

Disability, Long Term Care & Employee Benefit Advisory

The Smoke and Mirrors of Health Care Reform for the Elderly

I'm deeply concerned that the American public, especially our nation's elders, will be relying on our government to provide long term care services they'll never see. They'll only see the "smoke and mirrors" of Health Care Reform.

Our nation's seniors are the most vulnerable segment of the U.S. population; vulnerable both health wise and financially. They're silently discovering the savings they thought would be enough is not enough. They're silently fearful of running out of money with no one to care for them as they become more frail. The silence is about to become deafening.

Regrettably, when Health Care Reform proudly announced New Long Term Care Services, it discouraged many American's from purchasing Long Term Care Insurance.

The New York Times reported on '*Options Expand for Affordable Long-Term Care*' *THE NEW OLD AGE*. The Associated Press announced '*New Health Care Law Has Benefits for Seniors*'. Point being, the casual reader was relieved to hear their government will "take care of them" when they need long term care services. We now know that is not about to happen.

Fortunately our representatives in Washington discovered that Health Care Reforms answer to the problem of Long Term Care, "CLASS", (Community Living Assistance Services and Supports Act) legislation would have been fiscally unsound. \$70 billion in premiums that was expected to be raised for the new "long term care" program would have been counted as "deficit reduction". The long term care benefits it was intended to finance were assumed not to materialize in the first 10 years. However, that money was not accounted for anywhere in the legislation.

The new legislation proposed to "trim" \$463 billion from Medicare. Yet Medicare is currently having trouble balancing its books today. Yet, why does the health care bill tell us Medicare can operate more cheaply going forward without the accompanying reforms?

Our national media gave enormous fanfare to the CLASS ACT when it passed. Unfortunately the media has given the CLASS ACT's demise little attention. Now what?

Projections show that the federal deficit is expected to exceed \$700 billion annually over the next decade. This essentially will double the national and \$900 billion represents interest on previous debt. Would the CFO of any major corporation in the United States allow the company he worked for to end up in this type of financial position? Absolutely not.

Our officials in Congress have been elected to protect the best interests of the American people. "Robbing Peter to pay Paul", and once again printing more currency, has become our government's mantra for the future. Yet the magnitude of the mismanagement of America's purse strings has now reached an unconscionable state.

The United States of America cannot continue to mismanage its financial future. Future Congresses will have to deliver a multitude of future reforms and, regrettably, history tells us THAT will never happen. Proposals for financing health reform were based on more "smoke and mirrors". The "Cadillac" tax is scheduled to begin in 2018.

The health care legislation that has been forced on each and every one of us is known to be fiscally unsound. Where do we go from here? It's too easy to point the finger at the President and his administration. Yet Congress owns the responsibility of passing Health Care Legislation. And THAT is the problem.

The 535 voting members of Congress shared the responsibility equally. If one clear thinking, intelligent, honorable Congressman had the entire responsibility for Health Care Reform, he or she would not have forced a fiscally unsound Health Care Reform Bill down our throats.

Now let's again evaluate how Health Care Reform will work against our senior citizens.

A most recent government report identified that in 2000 there were 1.8 million available nursing home beds. As the year 2010 came to a close, there were 1.7 million nursing home beds; a net 5 percent reduction in available beds. And, there are no new nursing homes being built.

Today there's less than 1.5 million Americans confined to nursing homes. Reportedly 10 percent of these nursing homes are operating under bankruptcy protection. It's well known that most of these facilities are understaffed and many don't have competent help.

Next, let's consider that the Alzheimer's Association tells us the likelihood of developing Alzheimer's after age 85 is 50 percent. By 2030, they tell us that the number of people age 65 and older with Alzheimer's disease is estimated to reach 7.7 million, a 50 percent increase from the 5.2 million age 65 and older currently affected.

The logical question I must ask is "if we cannot take adequate care of 1.5 million people today, how can we possibly take care of 7.7 million people in 2030?" We cannot. More simply put, when you or your spouse or your parent has Alzheimer's, there is no place for them to go. Not to be cruel, but if you ever think for

a moment about taking in an aged parent with Alzheimer's into your home, please think again. Ask any caregiver who's been through it. It's GUARANTEED to destroy any families' peace of mind and harmony.

Why aren't our political leaders actively working on solutions? Where's the outcry? Regrettably our political leaders only align themselves with solvable problems.

America's seniors became more hopeful reading that Health Reform will help them with added Long Term Care services. And we now know THAT is not going to happen. There are no plans in place to help our nation's seniors think they'll receive the comfort and dignity of adequate long term care services. What's worse is the silence shared by all our political leaders. The silence is now deafening.

Now there's newfound hope on the horizon. We have a new President election just starting to evolve. What the Republican and Democratic candidates have to say about our nations seniors need for long term care services? What do they think about the need for 7.7 million Americans with Alzheimer's that need a place to spend the night and be cared for when we can't take care of 1.5 million seniors today?

The national media needs to start reporting that our nation's seniors will have no place to spend the night when they become too old or frail to take care of themselves. Then the upcoming election presents one more opportunity for our political leaders to pay attention to our nation's elderly and their need for long term care services.

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Allan Checkoway, RHU most recently authored "***I'm Disabled . . . Now What?***", created for people whose lives have been impacted by changes in their overall health. Fortunately, our decades of experiences in working with people who have become disabled, sometimes ending up in long term care situations has given us a unique perspective that can benefit our readers. We've taken what we believe to be all the best up to date accessABLE resources from a multitude of resources, putting them all together in one place in "***I'm Disabled . . . Now What?***" and on our new website www.DisabilityandSeniorResources.com. **We are dedicated to helping restore active lifestyles.** Allan is presently the Principal of Disability Services Group, an Employee Benefit Advisory firm. Allan's address is 661 Highland Ave. Suite 103, Needham, MA 02494, tel: 781.400.5055; email: allan@disabilityservices.com