



Health Care

You Can't Have Your Cake and Eat It Too

As I continue to study the current health care debate, I have come to the conclusion that Americans are a capricious lot who, as my parents used to say, *want their cake and eat it too*. And nothing could be more revealing than during the current health care debate. For example, according to a CBS pole, 62% of the respondents (1) believe the government should exert more control over the health care system and 55% believe that the federal government should guarantee health insurance for all Americans (2). But yet the majority of those poled don't believe this increased responsibility should lead to a government run system(3). Am I missing something here? How does any business entity, government or private, exert control over the workings of a system and guarantee a product (in this case, health insurance) without being involved in the running of that system? There is no way a business will invest its resources into a system while at the same time abrogate its authority. Could you imagine the disaster and chaos that would occur if the government relinquished its control over the airline industry!

For most Americans, health care reform means lowering their own health care costs while also providing coverage for the uninsured (8). And despite what I have heard on number of radio and television news programs, a number of pollsters show that the public as a whole would like to see a public, or government administered, health insurance plan with the majority of those poled wanting funding and oversight from the government ***but without the government administering it*** (2, 3, 4, 6, 7). They would prefer an outside entity to run the program. So let me get this straight. Americans want the government to fund the plan but they want to cut costs by hiring an outside agency to administer it. I'm lost on this one. Someone needs to explain to me how hiring an outside source to administer this health care plan is suppose to save us money!

Then there is the question of mandates. Some reform proposals would require all individuals to have health insurance coverage. I like this idea and there seems to be a good deal of public support for such an individual mandate if no mention is made of subsidies for people who cannot afford insurance (4, 9). Now if a mandate were to include such subsidies, surprisingly support increases. Wow! Good for us. We are willing to reach into our pockets and help subsidize those that can't afford to buy insurance providing, of course, that those pockets are our *employers* pockets and not ours. In fact 61 to 64% of those polled feel that employers should offer health insurance and if they don't, they should be required to pay a penalty.

But Americans are generous. In fact to help pay for this reform 58 to 68% of Americans don't mind having taxes raised ... on people with higher incomes (in some polls, those earning more than \$250,000 a year) (7, 9,10); and 30% support taxing all employer-provided health insurance benefits (3).

Although more than three fourths of Americans support a major change in the health care system (2) and more than half favor enactment of a national health insurance program (11), only 32% support increasing the deficit to help pay for health care reform (12). Yep, Americans want their cake and eat it too!

References:

1. CBS News poll July 9-12, 2009
2. CBS News–New York Times polls July 24–28, 2009
3. Quinnipiac University (QU) poll June 23–29, 2009
4. ABC News–Washington Post polls June 18-21, 2009
5. Gallup polls July 24–25, 2009
6. Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) polls July 7-14
7. Pew Research Center for the People and the Press polls July 22–26, 2009
8. Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) polls February 3–12, 2009 July 7–14, 2009
9. Gallup–USA Today poll July 10–12, 2009
10. Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) poll June 1-8, 2009
11. Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH)–Robert Wood Johnson Foundation poll June 17–21, 2009
12. KFF–HSPH poll December 4–14, 2008

Note : All the above polls are available from the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research (http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/tag/topics_at_a_glance.html)