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A Durian by Any Other Name Would Smell as Bad



by Nicole Kurokawa
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House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's creative wordsmithing has drawn the attention of critics lately (to be fair, there are a lot of critics when you have a [38% approval rating](#).) Just last week, [she told CNBC's Maria Bartiromo](#) that the expiration of the Bush tax cuts wouldn't be a tax increase, but merely "eliminating a tax decrease that was there." Spin it how you like, ma'am, but when I'm paying more on April 15 than I was the year before, I consider that a tax increase.

The latest bit of linguistic innovation concerns the government-run health care plan [announced today](#) in her press conference (the one that the [public wasn't allowed to attend](#) - I know, I tried.) She's launched a campaign to rename the public option the "consumer option," or alternatively, the "competitive option."

From the [Associated Press](#):

In an appearance at a Florida senior center, the Democratic leader referred to the so-called public option as "the consumer option." Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz, D-Fla., appeared by Pelosi's side and used the term "competitive option."

Both suggested new terminology might get them past any lingering doubts among the public-or consumers or competitors.

"You'll hear everyone say, 'There's got to be a better name for this,'" Pelosi said. "When people think of the public option, public is being misrepresented, that this is being paid for with their public dollars."

Breaking news, Madam Speaker: IT WILL BE PAID FOR WITH PUBLIC DOLLARS. Where do you think that \$894 billion will come from, anyway?

Like all government programs (looking at you, Medicare) the public option is likely to do a better job of HIDING its costs because it can spread many costs over a variety of agencies and departments. Private companies have to factor things like taxes into their bottom line, from which the government is exempt. The government plan might look lean and mean (like in the [ridiculous Moveon.org ad](#) where the public option is played by Heather Graham), but in reality, there's a lot of excess baggage behind the scenes. Come to think of it, most Hollywood stars have an [army of assistants doing the heavy lifting](#), so maybe it's not such a stupid comparison overall...

Money aside, however, a public option will have a lot of unseen costs - ones that the American people will pay dearly for in the end.

Companies' profit margins mean that they are constantly innovating to try and make money as costs rise (an [AP story over the weekend](#) indicated that those "evil" insurance companies who make money at the expense of the sick and the poor only have a 2.2% profit margin - hardly the wildly lucrative enterprises that the government has made them out to be.) Innovation is the driver of quality and efficiency. We like quality and efficiency in our health care system - they're two of the things that make America great! But those characteristics are about to go by the wayside, because the government's not exactly known for thinking outside the box.

For a good synopsis on the public option's many flaws, I recommend "[Fannie Med? Why a Public Option is Hazardous to Your Health](#)," written by the Cato Institute's Michael Cannon.

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