

ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

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22-23 August 2009

PERSPECTIVE NUMBER ONE

THE HEALTH CARE DEBATE: THE REAL ISSUES

In the town hall meetings this August and from the halls of Congress, we are hearing not reason, logic or argument; instead, we are hearing emotion, feeling and manifestations of “the American T-shirt and bumper-sticker political culture.” Both those on the left and on the right of the political spectrum are guilty. For example, Nancy Pelosi accused town-hall protesters of carrying swastikas. Rep. Brian Baird of Washington declared that protesters were guilty of “Brownshirt tactics.” Sen. Jim DeMint of South Carolina compared America under Obama to Germany in the 1930s. Rush Limbaugh talked of “similarities between the Democratic Party of today and the Nazi Party of Germany.” Such rhetoric is not only absurd and distasteful, it, in the words of columnist Michael Gerson, undermines “the special reverence we need to feel for that which is hateful. Nazism is not a useful symbol for everything that makes us angry, from Iraq to abortion. It is a historical moment, unique in the ambitions of its cruelty.” Such rhetorical emotion does no good; it only increases the level of hate and unreason in our nation.

What this nation needs now is a reasoned, logical approach to one of the most formidable issues of our day. We must solve some of the issues surrounding the current health care debate. But how do we do this? The Democratic Congress and president have proposed a sweeping piece of legislation (e.g., HR 3200), which will fundamentally change how we do health care in this nation and how we pay for it. Its effects, if passed, are not clear. Many of the details of the legislation are not yet hammered out. But there are several key propositions that we already know. These propositions, in the form of questions, must first of all be dealt with before we can go forward. Most politicians or other leaders are not addressing these propositions. In this *Perspective*, I hope to give focus to these propositions.

- First of all, this proposal, whatever its exact nature, will fundamentally and permanently increase the power and authority of the national government. How big of a government do we want? Insightfully, economist Robert Samuelson writes, “We face an unprecedented collision between Americans’ desire for more government services and their almost equal unwillingness to be taxed. The conflict is obscured and deferred by today’s depressed economy, which has given license to all manner of emergency programs, but its dimensions cannot be doubted.” A new report published by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) makes this point rather powerfully: For the last 50 years, federal spending has averaged about 20% of GDP, federal taxes about 18% of GDP and the budget deficit about 2% of GDP. The CBO estimates that

by 2020 (assuming full employment) federal spending will be 26% of GDP, taxes 19% GDP and the deficit about 7% GDP. Samuelson writes that “What this means is that balancing the budget in 2020 would require a tax increase of almost 50% from the last century’s average. . . In today’s dollars, that would be about \$1.1 trillion, a 44% annual tax increase. Even these figures may be optimistic, because CBO’s projections for defense and ‘nondefense discretionary’ spending may be unrealistically low. This last category covers much of what government does: environmental regulation, aid to education, highway construction, law enforcement, homeland security.” All of this is exacerbated by the aging population and the rapid increase in health spending. For example, in 2000, Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid—the primary programs that provide income and health care for those over 65—totaled nearly 8% of GDP. By 2020, CBO projects that these programs will reach 12% of GDP. In my judgment, as we begin this national discussion on health-care reform, what is also needed is a robust discussion on the role of government in our lives. Samuelson argues: “Everyone favors benefits and opposes burdens (taxes). Republicans want to cut taxes without cutting spending. Democrats want to increase spending without increasing taxes, except on the rich. The differences between the parties are shades of gray. Hardly anyone asks the hard questions of who doesn’t need benefits, which programs are expendable and what taxes might cover remaining deficits.” Furthermore, only in Neverland will Obama’s health care proposal make sense! His health-care proposal will increase federal spending. He contends that he will pay for it with tax increases on the rich or spending cuts on existing programs, but he never talks about reducing the federal deficit. In so many ways, this is the core of our economic crisis. We are avoiding the inevitable—our massive deficit, the enormous projections of federal spending and our propensity to continue to increase the role of the federal government. This is simply unsustainable! Common sense tells us that we cannot continue doing what we are doing! Samuelson concludes that the “CBO notes that elevated deficits would penalize savings, investment and income, while unprecedented tax burdens ‘could slow the growth of the economy, making the [government’s] spending burden harder to bear.’ To such warnings, Americans’ collective response is: Go away.” Amazing—and profoundly sad!

- Second, President Obama has argued that, when it comes to health-care, “the status quo is unsustainable for families, businesses and government.” What exactly does he mean by the “status quo?” For the past 45 years, the US government has followed this paradigm: Expand benefits and talk about controlling costs. According to economist Robert Samuelson, “That is the status quo, and Obama faithfully adheres to it. While denouncing skyrocketing health spending, he would increase it by extending government health insurance to millions of more Americans.” This is the way America is currently framing the debate about health-care: Health care is being promoted as a “right.” Promoting health care for all Americans is a moral/ethical issue. To attempt to control costs is deemed “rationing.” Obviously, a bias toward expanding the federal government’s role in health care is the reality. But what does history teach us? Medicare was created in 1965 to cover those 65 and older. In 1972, Congress added the disabled, now about 15% of beneficiaries of this program. Congress added dialysis for kidney failure, a drug benefit in 2003 and added hospice

care, mammograms, etc. Medicaid originally covered those on welfare. But Congress added children ages 6 to 18 in households under the poverty line. In 1997, Congress further expanded the program by adding the State Children's Health Insurance Program. Furthermore, open-ended reimbursement by government and private insurance has ballooned health spending despite repeated pledges to "contain" costs. Samuelson argues that "Obama would perpetuate this system. . . Obama's program would do little to reduce costs and would increase spending by expanding subsidized insurance." The key focus of true health-care reform should be controlling spending, not expanding the services of government. But we are not having that debate! What Obama is doing is misrepresenting reality: "He simply claims that his plan will do things it won't. What he's offering is an enlarged version of the status quo that, as he says, is already unsustainable." In the short-run (i.e., 4 to 8 years) the federal government simply cannot both insure the uninsured and rein in health care spending. Only in Neverland can you talk about doing this! We are not having the debate in this nation that we should be having. Our children will be the ones who will be crushed by our lack of wisdom and common sense.

See Michael Gerson in the *Washington Post* (14 August 2009); Robert Samuelson in the *Washington Post* (13 July, 27 July and 10 August 2009).

PERSPECTIVE NUMBER TWO

A SHOWDOWN OVER THE DEFINITION OF MARRIAGE

In an April 2009 poll, 31% of respondents over the age of 40 said they supported same-sex marriages. By contrast, 57% under age 40 said they supported it, a 26 point difference. Law professor and ethicist, Robert P. George, poignantly has stated that "We are in the midst of a showdown over the legal definition of marriage." Throughout the nation there have been referenda and various state legislatures are debating the entire matter of same-sex marriage. This is in many ways democracy at work. However, this whole matter is apparently headed to the courts. After California's Proposition 8 was passed, defining marriage in that state as the union of a husband and wife, a federal lawsuit was filed seeking to overturn all traditional marriage laws in this nation. George writes: "[To take this to the courts] would be disastrous. . . They would repeat the error in *Roe v. Wade*: namely, trying to remove a morally charged policy issue from the forums of democratic deliberation and resolve it according to their personal lights." George continues: "Even many supporters of legal abortion now consider *Roe v. Wade* a mistake. Lacking any basis in the text, logic or original understanding of the Constitution, the decision became a symbol of the judicial usurpation of authority vested in the people and their representatives. It sent the message that judges need not be impartial umpires . . . but that judges can impose their policy preferences under the pretext of enforcing constitutional guarantees. By short-circuiting the democratic process, *Roe* inflamed the culture war that has divided our nation and polarized our politics." How is this attempt to resolve this matter of marriage in the courts being defended?

- First of all, the defenders of the same-sex position argue that it is a matter of rights. Many who defend same-sex marriage liken their cause to *Loving v. Virginia*, which invalidated laws against interracial marriages. The obvious corollary is that those who defend a traditional definition of marriage are bigots! But George convincingly shows that the definition of marriage was not at stake in the *Loving* case. Everyone agreed that interracial marriages were marriages. Racists merely were seeking to ban such marriages. Opponents or defenders of these racist laws prohibiting interracial marriages never questioned the definition of marriage as between a man and a woman. Marriage unites a husband and wife at the most fundamental level and is the only means by which children are conceived. This is certainly at the foundation of what Genesis 2:24-25 refers to as the “one-flesh” principle. The sexual act is what legally has been deemed the consummation of marriage, which symbolizes the biological and emotional union of husband and wife, regardless of the matter of procreation. Law recognizes annulment if there is no consummation of the marriage. Law has never recognized sodomy as consummating a marriage.
- Secondly, George writes persuasively that “If marriage is redefined, its connection to organic bodily union—and thus to procreation—will be undermined. It will increasingly be understood as an emotional union for the sake of adult satisfaction that is served by mutually agreeable sexual play. But there is no reason that primarily emotional unions like friendships should be permanent, exclusive, limited to two, or legally regulated at all. Thus, there will remain no principled basis for upholding marital norms like monogamy.” The obvious result of this changing definition of marriage was a 2006 statement entitled “Beyond Same-Sex Marriage,” signed by over 300 lesbian, gay, and allied activists, educators, lawyers and community organizers—including such luminaries as Gloria Steinem, Barbara Ehrenreich and other prominent professors from Yale, Columbia and Georgetown. This statement called for legally recognizing multiple sex partner relationships (they called them “polyamorous”). Their logic is unassailable once the historical definition (rooted in God’s Creation Ordinance) of marriage is overthrown. The weakening of our marriage culture has already had disastrous effects—widespread divorce, cohabitation and out-of-wedlock children. Further, weakened marriages always have disastrous effects on children and those in the poorest, most vulnerable sectors of society. An act of raw judicial power in redefining marriage will solve nothing. It will only exacerbate an already tragic demise of our marriage culture. It is rather difficult to view this as positive. May God help us!

See Robert P. George in the *Wall Street Journal* (3 August 2009) and Adam Nagourney in the *New York Times* (29 April 2009).

PERSPECTIVE NUMBER THREE

DEFENDING FRANCIS COLLINS

On 8 July, President Obama nominated Francis Collins to run the National Institutes of Health (NIH). A geneticist with a stellar resume, Collins is one of the most qualified

doctors in the US to run NIH. No one would doubt that claim. Why then is this nomination controversial? It is simple—Collins is a Christian. He wrote about his conversion in an absolutely wonderful 2006 book entitled *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief*. He argues that “there is no conflict in being a rigorous scientist and a person who believes in a God who takes a personal interest in each one of us.” Critics of the appointment, specifically atheists Sam Harris and Steven Pinker, contend that a religious worldview is incompatible with a rational one. That is ludicrous! It is currently a major commentary on the state of our culture where an appointment like Dr. Collins to lead the NIH would be controversial. He meets every criteria as a scientist for this position. He just happens to believe in God—and some say that disqualifies him! Have we really fallen to such a sad state of affairs as a nation? May God have mercy on us.

See Lisa Miller in *Newsweek* (10-17 August 2009), p. 23.