



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on April 15, 2016

Opposition Gearing Up to Colo. Single-payer Healthcare Proposal

Mark Twain is alleged to have said that “a lie can travel halfway around the world before truth can get its boots on.” In Colorado Initiative 20 is already on the ballot in November and opposition to it is just getting its boots on.

If passed, it would be the 69th amendment to Colorado’s state constitution and would collect all the state’s healthcare programs — Medicaid, children’s healthcare, and all the other state and federal healthcare programs — under one roof. It would replace ObamaCare with what supporters are calling ColoradoCare. And it would double the state’s budget in its first year.



The [language of the ballot initiative question](#) may be enough to kill it:

Shall state taxes be raised by \$25 billion annually in the first full fiscal year, and by such amounts that are raised thereafter, by an amendment to the Colorado Constitution establishing a health care payment system to fund health care for all individuals whose primary residence is in Colorado, and, in connection therewith, creating a governmental entity called ColoradoCare to administer [it]?

At present Colorado’s budget for 2015-2016 is \$26.4 billion, limited by the Taxpayer Bill of Rights (TABOR), passed in 1992. Under TABOR, state and local governments cannot raise tax rates without voter approval. Under ColoradoCare, TABOR would not apply, and the program, according to its sponsors, would act like a state-wide cooperative with the “cooperation” of every citizen mandated under the program. Its funding (and anticipated increases) would not only fall outside TABOR, it would be beyond the reach of the state’s elected representatives. It would, in fact, be a separate government unto itself.

The legwork behind the initiative is a collective of three separate entities working together: the Colorado Foundation for Universal Health Care, which conducted the research; Co-Operate Colorado, which designed the language for the ballot; and ColoradoCareYES, which paid the 500 pollsters to obtain the 150,000 signatures from unwary citizens to get it onto the ballot.

The most prominent individual behind the measure is one T.R. Reid, a graduate of Princeton University who covered global affairs for the *Washington Post*. Reid now lives in Denver and is the *Post*’s Rocky Mountain bureau chief. He chairs the Colorado Foundation for Universal Health care along with Vice Chair State Senator Jeanne Nicholson, who has been pushing for government-mandated health care for years.

Reid’s ideology was exposed after he developed a documentary, *Sick Around America*, for PBS but then withdrew his support from it after PBS cut his conclusion: “You can’t allow a profit to be made on the



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basic package of health insurance.” He believes instead, as do socialists such as Bernie Sanders, that government can do a much better job at providing healthcare to the masses than can the free market. Said Sanders when he learned of the initiative, “Colorado could lead the nation in moving toward a system to ensure better health care for more people at less cost. In the richest nation on earth, we should make health care a right for all citizens. No one should go bankrupt or skip getting the care they need because they cannot afford it.”

Someone would have to afford it for them. Under the proposal, the \$25 billion would be raised by imposing a state payroll tax on business owners of 6.67 percent and on their employees of 3.33 percent. For those who are self-employed the rate would be a flat 10 percent.

When a similar plan was proposed in Sanders’ state, Vermont, in 2012, it was opposed by Democratic Governor Peter Shumlin who recognized that its implementation would be far beyond the citizens’ ability to pay for it.

The enticement inviting people to support the program is similar to nearly every other socialist program where something is offered for free. Said State Senator Nicholson, “With ColoradoCare there will be no deductibles and there will be no co-insurance ... that money that people are spending now can be freed up to spend on other things that will benefit Colorado’s economy.”

Reid’s own offer sounded the same. In a quote appearing in the group’s full-color brochure *Amendment 69 — ColoradoCare: How it would work*, Reid said:

ColoradoCare will be a win-win for our state:

- It will provide health insurance for everybody.
- It will save families and businesses billions.
- It will get us a waiver from ObamaCare, so we’re not bound by policies imposed from Washington, D.C.

And, once installed successfully in Colorado, it can serve as a model for every other state: “When Colorado demonstrates that we can cover everybody at reasonable cost, we will show the whole country how to do it.”

However, *The Basics*, as explained in that brochure, get a little tricky. It says, “It would finance comprehensive, high-quality health care for every Colorado resident ... [it] would operate using the cooperative business model ... [with] an appointed Board [to] create the infrastructure before the elected board took over ... it would be funded with Affordable Care Act (ACA) waiver funds [an additional \$11 billion] granted to states that innovate with their own plans ... if revenues do not keep up with costs, the members [of the cooperative] would be asked if they would approve a Health Care Premium tax increase.”

All of which, naturally, will lead to lower costs and better health care services, according to the brochure: “Changing to a simple and fair system for collecting premiums and financing health care delivery is necessary to reduce the administrative waste and achieve the savings needed to finance universal coverage, improve quality, and lower the costs for Coloradans.”

Kelly Sloan, a Colorado-based consultant and policy fellow at Centennial Institute, on the other hand, saw the initiative for what it really is:

ColoradoCare would dismantle Colorado’s health insurance industry, result in reduced services ... a



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loss of doctors and other professionals, and a massive, economically harmful tax increase, with future tax increases likely....

Colorado would go from one of the least taxed, to one of the highest taxes states in the nation. We would become highly unattractive to businesses.

And are they being optimistic in thinking that it will only cost \$25 billion?

In an offhand comment made during his presentation to the Colorado Forum in January, Colorado's Democratic Governor John Hickenlooper responded to a question about Initiative 20/Amendment 69:

The single payer issue ... I mean, I don't what [it's going to] cost ... it's going to be huge. I can't imagine there's any chance that it will pass.

But I can tell you there are a couple of health care related companies that are looking at moving their headquarters here, and they saw that, that that's going to be on the ballot and ... and, they paused.

It's going to be a tough sell. In late January the issue was debated at a town hall meeting in Frisco, Colorado, where more than 100 people listened for two hours as the pros and cons were hashed over by a panel of proponents and opponents. Corey Hutchins of the *Colorado Independent* was there to cover the event. He wrote that one question came from some who were already covered under Medicare who would see their taxes increase under the proposal. They asked, "What do we get out of it?" Answered Nicholson: "You get the goodwill of knowing that you're paying to help cover everyone else in the state."

Hutchins noted that one of the opponents on the panel, gynecologist Andy Catron, ran the numbers in his own practice and then quizzed Nicholson: "So [you] are going to save me four times the cost of my entire non-physician staff costs?" That is "absurd," said Catron, to think that expected savings from administrative expenses and providers no longer having to deal with insurance companies would finance the expansion of healthcare coverage to everyone in Colorado.

While supporters of the measure have a head start — the measure is already on November's ballot and the pro-ColoradoCare movement is well underway through advertising and print media — the opponents — including the Advancing Colorado, Coloradans for Coloradans, and the state's Republican treasurer, Walker Stapleton — are finally getting their boots on. With just six months to do, it's about time.

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