

Obamacare Turns Three, Remains Unpopular

President Obama signed the federal health care bill, The Affordable Care Act (ACA), into law three years ago. Let's look at what has happened over the past three years.

The law remains extremely unpopular with Americans. Since passage, polls have consistently shown at least 50 percent of voters disapprove of the law. A recent Kaiser Family Foundation poll revealed that only 41 percent of respondents actually understood the law while 57 percent did not.

The estimated cost of the law has gone up dramatically. Originally the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimated Obamacare would cost \$940 billion over its first 10 years. This was based on a deception written into the law of 10 years of revenue starting in 2010 but only six years of benefits starting in 2014.

The CBO now estimates the cost to be \$2 trillion over the 10 years starting in 2012. Revenue comes from a \$716 billion cut to Medicare providers and over \$1 trillion in new or expanded taxes. None of the significant Medicare cuts have taken place as scheduled, so the cost overrun of Obamacare has already started. Health insurance companies are warning of 30 to 116 percent increases in premiums and the government's own CBO estimates at least 10 to 13 percent increases in rates.

Even President Obama sees the failure of parts of the law. He has signed the repeal of the long-term care provision, or CLASS entitlement. He also signed the repeal of the \$1.7 billion Small Business Tax Reporting Requirement, which would have forced businesses to report every vendor transaction over \$600 to the IRS.

A bipartisan majority in the U.S. Senate recently voted 79 to 20 to repeal the 2.3 percent tax on medical device makers' revenue (not profits).

The administration has, to date, granted 1,600 waivers to unions and various favored companies allowing them to opt out of Obamacare. For the rest of us, the government has issued 20,000 pages of new regulations for implementation of the law and will force patients to fill out a 21-page application to

receive care under the ACA (that's the EZ form, the long form is 60 pages).

Medicaid expansion and new government-run insurance brokerages, or exchanges, are fundamental provisions of Obamacare. Yet 18 states have opted to not expand Medicaid and 26 states have no plans to set up a state-run exchange.

The proponents of Obamacare cling to a number of inconsequential benefits. Young adults from ages 19 to 25 can now be covered on their parents' health insurance plans. These are the young and healthy, however, and the vast majority don't need health care and don't have much impact on health care costs. Also, when they turn 26 their parents' coverage ends. They will then have to pay more than their fair share for health insurance because of the community rating requirement that forces young, healthier people to pay the same premium as older, sicker individuals.

Proponents also tout the mandated preventive care in the law. Yearly physical examinations and other preventive care are not "free" and for large numbers of patients have no impact on health outcomes nor do they save money.

We are also told the law prohibits insurance companies from denying coverage to patients because of pre-existing conditions. Research shows that only 62,000 people in the United States are in this group with no insurance and a pre-existing health problem. Spending \$2 trillion to provide coverage to this small group is irresponsible and could be handled by shared-risk pools like the one Washington state already has.

The ACA is a 2,700-page, aching complex, monstrous law that will soon control one-sixth of our economy. The country continues to dislike Obamacare and remains puzzled by its mind-numbing complexity.

Everyone agrees health care needs to be reformed. Patients making informed choices in a free market, not top-down government mandates that will only result in higher costs not better care, will put patients in charge of their health care decisions and their own health care dollars.

