



The way I see it...

BY PAUL KINDINGER

Who's driving the bus?

CONGRESS is debating how to fix the health care system and spend the next trillion dollars of our money to fix it. I will be the first to admit we have some issues with health care, but this comes on top of the bailout for financial institutions, plus a so-called "stimulus" package. I don't know about you, but I think it would be less expensive for you and me to simply purchase a health care plan for a stranger than create another bureaucracy and add to the burden of future generations or taxes that will drag down the economy.

By the way, what happened to those "shovel-ready" projects to improve our infrastructure? Ask the CEO of CAT how the stimulus money helped take the company from a \$50 billion dollar company to a \$30 billion dollar company. Okay, I know we are experiencing a global slowdown, but wasn't the stimulus supposed to prevent CAT and others from laying off employees?

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Also, what about the money eventually used to "prop up" the auto companies? Maybe we could ask the displaced UAW members whose jobs are going to Mexico or the laid off auto executives or, better yet, the auto dealers who received "pink slips" that eliminated their entire life's work.

I have personally tried to keep a positive perspective and be as supportive of such policies (despite a strange feeling in the pit of my stomach). I have even said to myself the methods used to pass such legislation might be condoned if the end justifies the means. To date, however, I am not impressed or convinced that my optimism has been well placed.

I don't know about you, but I have always believed that in a democracy where there is a rule of reason it would prevail sooner or later. No matter which political party was driving the bus, the public policy road was only so wide. Sometimes we would wander across the centerline or even bump up against the edge of the road, but sooner or later, we would find our way to a safer place. Unfortunately, I am starting to lose some of that optimism and belief.

What I observe now is a bus completely off the road and wandering through the wilderness, seeking direction with no GPS or map to bring it back. Part of the reason I have these feelings is the style of politics, which is more centered on personal political gain and power than the good of the people or our country.

We see politicians who care more about their personal reelection than they do about carrying out the will of the people. They remind

us, after all, that they have a "clear mandate" and obviously know more about what is in our best interest than we do. The so-called stimulus package is a perfect example. Nearly a trillion dollars, money we didn't really have to spend, has now been appropriated because it was good for "Main Street."

Unfortunately, very little of the funds have found their way to "main street." Instead, the funds are being used to bail out state governments and support programs that create very few jobs. I read a report the other day applauding the fact we have spent something just north of \$500 million in stimulus money on infrastructure projects. Grant you, in my world, that is still a lot of money. However, it pales in comparison to the over \$750 billion Congress approved. Come on, it's a flea on a gnat's butt.

Similarly, I see a huge social, political and economic experiment that reminds me more of the former Soviet Union than what I'm now beginning to call "the former United States." Think about it: We now have more "czars" in Washington, D.C., than they had in the former Soviet Union. That we are appointing people to watch over wages, health care, financial institutions, etc. and calling them "czars" speaks volumes to me about the direction we are headed today. I should also mention these "czars" have not been confirmed or approved by Congress. Therefore, don't they circumvent the checks and balances guaranteed by the Constitution?

One other thing really concerns me and brings me back to my initial point – our ability to lobby and have input on issues where intelligent people might legitimately disagree is being monitored and in some instances severely restricted. Again, passage of the stimulus package underscores my point. Subcommittee hearings to debate the merits of this huge plan were not held. In fact, the timeline for passage was so tight that debate at the full committee level was greatly restricted. Many of the people voting for the package, when later asked about specific provisions, were unfamiliar or uninformed about them. And worst of all, in my opinion, public sentiment was overwhelmingly opposed to the plan yet Congress passed it in spite of this opposition. One has to ask, why?

We need someone to drive the bus who can help us get back on the road to real recovery... and that's the way I see it. ■

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