

WASHINGTON WATCH®

THE MAGIC ELIXIR: INCREMENTALISM

Watch out for the new Washington buzzword: *incrementalism*.

Incrementalism means a gradual progression toward a specified goal. It sounds mild, moderate, non-threatening. But in the health care debate, it means advocates of the politically unpopular ClintonCare will salvage as much of it as they can.

Bill in Trouble

ClintonCare is increasingly rejected by the American people. The most recent *Newsweek* poll says fully 65% of us want Congress to wait until next year. But the President's allies on Capitol Hill know they may never have a better shot. That's why Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-W.V.) says, "We are going to push through health care reform regardless of the views of the American people."

FRC's econometric studies show why Americans are spooked. Working parents with young children will bear the brunt of ClintonCare. Moreover, the similar Gephardt bill would squeeze an average \$4,300 out of the family budgets of 3.5 million working parents. Four million children would be hit.

Incrementalism is designed to ease the nation into government control. The incremental bills under consideration drop job-killing employer mandates, mandatory health alliances and rigid ceilings on health care expenditures—for now. They emphasize popular reforms, like covering pre-existing conditions, voluntary purchasing pools, portability, malpractice litigation reform, and eased anti-trust rules to permit technology sharing by hospitals. But the incremental bills will perpetuate government-controlled health care and chain Americans to employer-provided plans—exactly those things in most need of reform.

Key Terms

Look for these threats in September:

- *Standard Benefit Packages*. They limit choice, force subsidy of abor-

tions, and prod government to ration care.

- *Health Benefits Bureaucracies*: Anything like a "national health board" (whether in the form of a Presidentially appointed board or the National Association of Insurance Commissioners) supplants your ability to decide which treatments you or your loved ones need.

- *Killing Tax Breaks*: Government take-backs of hard-earned, negotiated health plans means workers will pay—either in increased premiums, reduced benefits, or lower wages.

**"INCREMENTALISM" IS A
POLITICAL SHELL GAME."**

- *Community Rating of Premiums*: This device encourages bad behaviors and soaks the young and their growing families.

- *Privacy Assaults*: Standardizing forms and filing procedures sounds efficient, but it's the opening wedge for

federal health bureaucrats to maintain computer records on your family's entire medical history.

The Senate's so-called "mainstream coalition" of liberals and moderates is still meeting. However, their plan, which combines most of the above elements with abortion subsidies for the poor, was staggered by the Congressional Budget Office's \$900 billion, 10-year cost estimate—for the low-income subsidy alone. The group now pledges a "workable" bill by mid-September.

Doctors in the House

Some pro-family conservatives in the House privately complain of GOP leadership pressure to back a bill nicknamed "Rowland-Bilirakis II." RBII seems leaner than the mainstream coalition's, but its basic thrust is the same.

It's a political shell game. Americans recoil at most elements of ClintonCare, so they are constantly repackaged and resold. While House Speaker Tom Foley (D-Wash.) suggests his aim now is a modest bill, the danger remains that the Hill leadership will desperately pass anything in each House and use a conference committee to load it up with controversial provisions. Proponents of ClintonCare are likely to pressure members late in the session with a take-it-or-leave-it vote.

It's not a prescription your doctor would write. It's not medicine you're likely to ask for. But, then, it's not being written for you. Incrementalism is being spooned out as the sure-fire cure for the oldest American disease: Potomac fever. Americans need to let Congress: Let's take the time and do it right.

Call to Action

Call your senators (202/224-3121) and congressman (202/225-3121) and tell them you want health reform that isn't rushed or radical. Use FRC's information hotline (202/783-HOME), updated every Friday, for current information on the health reform debate.

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