



FEATURED COLUMNIST

Time for an Alternative to PelosiCare

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As it becomes increasingly clear in the light of day that the bill passed by the U.S. House in the dark of night cannot find the necessary votes in the Senate, it is time for leaders to explore alternatives that have the support of the American people and will set us on a path to contain costs and achieve our goals without massive tax hikes and ever more spending.

Last month my firm surveyed 500 nationally representative registered voters about competing visions for health care reform. The results were clear: voters want a plan in line with what GOP leaders offered as their alternative on Saturday night. Voters preferred a comprehensive, step by step, common sense restructuring of the health care system over the massive, incredibly expensive, one size fits all, all at once plan offered by Speaker Pelosi. Voters were especially drawn to reforms which reduce the costs to consumers without adding to the deficit, create no new government agencies, and are less costly than the Democrat's plan.

This should be welcome news to wary Legislators, especially those from red states and red districts. The public is not ready for a rapid and radical transformation of the health care system – they prefer a step by step solution to accomplish meaningful reforms. A strong plurality of voters believe that the President and Congress are trying to accomplish too much when it comes to healthcare and an overwhelming 63% of voters agree that “my health care is too important to risk on one gigantic piece of legislation rushed through Congress. I would rather see Congress take a more thoughtful step by step approach, focusing on common sense reforms.”

Support for this step by step approach grew as we added more components of the Republican and Democrat plans: support for the GOP plan soared when a “no new tax” pledge coupled with an incremental approach was tested against a comprehensive reform plan that includes tax increases. Indeed a clear consensus emerged from the data:

Americans believe that if we make the right decisions, we can reform our health care system without raising taxes.

Our survey also shows that liberals are misreading the American public with their overwhelming emphasis on coverage, to the exclusion of cost reductions. Americans are indeed concerned about access to care (83% say “finding a way to provide health insurance coverage to most Americans” is an important part of health care reform), but there is greater concern and demand for solutions that lower costs. A nearly universal 97% deem “making insurance more affordable” an important part of reform, with 69% rating it extremely important.

Even when we asked voters to make direct tradeoffs between increasing coverage, lowering costs, and improving the quality of care, their preferences were clear. Respondents were asked what percentage of a health care reform plan should be focused on each of these three goals - 55% of voters assigned more weight to cost than they did coverage, and on average they assigned cost seven times the weight and importance they gave to coverage. The Democratic plan, with its myopic focus upon coverage while doing almost nothing to decrease health care premiums for most Americans, misses what Americans feel is the most crucial part of the debate.

Ultimately, when asked to choose between complete descriptions of the Republican and Democratic plans (without labeling them such), voters chose the GOP plan: 63% chose “a limited, incremental, step-by-step approach to reform, which has no new taxes. This plan would lower premiums; but would not do anything to address the number of uninsured Americans. This plan would go into effect immediately;” and only 37% preferred “one comprehensive reform bill that would include multiple tax increases, would minimally impact premiums, but would provide insurance to most Americans. This plan would not go into effect for three years, though the tax raises would occur immediately.”

We have worked closely with Congressman Dave Camp as he helped forge this alternative plan and it is clear to us, clear to Congressman Camp, clear to congressional Republicans, and clear to 39 moderate Democrats, America is ready for health care reform – just not a sweeping re-creation of the entire system. Far from acting as the party of “No”, Republicans are showing a way forward on this debate that fits the prescription required for our ills. We hope in the coming days that a majority of the US Senate will also come to understand this as well. If they do, we can achieve meaningful reforms that the American people can agree on, and take a step toward restoring their confidence in the legislative process and their elected representatives.