

They don't dislike health care, they dislike Barack Obama

Written by Julianne Malveaux, NNPA Columnist
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I am fascinated by the town hall meetings that are happening around the country and the ire, real or imagined, that is being heaped on members of Congress who are simply attempting to share information with their constituencies about ways our government hopes to help 50 million uninsured Americans get health insurance.

There are some Americans who honestly oppose a government role in providing health care, some who dishonestly (like Sarah Palin) have twisted provisions to end up with "death panels" that do not exist but frighten many people, and some who have no problem with health care, per se, but have jumped in on this one as a way of pouncing on a weakness they perceive in the Obama Administration.

They don't dislike health care, they dislike President Barack Obama. They see blood in the water and so, like the sharks they are, they are going after it. Here's the evidence – the discussion is shrill and uncivil. It is long on emotion and short on facts.

I hesitate to say that there is a racial element in this opposition because those who oppose national health insurance were pretty nasty when the Clintons were attempting to implement those policies (remember Harry and Louise?). Still, I never thought a debate about health insurance could turn so vituperative, and in sleepy August, too.

While politics is the art of compromise, President Obama and his team should hold the line on health insurance. It is an essential part of economic recovery and economic vitality. How many people file bankruptcy because, uninsured, they have encountered health care bills for an unplanned illness?

How many allow small illnesses to become large ones because they can't get to a doctor? We know there are 50 million uninsured adults and children. What kind of productivity drain exists because people don't have the health insurance they need?

After being battered by the astroturf organizations playing at real opposition, President Obama seems ready to step back and perhaps abandon the idea of giving Americans the option of government-run insurance. This represents capitulation on a key point, preserves the so-called free market forces that Republicans want, and postpones the reckoning that must take place about health care until a future time when another leader (or perhaps this one in a second term) is able to deal with comprehensive reform.

On in seven of our GDP dollars are spent on health care, and it is inexcusable that so many Americans are pushed to the periphery of the system. Those of us with jobs that provide benefits clearly have the best health insurance options, while those who are gainfully self-employed have some options, but pay more dearly for insurance. Those who are separated from the labor market and those who work at low wages often do not have health insurance, or they simply can't afford it. In some cases, premiums will take up to a third of a worker's paycheck. That's when people decide to take a chance and pray they won't get sick.

While the government-run insurance option is not the central fact of the Obama plan, it is an important part of it. There are Democratic members of Congress who will not support health

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care without this feature. Why? Because the private sector has heretofore been unwilling to insure the uninsured. Government is stepping in because the market hasn't worked for everyone. But the free market advocates claim that government intervention isn't fair to private companies. What? The same private companies that now leave people uninsured?

A compromise might be the notion of government supported health insurance cooperatives. This takes a step in the direction of those Republicans who want to preserve competition. From my perspective, the cooperatives could work, but they may also have flaws that distort the outcomes for the poorest Americans.

Further, a compromise right now signals that all people have to do is go to town meetings, clown and perform like banshees, in order to get their way. In discussions that have shed less light than heat, health insurance reform opponents have clearly signaled their antipathy to this President, but they have not offered clear objections to his health insurance plan. They have provided the basis for analysis, but not capitulation.

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