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The cost of health care, if we have it, if we don't

Michael Sean Winters | Aug. 4, 2009 NCR Today

The role of end-of-life care has burst into the debate about health care reform. Among other thoughtful voices, Randall Terry on his radio program, has raised the specter of pressure being brought to bear on elderly people to end their lives to save the inheritance for the children. Of course, Mr. Terry insinuated himself in the most public, least dignified end-of-life situation in modern memory, the Terry Schiavo case which remains the most obvious example of how not to address these issues. But, hey, if you can exploit a bit of fear to kill health care reform, why not?

As Congress holds its town meetings during the August recess they need to remember that those who shout the loudest are not necessarily the same people most worth listening to. Already, organized groups have disrupted town hall meetings in several congressional districts, not with the aim of engaging debate but with the clear purpose of foreclosing any debate. We have enough foreclosures in America today.

This is also a time for a refresher course in the nature of representative government. If politicians are simply going to follow the polls, they deserve the contempt that will be heaped upon them. Members of Congress are elected to do what they think is right, not to act as a plebiscitory vehicle for a public that can barely understand the complicated issues, and are easily swayed, even in polls, by how the question is framed.

If Democrats do not pass health care reform, they will be running next year as a failed Congress. That is their incentive. Republicans, determined to be the ?party of No? are going to try and make Democrats pay for their vote. Members of Congress should be willing to pay the price.

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