DEVASTATING IMPACT OF U.S. CORPORATE HEALTH CARE BILL

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By Shamus Cooke, Global Research , 27 November 2009

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And although the final bill has yet to be crafted, there exists general agreements as to what the end version will look like. Americans will be forced to buy shoddy corporate insurance with no limit to the cost, no guarantee of quality, with large premiums and other tricks to further gouge consumers. If a public option emerges in the final bill — by no means a guarantee — it will be shrunken enough to insure very few people (2 percent of the U.S. population).

But it gets worse. How this health care "reform" will be paid for has implications that dwarf the

above atrocities.

For example, the Democrats were determined to pass a health care bill that "will not add one cent to the deficit." And they have succeeded: the House and Senate health care bills both plan to reduce the deficit by over $100 billion. But a second-grader could do the math here: more service does not equal less cost — a truism that dominates the for-profit health care industry.

So how does the government plan to save billions of dollars as they "help" millions of people?

The two biggest cost saving schemes are the most damaging. The first is the enormous attack on Medicare. Since its inception, the corporate elite wanted this program struck down. Now they have their man for the job — a Republican could never get away with such obvious treachery.

The Congressional Budget Office estimates that the Senate version of health care would cut $404 billion from Medicare and Medicaid; the house version would cut $570 billion. The final cut could be much more. Obama made the ridiculous claim that only "wasteful" parts of Medicare would be cut. The truth is far different.

One way that both Congressional health care bills will gut Medicare is referred to as "forced productivity gains" — cost saving measures essentially; trimming the fat.

What are these savings? The most mentioned device — by politicians and media alike — is the reduction of "wasteful tests" and procedures that doctors routinely perform, an idea that the health care mega-corporations love. It will save them billions, while having catastrophic effects on the health care of millions of people.

For example, the recent announcement that women will now be persuaded to cut back on screenings for breast cancer and cervical cancer have caused an uproar nationwide: people are correctly making the connection behind Congress' "forced productivity gains" and the new "recommendations" that will be used by insurance companies to justify cutting these services, both of which will boost profits. The general agreement behind rationing health care in this way will be an attack on not only Medicare, but serve as the backbone of any health care bill passed, negatively effecting everyone unable to afford luxury health care.

Another piece of Medicare that's being trimmed is Medicare Advantage, a favorite program of the elderly because of its comprehensive services. Premiums for this program are already rising drastically in anticipation of the health care bill's passage, considered by Congress to be "wasteful." Without this program, Medicare will be greatly devalued and be more appropriately named: "band-aides for seniors."

Finally, The Senate health care bill attacks Medicare by reducing payments to doctors by 25 percent. If doctors receive such a drastic reduction in pay, they will simply refuse to see Medicare or Medicaid patients; people will thus be insured only on paper. The newly insured Medicaid patients under any new congressional bill will be sorely disappointed.

Once Medicare is undermined in the above ways, the corporate sponsored right-wing will make a very convincing argument that "Medicare doesn't work", leading to future cuts that will further destroy the program.

The second hidden disaster in financing a congressional health care bill is the tax on so-called "gold-plated" or "Cadillac" health insurance policies that some employers offer their workers. This tax is supposedly meant to apply to the health care policies that "elite" employees receive.

And while there should exist no complaints about taxing corporations, the motives behind this particular tax are intentionally deceiving. As it turns out, many, if not most workers in unions will be included in this tax, which, under the Senate version, will include any plan worth more than $8,000 for individuals and $21,000 for families. Hardly elite, considering the still-soaring costs for health care.

If this provision were to pass — and it's very popular in Congress — the immediate reaction would be very predictable: employers would immediately drop their health care plans, forcing workers into the now-forced purchasing of inadequate health care. This is why unions oppose such a plan. California Democrat Pete Stark agrees: "Employers and insurers will reduce their benefits to avoid paying the proposed tax."

Workers fortunate to have union contracts will be heavily pressured to concede their plans, which in the past they've sacrificed wage-increases to keep. Ultimately, employers will have a new excuse not to provide health care to workers.

Obama again used his superb intelligence to totally obscure the issue in support of the tax:

"I do think that giving a disincentive to insurance companies to offer Cadillac plans that don't make people healthier is part of the way that we're going to bring down health care costs for everybody over the long term." Translation: he supports taxing the health care of union workers.

Overall, a compromise bill between the Senate and House versions will create utter disaster for the working-class. It will not signal a progressive "step in the right direction," as many liberals claim. At minimum, it will be a step backward, though more likely such a bill will be an enormous regression, to a time where health care was the exclusive privilege of the wealthy.

The right-wing attacks on "Obamacare" — along with the media's lack of questioning — have shielded the Democrats from any serious debate about the above questions, including many other concerns unmentioned here.

The trash legislation that Congress is producing is the direct consequence of the Democratic Party being dominated by giant corporations — in this case the health care industry. The two-party system is the political system of the corporate elite, who switch party affiliations when they find it convenient; many of them throw equal money at both parties.

A crucial prop in this broken political system needs to be removed and organized under its own strength. If the unions took their support from the Democrats, organized their members and resources into a new political party, and aggressively pushed reforms that benefited the majority of working-class Americans, U.S. democracy would be tremendously strengthened. Medicare could not only be saved, but expanded to everyone from birth to death and be considered a fundamental human right.

Shamus Cooke is a social service worker, trade unionist, and writer for Workers Action (www.workerscompass.org). He can be reached at shamuscook at yahoo.com