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Ignore disinformation campaign on health care plan

The U.S. Congress is back in session for a shootout at the OK Corral. President Barack Obama will speak to Congress and the nation tonight. Health care is the principal topic — one which has so far been debated with a great deal of heat and misinformation, such as:

■ Illegal aliens will be covered under the new health care legislation. None of the three bills in the House or two in the Senate allows illegal immigrants to participate. Federal law, however (signed by President Ronald Reagan), requires all emergency rooms to accept and treat anyone who comes in.

The new legislation will offer insurance for almost all legal residents of the United States, removing a huge burden from hospitals to treat those whose only access to



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health care is an ER.

■ Obama's plan will cover abortions. Restrictive language, known as the Capps Amendment, prohibits the use of federal funds for abortions except for rape, incest and life of the mother.

■ Death panels will cut off care for the elderly when they decide limited medical dollars should be spent on younger people. Most physicians now give advice to their patients about end-of-life care, when and how, for example, to access hospices and what medical care and equipment are available and at what cost.

One of the bills in the House would allow Medicare pay-

ment for this service, which is completely voluntary and non-binding on physicians, patients or hospitals. You may read that language in H.R. 3200, Sec. 1233, p. 424. Because of political distortion of this provision, it will probably be dropped.

■ Health care reform is a "socialized" takeover of America's private health care system. About 100 million Americans, a third of our population, already have "socialized" medicine. Those of us who are lucky enough to have Medicare often wish that other Americans could have this excellent, single-payer, federal program, but the new legislation does not allow that. It will, however, secure and strengthen Medicare. Also included in this number is a larger bloc of Americans who have Medicaid, a joint federal

and state program, as well as our VA and military hospitals.

As for the remaining 200 million Americans, private insurance companies will continue to provide health insurance, and they may gain an extra 30 to 40 million policyholders from those who currently have no health insurance. Insurance will be portable and not denied for pre-existing conditions.

There will be no government "rationing" of health services, but any expanded insurance coverage, whether Democratic or Republican (the GOP plan would use tax credits), will especially increase the demand for primary care.

For those who like to say that anything the government does is less efficient than the private sector, it is worth noting that administra-

tive costs for Medicare run from 2 to 3 percent while private health insurance companies run from 10 to 20 percent. This is not necessarily because the bureaucrats who work for the private companies are less able and dedicated than those who work for the government, but because the private companies spend so much time and money trying to disqualify applicants and policyholders who have a higher likelihood of claims.

One of the major assets of the new legislation will be a health care exchange, which will offer those not covered by group policies an opportunity to choose from a wide range of plans providing the benefits of large-group membership. One feature, a "public option," has become such a political target that the legislation would be better off without it. Expect

the Senate to drop it.

The efforts of President Obama and congressional Democrats to gain substantial bipartisan support now appear to be unsuccessful, in large part because the opposition have chosen this legislation as a means of attacking the president politically. Senator Jim DeMint of South Carolina declared, "If we're able to stop Obama on this, it will be his Waterloo."

Despite the disinformation campaign, legislative skill and a congressional and presidential guarantee that there will be no deficit spending could bring victory for this health care reform, but the contest will be close.

■
David Bowen is a former congressman who now is a writer and consultant living in Jackson.