

Partisan politics out of hand

This weekend was a historic one. A health care reform bill—H.R. 3962—was voted on in the House of Representatives (HOR). It passed with a “pro-life” amendment attached to it—one proposed by Bart Stupak (D-MI) which further limits a woman’s ability to get an abortion. Though the bill must be passed (after modifications) in the Senate, that it passed in the HOR is a very significant first step. Having watched the debate via my computer (on CNN’s online feed of CSPAN) this past Saturday night, it became clear how partisan our political process has become. The bitterness and rancor displayed by speakers from both sides of the political divide serves as a vivid reminder that we have serious problems with our political system. We had better reform it before it leads to greater misunderstanding or much worse.

Several aspects of what happened on Saturday were really disturbing. First there was the rhetoric. Speakers pro and con of the bill offered very impassioned arguments, yet everything was couched in terms of party affiliation. Next there was the vote, actually several votes, that ensued (for the amendments and the final bill). Lastly, there was the bill itself—full of compromises, obfuscation, and other shortfalls.

Apparently, based on the debate, Republicans and Democrats, by definition, are worlds away from one another when it comes to reforming health care. Both

sides were adamant that the other side is extremely misguided. But, reading between the lines, the rigid divide that was exhibited seemed more like a “dog and pony show” than a real ideological disagreement. The reality is simple. Based on what was said, both sides can’t be right, one side must be lying or both are fudging their numbers and the benefits in ways that are very deceptive (and, seemingly, duplicitous). Ultimately, both bills benefit the insurance and pharmaceutical industries very well. There has got to be a simpler, more honest, and more effective way to provide health care to all (a fundamental human right as far as I’m concerned). It doesn’t seem that our politicians want us to understand any more than we need too—hence a 2000 page bill and a very divisive situation. The votes were extremely revealing. Currently there are 177 Republicans and 258 Democrats in the HOR; notice that there are no Independents at all. Of these Republicans all but one voted for the “pro-life” amendment and against the final health care bill. Democrats were much more “flexible” with 64 (or 25 percent) of them voting for the “pro-life” Stupak amendment and 39 of them (or 15 percent) of them voting against the final bill. On the face of it, it would appear that Democrats are less ideological and able to vote based upon something other than party affiliation (or what their party leaders tell them to do) whereas the Republicans are the party with very narrow

windows to think outside of a prescribed (some might say “dogmatic”) position. This interpretation makes sense until one looks at the Democrats who voted with the Republicans. According to the pundits, most of them come from districts that voted for McCain (rather than Obama) for President in 2008. Thus, they were vulnerable and not willing to support Obama in his effort to reform health care. Once again we see that reelection appears to be much more important to our politicians than what might be “right” or “necessary.”

Now for the big bill in question, entitled, “Affordable Health Care for America Act.” One Democrat, Dennis Kucinich (D-OH) voted against the bill because it doesn’t live up to its name. According to Congressman Kucinich, one of the few politicians that can be counted on to speak his mind (and not pander or cave to big Pharma, big Agro, or big Demo), the bill that passed is really a major victory for the insurance companies who will now be guaranteed payments from over 90 percent of people. Apparently, if people can’t pay the bills then the government will subsidize them. If you haven’t heard much from the extremely well-endowed insurance companies it is precisely because this bill is a huge windfall for them. Perceptively, Congressman Kucinich asks, “Why is it we have finite resources for health care but unlimited money for war? The inequities in our economy are piling up: trillions for war, trillions for Wall Street and tens of billions for

the insurance companies. Banks and other corporations are sitting on piles of cash of taxpayer’s money while firing workers, cutting pay and denying small businesses money to survive.” This question/statement must be asked and considered when one realizes that we are the only industrialized country that doesn’t provide health care to all its citizens and we also happen to be the country outlaying nearly half of the world’s military budget as well (though we make up less than five percent of the world’s population).

The saddest part of the entire process is that the majority of Americans are not being listened to. In poll after poll, the majority of Americans want a nationalized health care system. They realize that Medicare is the best form of health care available right now and it is government run. The (mis-)framing of the issue of “single payer” indicates that the media doesn’t represent reality; they merely represent the interests of the advertisers (who pay their bills). Until we come to terms with this sad reality and make an effort to return the media to the people and make our politicians accountable for their neglect/misrepresentation of our will, we will continue to be “sold” to the lowest bidder (in this case, insurance companies that make billions of dollars in profits as we get sicker and sicker from degraded environments and processed foods).