

# The Health Care Hindenburg Has Landed

AP / Charles Dharapak

Rep. Dennis Kucinich, D-Ohio, accompanies President Barack Obama as they arrive at Cleveland-Hopkins International Airport before the congressman decided to switch his vote and help pass a health care reform bill he had staunchly opposed.

By Chris Hedges <[http://www.truthdig.com/chris\\_hedges](http://www.truthdig.com/chris_hedges)>

Rep. Dennis Kucinich's decision to vote "yes" in Sunday's House action on the health care bill, although he had sworn to oppose the legislation unless there was a public option, is a perfect example of why I would never be a politician. I respect Kucinich. As politicians go, he is about as good as they get, but he is still a politician. He has to run for office. He has to raise money. He has to placate the Democratic machine or risk retaliation and defeat. And so he signed on to a bill that will do nothing to ameliorate the suffering of many Americans, will force tens of millions of people to fork over a lot of money for a defective product and, in the end, will add to the ranks of our uninsured.

The claims made by the proponents of the bill are the usual deceptive corporate advertising. The bill will not expand coverage to 30 million uninsured, especially since government subsidies will not take effect until 2014. Families who cannot pay the high premiums, deductibles and co-payments, estimated to be between 15 and 18 percent of most family incomes, will have to default, increasing the number of uninsured. Insurance companies can unilaterally raise prices without ceilings or caps and monopolize local markets to shut out competitors. The \$1.055 trillion spent over the next decade will add new layers of bureaucratic red tape to what is an unmanageable and ultimately unsustainable system.

The mendacity of the Democratic leadership in the face of this reality is staggering. Howard Dean, who is a doctor, said recently: "This is a vote about one thing: Are you for the insurance companies or are you for the American people?" Here is a man who once championed

the public option and now has sold his soul. What is the point in supporting him or any of the other Democrats? How much more craven can they get?

Take a look at the health care debacle in Massachusetts, a model for what we will get nationwide. One in six people there who have the mandated insurance say they cannot afford care, and tens of thousands of people have been evicted from the state program because of budget cuts. The 45,000 Americans who die each year because they cannot afford coverage will not be saved under the federal legislation. Half of all personal bankruptcies will still be caused by an inability to pay astronomical medical bills. The only good news is that health care stocks and bonuses for the heads of these corporations are shooting upward. Chalk this up as yet another victory for our feudal overlords and a defeat for the serfs.

The U.S. spends twice as much as other industrialized nations on health care—\$7,129 per capita—although 45.7 million Americans remain without health coverage and millions more are inadequately covered, meaning that if they get seriously ill they are not covered. Fourteen thousand Americans a day are now losing their health coverage. A report in the journal *Health Affairs* estimates that, if the system is left unchanged, one of every five dollars spent by Americans in 2017 will go to health coverage. Private insurance bureaucracy and paperwork consume 31 cents of every health care dollar. Streamlining payment through a single nonprofit payer would save more than \$400 billion per year, enough, Physicians for a National Health Plan points out, to provide comprehensive, high-quality coverage for all Americans. Check out [www.healthcare-now.org](http://www.healthcare-now.org) <<http://www.healthcare-now.org/>> . It has some of the best analysis.

This bill is not about fiscal responsibility or the common good. The bill is about increasing corporate profit at taxpayer expense. It is the health care industry's version of the Wall Street bailout. It lavishes hundreds of billions in government subsidies on insurance and drug companies. The some 3,000 health care lobbyists in Washington, whose dirty little hands are all over the bill, have once more betrayed the American people for money. The bill is another example of why change will never come from within the Democratic

Party. The party is owned and managed by corporations. The five largest private health insurers and their trade group, America's Health Insurance Plans, spent more than \$6 million on lobbying in the first quarter of 2009. Pfizer, the world's biggest drug maker, spent more than \$9 million during the last quarter of 2008 and the first three months of 2009. The Washington Post reported that up to 30 members of Congress from both parties who hold key committee memberships have major investments in health care companies totaling between \$11 million and \$27 million. President Barack Obama's director of health care policy, who will not discuss single payer as an option, has served on the boards of several health care corporations. And as salaries for most Americans have stagnated or declined during the past decade, health insurance profits have risen by 480 percent.

Obama and the congressional leadership have consciously shut out advocates of single payer from the debate. The press, including papers such as The New York Times, treats single payer as a fringe movement. The television networks rarely mention it. And yet between 45 and 60 percent of doctors favor single payer. Between 40 and 62 percent of the American people, including 80 percent of registered Democrats, want universal, single-payer not-for-profit health care for all Americans. The ability of the corporations to discredit and silence voices that represent at least half of the population is another sad testament to the power of our corporate state to frame all discussions.

Change will come only by building movements that stand in fierce and uncompromising opposition to the Democrats and the Republicans. If they can herd Kucinich and John Conyers, the sponsors of House Resolution 676, a bill that would create a publicly funded National Health Program by eliminating private health insurers, onto the House floor to vote for this corporate theft, what is the point in pretending there is any room left for us in the party? And why should we waste our time with gutless liberal groups such as Moveon.org, which felt the need to collect more than \$1 million to pressure House Democrats who had voted "no" on the original bill to recant? What was this purportedly anti-war group doing anyway serving as an obsequious recruiting arm of the Obama election campaign? The longer we tie ourselves to the Democrats and these

bankrupt liberal organizations the more ridiculous and impotent we appear.

"I'm ready to listen to the White House, if the White House is ready to listen to the concerns about putting a public option in this bill," the old Kucinich said on the "Democracy Now!" radio and television program before he flipped. "I mean, they can do that. You know, they're still cutting last-minute deals. Put the public option back in. Make it a robust public option. Give the people a chance to really negotiate rates with the insurance companies ... from the standpoint of having a public option. But don't just tell the people that you're going to call this health care reform, when you're giving insurance companies an even more powerful monopoly status in our economy."