



The way I see it...

BY PAUL KINDINGER

Government-run health care?

SOMEONE recently sent me a quote attributed to Karl Marx, father of communism, who said, “Democracy is the road to socialism.” Given all that has happened in the past couple of years, one has to wonder if Marx truly was prophetic. Think about it: Government now owns a huge stake or has some control over financial institutions, auto companies, is seeking control of health care, and is even exploring investment in the media – television and radio. This would give the government virtual control over every important aspect of our lives. At a minimum, this provides government a lot of control and influence it did not have five years ago.

It behooves us to examine the track record of other government ventures. For instance, the postal service is a stellar example of how a government-run operation performs. Several others also come to mind that are typically not found on the B-school list of successful company case studies, i.e., Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, Fannie Mae, and Freddie Mac.

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A recent survey conducted by an electronic newsletter asked a very simple question, “Does the federal government spend taxpayer money wisely?” The results may or may not surprise you, but over 58 percent said, “Absolutely not, the government spends way too much money.” Approximately another 30 percent said, “No, we need to reform how much money is allocated and spent.” Only 11.2 percent responded “Sometimes” and, get this, only .8 percent, that’s right less than 1 percent said, “Yes.”

So, what gives us any confidence that government will be successful at administering our health care system? I have not visited with a single person, not one, who does not support some reform to our health delivery system. For instance, most people seem to agree that health care should not discriminate against “pre-existing” conditions. I for one would appreciate more portability, more transparency and some way to expedite claim processing.

Cost is certainly an issue. We spend nearly 16 percent of our GDP on health care and that number is growing. But, cost control requires a multifaceted approach. Tort reform should be high on that list. Perhaps regional specialty centers are another concept whose time has come versus every hospital duplicating every other hospital’s capabilities. Also, I have always found that when people have some “skin in the game,” some ownership, they act differently. Similarly, holding people accountable for their poor decisions such as smok-

ing or overeating might deserve some consideration in this debate. Why would we charge everyone the same rate if one person takes responsibility and does what they can to prevent health problems versus someone who does not?

As always, I need to add a disclaimer: I am not a doctor, insurance professional, lawyer or expert in health care. I am simply an average citizen attempting to evaluate the options. As such, I don’t believe the current health care system is broken, but it certainly needs some tweaking. Also, I do not believe in throwing the baby out with the bathwater. By this, I mean a huge percentage of our population does have health insurance. One insurance company source indicated that 179 million U.S. citizens fall into this category. Another 44 million are on Medicaid, 44 million are on Medicare, and nearly 12 million are taken care of by the Department of Defense or the Veterans Administration. The number of uninsured is approximately 41 million. Clearly, there are some who simply cannot obtain or afford insurance. However, there also are some who are able but chose not to seek insurance because they feel they don’t need it. The “uninsured” number is a mixed bag at best!

Admittedly, 41 million is not a small number, but just because they are uninsured does NOT mean they do not have access to health care. Ask any doctor or hospital administrator and they will be quick to point out this fact. The other thing they might point out is fundamental to my central point: It costs about \$717 billion to insure the 179 million on private plans; however, it costs approximately \$334 billion to support the 44 million on Medicare, another \$567 billion for the 44 million on Medicaid and \$144 billion on DOD and VA. You do the math!

We all agree it is impossible to place a dollar figure on saving a life or providing proper health care at the appropriate time. But that old saying “if it ain’t broken...” seems to apply here! Let’s modernize and improve our health care system. Let’s not make Karl Marx a prophet! Fix what needs fixing and move us into the 21st century.

If the town hall meetings that were held around the U.S. this summer are any indication, I know I am not alone in my thoughts that government-run health care is NOT THE ANSWER. If you agree, write your congressional representative or senator today and let them know... and that’s the way I see it. ■

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