



AARP Controversy Over Healthcare Reform

As FOX News put it on August 10: "Elected officials aren't the only ones facing frustrated, angry crowds at health care town hall meetings." Now AARP, the senior advocacy group, has come under fire from its own members for appearing to support President Barack Obama's healthcare reform proposals.



AARP sponsored a July 28 town hall with Obama hosted by the group's CEO Barry Rand and President Jennie Chin Hansen, but it claims to be nonpartisan with respect to specific legislation. Many AARP members apparently weren't convinced by Obama's talk, and they aren't too happy about the group's course of action. Part of the reason may have been found by FOX News polling, which shows that 93 percent of seniors "rate their current coverage as good or excellent," and 56 percent "say they oppose the creation of a government-run option for all Americans."

AARP officials at a recent forum in Dallas walked out after several seniors interrupted the gathering with critical questions and comments. According to FOX News, "some AARP members say they are so outraged that they've taken to tearing up their membership cards and firing off heated letters to the organization's CEO."

Stuart Barton, president of the American Seniors Association, understands the frustration: "We get letters every single day from people that are very upset about this bill and about the AARP supporting it. So I don't blame them for coming back and saying they are going to tear up their AARP cards." While AARP officials say they are attempting to work with all sides of the debate and are used to taking criticism from both liberals and conservatives, Barton doesn't see it that way. "The AARP speaks out of both sides of their mouth and tells their constituents or their members one thing and [does] another," he said.

Town halls will continue to be sponsored by AARP, and AARP spokesman Jim Dau has issued a plea for participants to remain civil. "It's really important to ratchet down the tension," Dau said. "Make sure that you are getting a debate based on the actual facts, not the myths, not based on the things that some folks want you to believe."

Dau has a point, but he may be right and wrong at the same time. It is important for those who oppose President Obama's healthcare reform proposals to express their opposition without losing their temper. Emotions will understandably run high regarding an issue as vital as healthcare, but the facts are on the side of the opposition, so name calling or disruptive shouting will only be counterproductive. In fact,



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it is even conceivable that those who are actually supporting Obama's reforms may want to turn town halls into riots in order to make opponents look bad and to shut down debate on the issue. So Dau is right about ratcheting down the tension.

Where Dau is at least partially wrong is his suggestion that opponents of current reform legislation have been misled into believing myths. While this could be happening in certain instances, Dau seems to be implying that opponents have no real arguments against reform. For example, opponents don't want reform to establish single-payer, socialized medicine. Dau could accurately say that current bills won't mandate a single-payer system, so opposition claiming otherwise would be wrong.

However, a taxpayer-supported, government-run insurance plan has the ability to put private insurance companies out of business by paying less to providers while charging lower premiums. Providers will charge more for services rendered to those with private coverage, causing private premiums to rise and forcing more people to join the public plan to save money. The vicious cycle continues until government has driven its only competitors out of business and virtually everyone is enrolled in the public plan — which ends up achieving a single-payer system, but in a roundabout way.

The truth is that single-payer, socialized medicine doesn't have to be created immediately for it to be the ultimate result of reform. It is not believing a myth to oppose current reform proposals because of what they can lead to in the future. After all, if a public plan is never created in the first place, it can never lead to socialized medicine. Once a public plan does exist, it will always have the potential to become the *only* plan.

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