

Stephen -

Clearly, you have thought long and hard about this, and I understand your reasoning and applaud your efforts for single payer in the past. However, as Andrew McGuire mentioned, we have a fundamental difference of opinion.

ABX 1 1 will not be a step closer to single payer. Rather, if it passes, it will introduce the notion--no doubt with great ballyhoo--that the healthcare crisis has been solved in California, thanks to unprecedented cooperation between the Republican governor and the Democratic legislature. This success will likely mean further duplication of the ABX 1 1 model across the nation, setting single payer reform back at least a decade. The reason: It will take five years for people and governments to figure out that a system that subsidizes private health insurance is economically doomed. Costs will continue to escalate, government will have to absorb those costs, and taxes will continue to rise. Meanwhile, the death spiral in the insurance industry will worsen and fewer and fewer people will be able to get meaningful coverage while the sickest will be relegated to government plans. At that point, another grass roots movement will have to be developed, single-payer sold all over again, and legislation will have to be introduced, passed, and then defended in referendum--another five year process at least.

You say that ABX 1 1 will make for an easier transition to single payer because it will put several bureaucracies in place that can be converted to single payer when the time comes. My opinion would be quite the opposite. The processes necessary to implement ABX 1 1 will create several new layers of entrenched bureaucracy that will have to be disassembled eventually, along with the powerful health insurance and pharmaceutical interests. Single payer doesn't need more enemies, especially among civil servants.

That it would be easier to transition from ABX 1 1 to single payer because the taxes wouldn't be significantly different ignores the fact that single payer is far less costly than ABX 1 1 or the private insurance mess we have now.

You seem willing to accept the fact that there are no meaningful price controls in ABX 1 1 when this is its greatest flaw. Yes, many more people will be covered. But what guarantees are there that premiums will not rise and deductibles and co-pays will not grow? Are we willing to make scofflaws out of those who are unable or unwilling to pay these premiums? And if hardship cases are excluded from the mandate, that only means that they won't have insurance and will once again turn to the state for help. ABX 1 1 forces people to buy an inferior product that many can't afford when we know that the economics of it don't wash without many billions of dollars in subsidies from the state. This when the state is going broke and we know that single payer will actually cost less. What's the sense in even considering it?

You say that opposing ABX 1 1 will make no new allies or adherents for single payer. I disagree. A statewide movement opposing ABX 1 1 and exposing for what it is-- government subsidy of the existing, valueless insurance system--will indeed win new allies and adherents for single payer. The initiative will put the issue on the public agenda. It will not be difficult to make the case that single payer is a far more attractive alternative.

You say that people don't want single payer because they are afraid of losing their coverage. The most recent polling is to the contrary. People are not afraid. They want single payer. The AP/Yahoo poll taken just last month showed that 65% agree that: "The United States should adopt a universal health insurance program in which everyone is covered under a program like Medicare that is run by the government and financed by taxpayers." When asked about single payer specifically, the support was still in the majority. 54% agreed with the statement: "Do you consider yourself a supporter of a single-payer health care system, that is a national health plan financed by taxpayers in which all Americans would get their insurance from a single government plan, or not?"

We are keenly aware that the vested interests will use fear-mongering to defeat single payer. That's why it will be necessary to build a grassroots movement that is unstoppable. Doing so will take enormous energy and resources. But we know that the people are already on our side. HCA has grown exponentially over the past two years. We have formed significant alliances upon which to build further. Now is not the time to cave into the political juggernaut financed by special interests. Now is not the time to throw in the towel and settle for 'pretty good.' ABX 1 1 won't solve the problem. It will delay the only real solution--single payer.

But you're right. This is going to be tough. So was women's suffrage, civil rights, and the defeat of apartheid. Difficult doesn't mean impossible, especially when the majority knows you're right. You watch. We're just getting started.

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