

It's Official: Healthcare Reform is Dead

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The “transparent government” that President Obama guaranteed during his electoral campaign has become yet another broken promise. On August 14th, the Huffington Post revealed a memo containing details of “the deal” that Obama cut with health care mega-corporations in secret White House meetings. And although the White House denies the authenticity of the memo, the details are consistent with earlier reports from other national media outlets.

The White House deal essentially reduces some of the more egregious health care corporation swindling — estimated to save \$80 billion over ten years — while Obama shamelessly promised that other irrational vehicles for health care mega-profits will remain untouched: any congressional health care plan will not attempt to negotiate for cheaper drugs, nor import them from other countries, Medicare will not be altered in a way that affects health care corporations’ profits.

Creating new laws by backroom dealing with giant corporations is of course bad for democracy. Unfortunately, Obama had few other options, since he refused beforehand to directly confront the health care industry’s power. He was thus reduced to bargaining with these entities, leaving any leverage at the door. The health care companies fully understood this and exploited the situation to the fullest.

The competing health care bills in Congress reflect this dynamic, since Congressmen have been similarly awed — and bought — by the health care industry. The different health care bills all agree that health care should be “mandated” — like the car insurance you’re required to buy (if you can afford it). All the bills also agree that Medicare payments to hospitals and other providers — many directly affecting the most vulnerable — will be cut drastically, leading to “...savings [that] would pay nearly 40 percent of the [health care] bills’ cost.” (New York Times, August 9, 2009). They’re giving health care with the left hand and taking it with the right.

One disagreement between the competing plans was the highly controversial “public option.” This was what the health care corporations hated most, since it was a way to directly take power out of their hands. Again, the White House backed off, “signal[ing] Sunday that it was willing to compromise and would consider a proposal for a nonprofit health cooperative being developed in the Senate.” (New York Times, August 16, 2009). The “cooperative” idea is widely considered by health care advocates to be useless.

Such sellouts were the inevitable result of intensified health care industry bribery (so-called “lobbying”), which Business Week claims to be “... a record \$133 million...in the second quarter of 2009 alone...” (August 6, 2009). The same article — appropriately named *The Health Insurers Have Already Won* — examines the health care lobby’s successes and notes

that no matter what health care bill emerges from Congress, the “insurance industry will emerge more profitable.”

The same article also reveals — unsurprisingly — that health care corporations were responsible for destroying the public health care option, while “also achieving a secondary aim of constraining the new benefits that will become available to tens of millions of people who are currently uninsured. That will make the new customers more lucrative to the industry.” This simply means that the taxpayer money that will be used to subsidize any health care plan will go straight towards health care company profits, while providing the same shoddy care they’ve always provided.

Heads they win, tails we lose.

The health care industry is so pleased with the deal they’ve struck with Obama, they’re willing to put up \$150 million toward an advertising campaign to insure the deal’s passage.

This servitude to the health care corporations has strongly emboldened the rightwing, who are using the Democrat’s obvious corruption to stir up hysteria and fanaticism through media and town halls. The rightwing attacks have driven many liberals to defend the Democrats, who deserve zero pity, let alone support.

The Republicans are placing safe bets that the Democrats will achieve absolutely nothing progressive in health care — a gamble that will payoff tremendously in the next elections. The Republicans are also using the situation to massively propagandize against “socialism,” a word wrongly attributed to any health care bill in Congress. The purpose, however, is to steer people away from any substitute to capitalism, a system that millions of Americans rightfully see as broken as health care.

The rightwing is also using the health care crisis to again focus its guns on immigrants. Instead of the giant health care corporations being responsible for the health care crisis, society’s most vulnerable are painted as the culprits. The Wall Street journal complained that health care costs are being driven up due to “half of the 12 million illegal immigrants in the U.S. don’t have health insurance”. (August 15, 2009)

Of course the 6 million undocumented immigrants who lack health insurance have plenty of company: there are at least 47 million U.S. citizens without health insurance, a number that is growing drastically as unemployment skyrockets.

The same Wall Street journal article implies that anyone seeking emergency room help should be turned away unless they show proof of citizenship. Leaving aside the obvious moral issues of denying a human being emergency room medical treatment, another issue remains: millions of working and poor people do not have any “proof of citizenship,” and would also be denied lifesaving emergency health care.

The Wall Street Journal would never focus on the fact that a large number of African Americans likewise use the emergency room for their primary source of medical treatment, since such a statement would be obviously racist, while racism against immigrants is widely accepted. Whipping up racist hysteria, however, is a tactic that is being employed on a broader basis as people rightfully blame mega-corporations for the economic crisis.

Another issue blamed on immigrants is Medicare’s economic woes, while the real

perpetrators — the health care corporations — escape responsibility. Every time Medicare is used to purchase overpriced medications, the pharmaceutical companies rake in huge profits. Medicare must also pay for over priced medical procedures, pricey hospital stays, etc. In fact, Medicare Part D was specially inserted by the Bush administration to drive up profits for the health care industry. In Part D's first six months, profits for pharmaceutical companies went up \$8 billion, according to the U.S. House Committee on Government Reform. Part of Obama's deal with the health care industry says that Part D will remain untouched.

This fiscal ransacking of Medicare is being used as a reason to dump the program in its entirety, something that the Democrat's "health care plan" will be the first step towards achieving. (The most profitable parts will likely remain intact.)

Medicare must not only be saved, but extended to everybody. This obvious solution to America's health care disaster is "too radical" for Democrats and Republicans alike. Indeed, under the current system far too many of society's resources are being used towards the profits of the health care industry, bank bailouts, and foreign wars for such truly universal health care to exist.

To create health care for all, the socially-precious health care industry must be completely taken out of the hands of the mega-corporations who've ruined the lives of millions of people — indeed directly responsible for the deaths of a staggering number of lives — while helping bankrupt federal and state governments.

In an earlier article we wrote: "If Obama's health care plan leaves in place the same greedy shareholders and CEO's of the health care mega-corporations, while funneling them billions of taxpayer money, very little is likely to change. Likewise, if every American has health insurance, but insurance companies benefit from not paying for expensive surgeries or medications, or drug companies continue to benefit from having monopolies over medications, millions of people will continue to suffer." (March, 9, 2009, The Emerging Health Care Sellout).

Obstacles to change must be removed, not bargained with or pandered to. The health care industry — like the big banks — is exerting a stranglehold over society that the Democrats and Republicans are unwilling to break, and indeed profit from. This cowardice will hopefully shed light on an old truth for millions of people: the Democrats — like the Republicans — are a party of big business and cannot be anything different. Workers must make a decisive break with the Democrats and politically organize themselves independently, so that another hope-wielding politician doesn't waste our time with promises of change while delivering health care profits, bank bailouts and wars.

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