Public Opinion is Shifting About Health Care

May 5, 1994 by Phyllis Schlafly

The little boy finally said the emperor has no clothes. Republicans have been mumbling for months that the Clinton health care plan will require big tax increases, but now the powerful chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, Dan Rostenkowski, has finally come right out and said that it will require "a broad tax increase that has some impact on virtually every American."

Whew! Such candor is refreshing. Rosty added that the "tens of billions of dollars" of additional money needed simply cannot come from the "health fairy" or from a cigarette tax plus savings that are promised to be carved out of current wasteful spending. Those savings won't happen.

Rostenkowski said that he still supports the Clinton bill and we should all "belly up to the bar" and pay these tax increases. This tough talk came only four days after he had proposed increasing Social Security payroll taxes.

The same week, the Clinton health care plan took another body blow. The new USA TODAY /CNN/Gallup Poll shows that public opinion has moved massively against the Clinton plan and even against the Clinton health care rhetoric.

The best thing the Clinton health plan had going for it was the rhetorical question that Clinton and all the liberal media hurled at critics: "You are for 'universal coverage,' aren't you?" This new poll now gives Congressmen the courage to say, "No, I'm not, because I'm not for government mandated coverage; I'm with the 63 percent of Americans who prefer access to affordable coverage." Access is the key word.

Clinton threatened Congress that, if a bill reaches his desk without universal coverage, he will veto it. The poll shows the American people saying, "Go ahead and veto it; we don't want your plan."

The best way to get the affordable access that Americans want is to eliminate the current disgraceful discrimination in the tax code which allows executives and workers in employer-paid health plans to buy their health insurance BEFORE they pay their taxes, but requires workers who are part-time, self-employed, or work for a company that doesn't offer health benefits, to buy their insurance only AFTER they pay their income and payroll taxes.

I have news for the liberals. Most of the working poor and middle class without health insurance are not demanding a government handout of free health care. All they want is the same access (tax deduction) for buying health insurance that rich CEOs currently receive.

Some Congressmen, when confronted by their constituents on this issue, readily

agree with the need to change to a system of tax fairness so all will be equally allowed to deduct their health insurance, but they assert that it "costs too much money" to make this change. The answer to that is, "There's no price tag on discrimination. The part-time waitress must be given the same benefit enjoyed by corporation executives."

The second best thing that the Clinton health plan had going for it is the typical American attitude that, when confronted with a problem, "there ought to be a law." The new poll shows that the American people are too smart to fall for this line where their health is involved because they know the government cannot solve all their problems.

According to the USA TODAY/CNN/Gallup Poll, by a margin of 48 percent to 19 percent,, people *say* they will be *"worse off* if health-care legislation passes,,." and by a margin of 48 percent to 16 percent, people say they will have "fewer choices."

These polling figures should eliminate the fear that some Congressmen have of being left waiting on the dock when a health care bill raises anchor and sails. According to the poll, only 37 percent want a health care bill to pass this year, and 58 percent say they prefer gradual change over several years.

Put another way, Congressmen no longer need worry about being accused of causing "gridlock" by opposing a big government health bill.

Indeed, Congressmen will be better off if they are left standing on the dock waiting for a better bill. Those who set sail with the Clinton bill will be stuck with inevitable adverse public reaction because there won't be any lifeboats to bail out of their roll-call vote.

Only 19 percent of Americans say Congress should pass the Clinton health care bill, whereas 23 percent say Congress should reject it in toto, and 51 percent say it should have major changes.

The poll shows that almost twice as many Americans think that the quality of medical care will decline, rather than improve, under Clinton's health care proposal. Three times as many people think that the Clinton bill will make health care cost more rather than less, and ten times as many Americans think it will mean too much government involvement rather than too little.

Harvard Professor Robert Blendon, an expert on health policy and public opinion, summarized public opinion like this: "Not only are they nervous about the president's plan, but they are sufficiently nervous about reform in general that if it dragged on for a number of years, it wouldn't bother them."