

## **Another View: Head-in-the-sand 'solution' is killing GOP**

By Jack Bernard, DesMoines Register

We Republicans have ourselves to blame for the Affordable Care Act, or Obamacare.

Our reaction to the Clinton health reform proposals in the early 1990s was to have conservative think tanks come up with a free competition model based on expansion of private insurance and Medicaid. That idea became Romneycare, which evolved into Obamacare.

It is our baby, ugly or not.

It is the height of hypocrisy for us now to criticize our own idea unless we have something better to replace it. And, the replacement needs to be comprehensive, not just a series of unacceptable statements and proposals based on doing away with traditional Medicare by turning it into a voucher program and gutting Medicaid by making it into a block grant.

Using vouchers for Medicare just dumps the cost problem into the lap of the powerless patient, rather than the federal government that has clout, making the cost escalation problem worse. The block grants for Medicaid idea just shifts the cost issue onto the states rather than the federal government, which once again solves nothing and only makes things worse.

States will just cut services and people from their Medicaid roles, creating more uninsured. Don't Iowa hospitals serve enough uninsured in their emergency rooms now?

**This gets us to what we as Republicans should do:** throw out our rule book and be innovative. People my age will remember how we Republicans were 100 percent against recognizing China before Richard Nixon, the anti-communist crusader, came out for it. We must do the same with health care.

There is only one way to control health care costs and insure universal access — and that is by first admitting that the U.S. system has failed and then adopting ideas that have been proven to work elsewhere. We should take a look at how health care is financed and delivered in other developed nations with lower cost and better morbidity and mortality rates.

A Commonwealth Fund study was issued in May 2012 which did just that for 13 countries. The bottom line is that we spend 17.4 percent of our gross national product on health care, far more than other developed nations, which averaged

9.5 percent. Our per-capita spending was \$7,960 versus \$3,182 for the group as a whole.

Why? One key factor is prices. For example, U.S. pricing on the 30 most commonly prescribed brand name drugs is one-third higher than Canada and double France, both of which have a form of Universal Medicare.

**From looking at the international data**, if we Republicans really want to dump the Affordable Care Act, the way to go is Medicare for all. Studies show that the nations with universal health care have better overall health care outcomes than we do, not worse.

And, according to the respected Physicians for a National Health Program, [www.pnhp.org](http://www.pnhp.org), yearly savings generated under Medicare for all would be \$400 billion. That would go a long way towards paying for universal coverage, versus the Affordable Care Act, which will increase systemic costs because it relies on private insurance.

The canard about waiting times to see doctors is just a tactic to scare the public. If you need a knee replacement for a knee that has been going bad for years, waiting a little longer for an operation should not be a major issue for the patient. Despite the scare tactics, no one who needs immediate care in Canada is ever left to sit in a line. In any case, there should be no waiting lists at all here. Canada spends just \$4,363 per capita on health care versus our \$7,960.

If we Republicans took the Medicare-for-all approach, it would thrust us into the vanguard of reform. Instead of the Democrats stealing our ideas, we could steal theirs. When it was implemented and turned out to be widely accepted, as was Medicare in the 1960s, we would be the party the public would look to for the future.

Of course, there is an alternative. We can stick our heads in the sand and push for infeasible actions. That approach is killing us regarding immigration and will work just as well for health care.

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