



Written by [Steven J. DuBord](#) on July 31, 2009

Health Reform & Illegal Immigration

"Health care reform could end up bailing out employers who hire illegal immigrants and skimp on their health benefits," Fox News reported on July 30.

Despite House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's assurance during a July 26 interview that "illegal immigrants are not covered by this plan," immigration analysts say that current proposals don't provide any mechanism to prevent illegals from participating. It is possible that taxpayers could be stuck supporting illegal immigrants who join the public insurance plan because their employer doesn't provide coverage.



Preliminary data from the Federation for American Immigration Reform indicates that illegal immigrants already account for \$10.7 billion in state and federal healthcare spending. Jack Martin, a FAIR special projects director, stated that this amount would go up unless reform legislation is modified. "The bill in its current form is in effect going to be tempting to illegal immigrants who are not yet receiving medical benefits," Martin said. "We would expect that the cost would increase."

A recent study by FAIR determined that healthcare reform would not have any real barriers against illegal immigrants enrolling in the taxpayer-funded public option, and that there would be no verification system to stop illegals from receiving credits to purchase private plans. What this boils down to is that taxpayers would end up paying for employers who hire illegal immigrants and then skimp on providing benefits.

The Center for Immigration Studies has put the number of illegal immigrants who do not have health insurance at 7.25 million. More than half of these — about four million — are probably employed, said Steven Camarota, a research director with the center. Camarota believes that it could cost anywhere from \$8 billion to \$12 billion annually to provide these illegal immigrants with insurance coverage, but there are many variables in the equation.

For one thing, Camarota's estimate doesn't include covering children. It also assumes all four million had no benefits from their employers to begin with, which doesn't take into account that some would have already received emergency room treatment at the public's expense. Some of the four million would likely be too afraid of being caught to enroll in an insurance plan, and some would actually be paying taxes, so they wouldn't be freeloading.

Nonetheless, Camarota maintains that, at the very least, the healthcare plans now being proposed on Capitol Hill would almost certainly make things worse by allowing employers to force taxpayers to foot the bill for their illegal employees' healthcare. "Illegal immigration kind of looms as the 800-pound gorilla," Camarota said. "The impact is really big." This is because the reform proposals fail to admit there is a problem. "The legislation says illegal immigrants are not supposed to get this plan, but it also guts any of the mechanisms that would leave them out — typical Washington kind of thing."



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It is worth pointing out that while illegal immigrants are not supposed to be covered by President Barack Obama's reform proposals, he always includes them when stating how many millions of "Americans" are uninsured. If the Center for Immigration Studies is correct, when the president talks about the 40-some million uninsured Americans he wants to cover, he is over-inflating the number by at least 7.25 million who are illegal immigrants. Then again, given Obama's support for providing illegal immigrants with a path to citizenship, perhaps he means exactly what he says.



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