

# Murdock: Minus public option, Obamacare still stinks

Submitted by SHNS on Thu, 10/01/2009 - 13:06

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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 healthcare industry. However, the House or Senate suddenly could defibrillate this concept. So, advocates of limited-government healthcare reform must remain vigilant. Unfortunately, Finance Committee Democrats have rejected numerous GOP 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:

-- 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 Kent Conrad) rejected Utah Republican Orrin 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.

-- Arizona Republican John Kyl offered an amendment to assure that senior citizens not suffer healthcare rationing under the Physicians Feedback Program. On a party-line vote, Democrats crushed Kyl's language and paved the road for rationing the treatment of elderly Americans under ObamaCare.

-- Iowa Republican Charles 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. Grassley proposed that individuals show government-issued photo identification when applying for Medicaid or SCHIP: the State Child Health Insurance Program. On a party line vote, Democrats killed Grassley's measure and helped the undeserving snatch everyone else's hard-earned tax dollars.

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

-- Democrats torpedoed Idaho Republican Mike Crapo's amendment to block any Medicaid expansion that imposes unfunded mandates on the states.

-- Kansas Republican Pat Roberts 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 Max Baucus, D, Mont., ruled Roberts out of order, and that was that. Democrats who whine about high-cost drugs stood by as Roberts' reform died. Americans who save their own money for their own healthcare may have to spend more of it on, say, pricier prescription cough syrup, rather than cheaper Robitussin.

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

-- Democrats killed Kentucky Republican Jim Bunning's amendment to require that the Finance Committee's website 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 sub-par care. Regardless of the government option's shaky prognosis, when it comes to lower-cost GOP healthcare proposals that actually could help patients, Democrats just say "No."

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