

As Congress continues to debate a possible Washington takeover of our nation's health care system, one looming question is whether or not this plan will cover uninsured illegal immigrants. Although both the Administration and Congressional Democrats claim that the 1,018-page House government-run health care bill will not provide benefits to illegal aliens, the truth of the matter is that the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service has found that a series of loopholes in the legislation would indeed provide health care coverage to illegals.

Under the legislation, individuals with an income of less than 400 percent of the federal poverty level would be eligible for affordability credits toward their required purchase of health insurance. When individuals have health insurance but cannot afford the cost sharing, such as the deductible and copayments, the bill also provides government subsidies.

While the legislation expressly prohibits illegal aliens from receiving affordability credits, the bill does not include a specific requirement that a person prove his or her citizenship in order to obtain such credits, which means that illegal aliens could obtain coverage.

In fact, in 2007 there were an estimated 6.6 million illegal immigrants without health insurance who had incomes 400 percent below the federal poverty level. If all uninsured illegal immigrants with incomes below 400 percent of poverty received the new affordability credits, the estimated cost to the federal government would be up to \$30.5 billion annually.

To close this loophole, a Republican amendment was offered to require the same verification mechanisms as already exist for other federal benefits programs to prevent illegals from receiving affordability credits. Unfortunately, this amendment was defeated by the House Ways and Means Committee along party lines.

In addition to this egregious loophole, another provision in the government-run health care bill states that if one member of a family is afforded coverage all members would have coverage. This means that if a child of illegal aliens is born in the United States, then the entire family becomes eligible for coverage. Again, a Republican amendment was offered to close this loophole by requiring identity verification for those claiming U.S. birth, but it was defeated by the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

Rather than create another incentive that drives illegals to the United States, Congress should be closing loopholes in our government programs that provide access to benefits. American taxpayers already spend an estimated \$4.3 billion each year to provide health care to illegal immigrants, primarily through emergency room visits and free clinics, and we should not provide additional taxpayer-subsidized coverage to those that have recklessly disregarded our nation's immigration laws. At a time when our national debt continues to skyrocket and millions of Americans are unemployed, Congress must end this abuse of taxpayer dollars and place the needs and interests of citizens above those who are unlawfully present in our country.

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