

From the governor, via *Politico*:

'A trillion here, a trillion there'

By Governor Bobby Jindal

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Things in Louisiana are looking up. We are announcing major economic development wins and private capital investment and reducing government spending in order to live within our means. We just completed a grueling legislative session where we all had to work together, Democrats and Republicans, to find a way to do more with less.

We trimmed government spending, protected vital services and refused to raise taxes. (As is the case in any legislative body, some gave it a try). I can't say our legislative session was much fun, but it was necessary, and it is the American way. Or, at least we thought it was.

In the meantime, I've been catching up on the news in Washington. I wish I had not.

Let's review: the Troubled Asset Relief Program, bailouts for American International Group and others, CEOs of bankrupt businesses that receive billions of tax dollars running off with millions in bonuses, a \$ 3.5 trillion budget, a nearly trillion-dollar stimulus that has not stimulated, unemployment continuing to climb, government in the banking business, and of course, the U.S. government now making cars.

We have record deficits, which are unprecedented in recorded world history. We have debt that is even causing our creditors in the Middle East and China to be worried. Oops, I almost forgot the new national energy tax that just passed the House. If it isn't bad enough that you may have lost your job and been fighting off foreclosure, the government now wants to make sure you, and every other American, pay more in energy costs so former Vice President Al Gore can be happy. This here is a fine pot of gumbo.

I honestly do not know one single individual who is happy with this situation. Not one. Not a Republican, a Democrat or an independent. These actions are all problematic individually, but taken as a whole, they are devastating. So against that backdrop, we enter the health care reform debate.

I know a little something about health care policy, and I can tell you exactly the game that is currently afoot. If the House Democrats' plan were to become law, the president's statement that if you like your health care now, you can keep it will not be true. This is not an opinion, this is a fact.

Businesses will, in effect, be forced to send employees into the Democrats' government-run health care. It's really not something to argue about, it is a fact. A private health insurance system, otherwise known as what we have today, will not be able to compete with a taxpayer-subsidized government plan, and businesses faced with growing health care costs will opt to either lay off more workers or send employees into the government plan. One independent study

already suggested that up to 119 million Americans will end up leaving their private plans for the public

plan. To think otherwise requires one to suspend disbelief.

The plan the House Democrats are developing is a radical restructuring of health care in America. You may like it, you may not, but it is just that; there is no denying or sugarcoating it.

Let me be clear about something: I have no problem conceding that Speaker Nancy Pelosi, with whom I served in Congress, means well, even though I realize some Republicans get mad when I say that. But the simple fact is that House Democrats are determined to try to tax and spend our way back to prosperity. The past six months have made that clear.

Our federal government is currently just flinging stuff against the wall, in trillion-dollar chunks, to see what sticks. Congress's own budget office has said the current federal budget is on an unsustainable path and that the Democrats' health plan does not reduce long-term health costs facing the government.

The House Democrats' plan would have the following consequences:

- * □ Most Americans would end up, over time, with government-run health care.
- * □ The only folks who would be able to stave this off are the wealthy.
- * □ The quality of our health care would diminish.
- * □ Someone other than patients and doctors would make decisions on the treatments and medicines we can have.
- * □ The taxes on the rich, otherwise known as employers, would further damage the economy and potentially drive up unemployment at a time we can least afford it.

If you like those outcomes, then by all means, support the House Democrats' health care plan.

The shame of it all is that there really is an emerging consensus among the populace that we need reform that reduces costs, improves outcomes and puts patients in control.

Imagine if the president proposed a reform package that made health insurance portable, ended frivolous lawsuits, allowed for pooling, required insurance companies to cover the sick, paid based on outcomes and not activity, used refundable tax credits to increase affordability and incentivized rather than penalized small businesses to provide coverage. Republicans would support those reforms, and the policy would benefit the entire country. True, it wouldn't be the radical and exciting restructuring that Pelosi is pushing, but it would begin to move us toward common-sense, bottom-up solutions. Solutions! There's an idea.

But wait, as the late Billy Mays would say, there's more. Social Security and Medicare, our two biggest entitlement programs in this country, are perpetually underfunded and are always in

danger of going bankrupt. Is it even remotely possible that we as a country are now considering adding an entire new entitlement program to our repertoire?

Would the last sane person in Washington please turn out the lights when you leave?