The overlooked (and possibly fatal) flaw in Obamacare

*The whole is quite often more than the simple sum of its parts*

Hardly a day passes without the discovery of some inherent flaw, inconsistency, or indiscernible complexity in the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Bureaucrats and politicians are sent scattering to find one patch or another to plug the leaking dike only to have another hole open. The pressure of the tide is simply too great for the inherent structural flaws.

Rather than forming a coherent, discernible pattern the ACA is hundreds or even thousands of provisions, mandates and regulations strung together by spit, bailing wire, and paste that form, in effect, a crazy quilt of various fabrics, that in all likelihood do not mesh. (Imagine a quilt made of thousands of pieces of silks, polyesters, and various wools, cottons, and linens then imagine what would happen if it ever got wet.)

The Space Shuttle, the Saturn rocket and the Dreamliner are examples of very complex systems each consisting of hundreds of thousands or even millions of parts that were all modeled prior to constructing a working prototype. That is, using mathematical, computer or physical models these systems were tested to see if the sum of their parts functioned as designed. Whereas a computer simulation model assisted in the design of the original legislation there is no indication that any such testing or modeling took place after the adoption of ten to fifteen thousand pages of associated regulations.

It could be argued that Romneycare in Massachusetts formed a type of small-scale experiment. It can also be argued that the interstate provisions of the ACA and its numerous add-on provisions increased its complexity and interdependencies far beyond those required in a single state with limited applicability.

If modeled mathematically the ACA would consist of thousands of equations with an equal number of variables of varying degrees of dependency. If properly specified there is scant likelihood that the resultant system of equations could be solved to form a determinant solution. That is, the system of equations may very well be insolvable. Assume for the moment that the system contained 1000 equations and that each equation was totally independent of the others. Further assume that each equation has a .99 probability of functioning properly then the probability that all parts would work properly at the same time is given by .99 raised to the 1000th power or .000043. There is just one chance in 2500 that all parts of the system will function together even in this highly simplified example.

Consider a more realistic example where all of the relevant variables are highly interdependent the resultant probably would be far smaller, i.e., negligible. Simply stated there is little chance that the entire system would function as intended and perhaps may not function at all except by shear coincidence. This argument does not deny that a small subset of provisions could be extracted and operated separately in an effective manner. For the Act as a whole the only foreseeable conclusion is that no matter what revising, patching, or reworking of the ACA takes place there is little likelihood that it would ever work efficiently or effectively.

The implication of this argument is that revisions, patches, or delays do not guarantee that the implementation of the entire Act would be improved. Indeed, it is quite likely that the alterations as they ripple through the Act will worsen its effectiveness.