

OBAMA'S ABSURD AUDACITY ... or THE AUDACITY OF HIS ABSURDITY or ...

Stephen L. Bakke – July 19, 2009

This is one of several topics which lead into my attempt at identifying reasonable and viable elements of health care reform – “soon to be completed”. My suggestions will recognize the compelling need for reform, accept those aspects which virtually all citizens agree must change, and provide an alternative to the undesirable, and ever less popular, government imposed system.

Waiter! Bring Me Some Smoked “PORK”, With Lots of Potatoes and Gravy – Please!

While working on my update on health care reform, something caught my attention in the newspaper. There was a picture, on the letters to editor page, showing President Obama and his surgeon general nominee, Dr. Regina Benjamin, standing at the teleprompter. The related commentary rang true. First, I should “trim up” myself, and I have lots of bad habits – I always have. Having said that, there they were, a fellow who can't stop smoking, and a prominent physician who looks like she could easily lose 50 pounds without sacrificing muscle mass. And they want to be our role models and primary leaders for health care transformation and reform?

I'm Confused!

Remember that old Johnny Carson skit “Tea Time Movie”, with fast talking host Art Fern giving confusing directions to an imaginary sponsor of the afternoon movie presentation. Those skits popped into my mind when I first saw a flowchart of the House's draft health care legislation. It was explained by the Minority Leader, Ohio's John Boehner. While I have read portions of both the House and Senate drafts of health care reform legislation, I admit have relied on numerous others to help me fish out the extent of the bureaucracies created by these drafts.

It appears that well over 30 new bureaucracies will be created by the Senate draft legislation. New agencies and their czar's include, **but are not necessarily limited to:**

- A new *Health Choices Administration* – this is separate from the already existing Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, the Veterans Health Administration and the Indian Health Service.
- A new *Health Choices Commissioner* to keep track of the new crowd of bureaucrats.
- *Public Health Investment Fund* – separate from the near-bankrupt Social Security and Medicare Trust Funds.
- *Health Insurance Exchange Fund*—creates a “transparent and functional marketplace for individuals and small employers to comparison shop among private and public insurers.”
- *Bureau of Health Information* – created within the department of Health and Human Services – don't confuse this with the existing National Center for Health Statistics.
- A new *Assistant Secretary for Health Information* will lead the information agency.
- This new Assistant Secretary will also coordinate efforts with the recently created *National Coordinator for Health Information Technology*.

- The Bureau of Health Information will contain its own *Office of Civil Rights*.
- The Bureau of Health Information will also contain its own *Office of Minority Health*.
- The new information czar will have additional responsibilities which include collection of health statistics in the “primary language” of ethnic minorities. This will require the formation of a new *language demonstration program* to showcase the efforts of the Bureau of Health Information.
- The legislation has a requirement to ensure *cultural and linguistics competence training*.
- The draft also would require a *youth public health program* to expose and recruit high school students into public health careers.
- The draft adds a new *Senior Advisor for Health Care Fraud*.
- It also orders the U.S. Attorney General to appoint a *Senior Counsel for Health Care Fraud Enforcement*. There already is a national Health Care Fraud and Abuse Control Program!
- To coordinate all this, the President’s loyal minions would create a *Health Care Program Integrity Coordinating Council* “to coordinate strategic planning among federal agencies involved in health care integrity and oversight”.
- The draft creates a new *Coordinated Environmental Public Health Network* to “build upon and coordinate among existing environmental and health data collection systems and create state environmental public health networks”. Is this created to make sure the environmental groups feel they have input to our health reforms?
- There would be a new *National Health Care Workforce Commission* which would review “health care workforce and projected workforce needs”.
- There would be a “*demonstration program to improve immunization coverage*” – including home visits.
- There will be a “*public plan ombudsman*” to look out for you and me. Thank God!
- There will be a “*special health insurance exchange inspector general*” to police spending and guard against waste, fraud and abuse (wasn’t there a “fraud guy” created in one of the earlier programs listed above?).

One of the positions already created by the existing stimulus bill was the *Federal Coordinating Council for Comparative Effectiveness Research*. This had the responsibility for some sort of health care effectiveness evaluation. I can’t tell where this fits into this bureaucratic grid/mess.

Think about how many more agencies and czars the House bill may add. Here are some of the added agencies, if my “sorting and comparing process” is correct, that the draft bill would add (I got this on the internet – you can too!):

- *Nurse Education and Training Program*
- *National Health Services Corps* (is this the Peace Corps in hospital “whites”?)
- *Public Health Workforce Corps* (How is this different from the last one?)
- *Health Benefits Advisory Committee*
- *Advisory Committee on Health Workforce & Evaluation*
- *Clinical Preventive Services Taskforce*
- *Center for Quality Improvement*
- *Physician Quality Reporting Initiative*

And as Yule Brenner said in “The King and I” etcetera, etcetera, etcetera.

Will the Congressional conference committee create an interesting combination of both the Senate and House legislation? You bet your cute little BIPPY they will. The Democrats will be wallowing in the new red tape and bureaucracy. Check the drafts available on the Senate and House committee websites. Michelle Malkin has created a good summary. Check the internet for even more info.

Please help me I'm falling ! You remember the old song? That's all I remember.

My Audaciously Absurd "What If?"

Just suppose the Democratic "high end" estimate of costs to implement their health care reform is reasonably accurate, i.e. \$2 Trillion – presumably, that is the cost up until the moment when their program is "scheduled" to start saving money. And let's consider only the real "hard core" uninsured – i.e. about 10 million people. This excludes illegal immigrants. And it excludes temporary uninsured and those uninsured by choice. These last two can be successfully resolved through measures covered in my update on health care reform (coming soon).

So, those 10 million "hard core" uninsured could each be gifted, tax free, \$200,000 by placing it in an **interest bearing** trust account. Remember, this would be given to each uninsured – and in many cases, the poorest of our society would be getting this for more than one member of the family. Each recipient would have a debit card to be used for purchasing major medical insurance and making normal annual contributions to a Health Savings Account (HSA) eligible for a **refundable tax credit**. They would get coverage for many years, and would even benefit from the tax credits on their other income (or a refund if they have a lack thereof).

Let's go one step further. We could require that their tax savings or tax credit refunds be deposited into long term CDs in a bank. **This would give a real boost to our recovering bank system!** And let's even go further. We could require that they spend a stipulated amount purchasing a Ford, GM, or Chrysler automobile within the next year. And a second auto for a family member after one year. These would be modest autos so it wouldn't decimate their trust account. That would be at least 20 million autos that wouldn't otherwise have been manufactured and sold. **We've helped save another industry segment!** And going back to the requirement that they purchase HSAs and major medical insurance. That would provide added business for the private insurance industry and could be translated into even more competitive rates for purchased coverage. **Another industry segment given a boost!** And **think of the tax revenues which would come from additional income creation!** And it would all be done mostly within our free market system. **It's not absurd after all! Just audacious!** And it would be better than the plan preferred by those supporters of the President's reform goals.

Sources of Information

The major sources of information used in developing my health care commentaries will be included in my future report on health care reform recommendations. A preliminary, but not complete, list of sources can be found in my April 2009 report on the status of our health care system and reform.