

## Reform equals “spending more” cacophony

My hopes for any meaningful health reform further dwindled recently when I heard Dr. Ezekiel Emmanuel, as part of a TV panel, revert to political talking points rather than health care analysis. An excellent writer, I always appreciated his health care policy analysis, even though I frequently disagreed with some of his conclusions.

His comment that most intrigued me was a remark that the latest version of the American Care Reconciliation Act of 2017 (ACRA) only proposed about one-quarter of the extra federal funds certain experts claim we need to fight the opioid abuse problem. This is a serious problem but hardly a major issue to debate regarding health care reform.

It did, however, focus my frustration of the last several months. There has not been – and it appears there will not be – and meaningful discussion of health reform, i.e., increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of health care delivery to contain costs and provide high quality care to all Americans.

Emmanuel’s remarks – and most newspapers and media reports – are fixated on one simple thing. Americans need more – not less – federal funds for 1,000s of special programs and individual entitlements. Individuals and states have maxed out on what they can spend for health care and the federal government must spend more.

The corollary is that there is no way to save money through decreasing central and state administrative excesses, curtailing the role of insurance companies, eliminating delivery system waste, duplication and low productivity by incentivizing local management, stimulating competition and increasing investment in public health protection, prevention and promotion efforts.. Evidently, those are just rhetorical platitudes, not “doable” objectives to be seriously debated.

There is little public and media analysis of any other reform bill. All are analyzed primarily on whether they reduce federal funding and entitlements in any manner compared with the ACA or Obamacare. I doubt 10% of the country could even tell you the name of any other proposal and what “reforms” it offers. The cacophony is: there is no way to “reform”; every dollar in cuts will medically harm or kill someone.

The obvious irony is that there are no federal funds, other than those we American people produce in terms of goods and services. Whether it is spent directly by the individual or a surrogate at the federal, state or local level, it’s our money.

The current debate on health reform ignores this fact to a great extent. Instead it is nothing more than an economic and political debate to decide how (and by whom) the dollars earned by working Americans will be gathered, redistributed and used. There is virtually no discussion on how to get more for the money we earn.

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