Montana Democrat, ruled Mr. Roberts out of order, and that was that. Democrats who whine about high-cost drugs stood by as Mr. Roberts' reform died. Americans who save their own money for their own health care may have to spend more of it on, say, pricier prescription cough syrup rather than cheaper Robitussin.

c Democrats channeled Marie Antoinette as they sank Mr. Cornyn's amendment to require members of Congress to enroll in their own states' Medicaid programs.

c Democrats killed Kentucky Republican Sen. Jim Bunning's amendment to require that the Finance Committee's Web site feature its Obamacare bill with an official price tag for 72 hours before the committee's final vote. Seizing 17 percent of the American economy apparently is too urgent a task to withstand a three-day wait.

"Every bill produced and every vote cast by Senate Democrats reveals that they want higher taxes, less choice, less

competition, and government making your medical decisions," says Michael Cannon, the Cato Institute's director of Health Policy Studies. "Nothing good can come of health reform in this Congress."

Democrats show zero interest in market-friendly, patient-centered ideas such as using refundable tax credits to make health insurance more affordable, granting universal access to health-savings accounts, or allowing Americans to buy health insurance across state lines (much as Democrats usually support the right of minors to cross state lines to receive abortions). Most Democrats spurn these ideas as threats to a gargantuan, bureaucratic system that will devour tax dollars and deliver subpar care. Regardless of the government option's shaky prognosis, when it comes to lower-cost Republican health care proposals that actually could help patients, Democrats just say, "No."

Deroy Murdock is a nationally syndicated columnist.

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