“The affordability you need, the quality you deserve, delivered by the doctors you trust”

By Grace-Marie Turner

Washington is too bureaucratic and remote to manage something as personal as healthcare. It essential to devolve power and control over decisions through the states to doctors and patients. And we can do this in an energized market that provides people with many more choices of affordable health care and coverage and that better protects the most vulnerable.

But it is a Sisyphean task to get policymakers to engage around ideas based upon choice and competition.

A recent column in *The Washington Post* summarizes the problem: “The GOP is playing catch-up on health care. It needs some fresh ideas.” Political analyst Henry Olsen writes about the growing number of states that are going in the opposite direction and expanding government programs by taking Washington’s bribe to dramatically expand Medicaid, most recently in North Carolina.

But Olsen makes a bigger political point. He claims that “Large majorities of voters nationwide, including most swing voters, support extensive public subsidies for health care.” He implies we need to give up on real reform and focus on “reforming subsidies and how health-care providers are regulated.”

This is not “fresh conservative thinking on health care.”

A subsequent op-ed in *The Wall Street Journal* by Judge Glock, director of research for the Manhattan Institute, shows how important it is not to give up. We must continue to explain that health policy must respect individual rights and control.

“Americans like limited government,” Glock writes. “For decades, Gallup has asked the public if government is trying to do too many things that should be left to individuals and businesses. Most Americans have agreed. Despite a few short-term dips around economic crises, the number preferring a smaller government over a larger one usually ranges from 5 to 28 percentage points.”

Glock acknowledges an inherent contradiction.

“Many political scientists note that Americans’ preference for small government appears contradictory, given that they also claim to like a host of particular government programs. In other words, they are ‘ideologically conservative and operationally liberal.’”

But he writes they want politicians “to balance popular demands for specific programs against the costs to the public.”

In other words, they expect political leaders to assess whether the costs are worth it. "When pollsters describe the taxes that would be required to pay for any particular program, support for it drops," Glock writes.

So here we are with health care in America.

Medicare, Medicaid, and Obamacare are the key legislative tools that enable Washington to rule over nearly every aspect of our health sector. Government is now focused on solving the problems it created with more and more hidden spending and by adding volumes more regulation to further control the health care economy.

So the next chapter in health reform must be to devolve power away from Washington. We need to move power, money, and control back to doctors and patients, through the states that have decades of experience in overseeing their health insurance and healthcare delivery markets.

As pollster Frank Luntz told me from his years of research on public opinion on health care, these policies must give the American people "The choice and control you want, the affordability you need, the quality you deserve, delivered by the doctors you trust."

A key goal of our Founding Fathers was to diffuse power among different branches and levels of government to decentralize power. But now, more and more power, money, and therefore control over healthcare have been centralized in Washington.

But health care is too personal and complex for that kind of centralized decision making.

We need to get Washington out of the business of micromanaging our health care. Instead, **we should redirect resources to the states and give them more flexibility** to approve plans that better meet the needs of their citizens.

This will lead to more flexible, affordable health care and coverage and better, more focused assistance to those who most need help.

We have a plan to do that: Health Care Choices 20/20 – a new vision for patient-centered health care—a plan built around protection of life.

The Constitution requires us to change our approach to health care—not just for the sake of health care, but for the sake of preserving individual liberty.

Liberty-loving political leaders can begin the work to devolve power to the people, through the states, to create a health sector that responds to their needs for secure, affordable health coverage with access to the doctors and hospitals they want providing the quality care they need.

We—and many of our allied organizations with a plethora of market-based plans—are eager to help.

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