



## Gag me with a spoon — full of health care reform

By Jim Waters

The beginning of the end of our health care freedom is underway in Washington.

Powerful left-winger, Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont., accused Louisville-based Humana Inc. of using [scare tactics](#) in a letter the company mailed to seniors warning them they might lose popular Medicare benefits if the senator's health care plan passes. The letter urged the elderly to contact their legislators.

What's wrong with that? Contacting legislators – especially when major policy changes are planned – is as American as apple pie and baseball.

But that's not the senator's America. If people disagree with his creative version of reality, he wants to censor them. Truth cannot interfere with his attempt to ram government-backed health care through Congress and down our throats.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services ordered Humana to stop using the letter — including removing it from its Web site. The obscure agency also started “investigating” Humana.

Humana, which employs more than 10,000 in Kentucky and 28,000 nationwide, faces a maximum penalty that includes throwing the insurer out of the Medicare Advantage program, which covers 1.4 million elderly and generates half Humana's revenue.

The question for Baucus: “What happened to economic stimulus and making sure all Americans have adequate coverage?”

Baucus and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services could not stop Sen. Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., Senate minority leader, from calling the halt to the letter writing what it really is: “[a gag order](#).”

And they couldn't gag the nation's chief budget expert, who said the Baucus health care plan would indeed “reduce the extra benefits that would be made available to beneficiaries through Medicare Advantage plans.”

That comes not from some right-wing radio shock jock but from [Douglas Elmendorf](#), appointed in January by the Democratic leadership in Congress to lead the Congressional Budget Office.

National Public Radio — again no right-wing mouthpiece by any stretch — reported: “As often as Democrats, President Obama included, say an overhaul won't crimp the insurance that people like, *there's no denying that folks enrolled in Medicare Advantage would see reductions* under the proposals getting traction.”

Experts estimate the Baucus health care plan would result in a [\\$125-billion cut](#) from Advantage, which offers better care, numerous options and more services to beneficiaries.

Humana's opponents are government interventionists desperate to win the information war and complete their conquest for control of the health care sector — 15 percent of our economy. The problem for them: They cannot find a way to pay for the plan.

So these spread-the-wealth proponents have decided to rob from Peter (Medicare Advantage) to pay Paul (the uninsured) even if an increasing number of taxpayers, especially the elderly, oppose the idea.

This agency tried to cover their assault on Humana's First Amendment rights to free speech by arguing that seniors may think the firm's memo was official government communication. Nonsense. It's clearly marked "HUMANA" in big bold letters at the top, indicating it's directly from the company.

What's really happening is these deficit spenders want to get their hands on the additional 14 percent paid to private providers in the Medicare Advantage program. In return for these higher payments, providers offer services not covered in the traditional Medicare programs, including eye care and hearing aids. Medicare Advantage also focuses on preventive care and results in elderly patients spending fewer days in the hospital while allowing them more than 30 different choices for care.

Scary? I'll show you scary: The same big-government types swearing up and down the halls of each hospital that any government health care plan would have to compete with the private sector are the same folks *censoring* a privately owned company from offering its side of the story *to their customers*?

This is just the beginning.

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