New American

A Town Hall Meeting Stacked to the Left

"Open borders, open hearts show humanity, Workers from all walks of life enrich democracy," the Raging Grannies, a group of older women who protest everything from war to immigration laws, sang to the tune of "Jingle Bells." I knew right then that this 1,200 person filled-to-capacity town-hall meeting I was attending on August 18 in Eugene, Oregon, was stacked in favor of the liberal-left.

As I made my way between two burly men to snatch the only empty seat near the front, I noticed that everyone around me was carrying a "Reform Immigration FOR America" sign. The "Reform Immigration FOR America" campaign, which was launched by La Raza and other groups, occupied the entire first two rows of the auditorium. Behind them, Planned Parenthood representatives occupied two more rows.

As if that wasn't enough, on the seat of every chair was an office-sized sheet of paper from the congressman's office listing "Healthcare Reform Myths." It looked eerily similar to the flier on "Debunking Canadian Healthcare Myths" handed out before the event by a woman who also distributed "Healthcare for America Now" signs. Hmm. Such "myths" included "Canada's Health Care System is a Cumbersome Bureaucracy" and, from the Congressman's literature, "The bill would force people off private insurance and into the public option". How do these constitute myths when even the president of the Canadian Medical Association says the system is "imploding," and numerous critics have noted that insurance companies won't be able to compete with the government-subsidized "public option" that would eventually force everyone into a single-payer system?

But, before I had too long to wonder if I should have brought a helmet and bullet-proof vest, in walked the master of ceremonies and star performer himself, Congressman Peter DeFazio, to thunderous applause. The circus was beginning.

"First of all this is H.R. 3200.... I have read it, to get that out of the way" the congressman joked holding up a dog-eared copy of the bill, which, at more than 1,000 pages, looked like an expanded version of *War and Peace*. Mr. DeFazio launched into the task at hand, denouncing outrageous abuses in the current health care system and citing tragic cases of people who have been devastated by high costs or the inability to get desperately needed medical care. While there are gross miscarriages of justice and numerous problems within the current healthcare system, these woud only be dizzyingly magnified in a government-run system. Letting government off the hook for its primary role in these fiascos in the current system, DeFazio held up insurance companies as bogeymen, and stated plainly that "private

insurance will double in the next 10 years." He didn't explain that prices for everything will rise in the next 10 years due to inflation from printing fiat money, nor, how many insurance companies are in bed with the government to get special privileges in the new health bill. Heathcare costs have indeed been going up even faster than prices in general, thanks principally to federal mandates and regulations, and the healthcare cost curve would be certain to get much steeper if H.R. 3200 — or any of its various alternates — is enacted.

Deceptions and half-truths usually fill the bag of tricks at these clown halls … at least until the questions are asked.

"My question," asked the first randomly selected questioner, "is how are we going to survive as a country economically if we're going to just take care of everybody with the government doing it? Medicaire is bankrupting this country…. I keep seeing these ads on the television saying 'if you need a wheelchair, you don't have to pay a dollar for it, Medicare will pay 100 percent.' Well, how long can we keep doing that?" . Applause erupted throughout the room. Apparently there was a conservative contingent after all, and someone who had the guts to ask, despite the boos and hissing, the million-dollar, or perhaps we should say trillion-dollar, question. How can we pay for this?

Then, DeFazio did something no politician is supposed to do. He answered that question. In doing so, he let the rabbit out of the hat, "There's a large group of young people who feel fairly invulnerable … and they don't have insurance. They're going to have to have insurance…. We're going to get a lot of people who are very low risk." Aha! People who are forced to pay for government health care insurance + don't use that insurance = money that can be used to pay everyone else's health care costs. In essence, it's a youth tax. But how long can we expect our youth, who are already heavily taxed for a crumbling Social Security system that they will never be able to draw from, to also carry the unfair burden of an increasingly expensive government-run healthcare system too?

Now his whole bag of tricks was on the floor. "The other thing is that of course, today, we don't deny anybody in America in the emergency critical care if you are seriously ill, but guess what, it's not free. So everyone who has insurance is paying for that unreimbursed care … so there are gains and losses that would make the public option affordable," "the Faz," as his followers lovingly call him, continued. The only difference between someone who would have a government health plan under the new bill and rack up emergency bills, and those who don't have that plan now, is that in the former scenario taxpayers would bear the burden for mandatory check-ups and preventative care as well as emergency room visits. In the latter scenario healthcare policy holders pick up the tab for just the emergency care. There would be no transfer of costs, just additions. And the burden would be put on the taxpayer. Poor DeFazio, using all those words to answer the question when just one would have sufficed, "taxes."

"Um I was wondering what the constitutional basis for this piece of legislature was?" asked the next randomly selected participant. It just wasn't DeFazio's day.

"Uh well, the uh, it's under the clause in the Constitution that justifies a whole lot of things the government does," stammered the befuddled congressman. "Some of these things were not particularly anticipated when the Constitution was written." Apparently everyone had perfectly good health back in 1776.

The tour de force came after the head of Planned Parenthood in Oregon was randomly picked to ask a question, and two questions later a man asked if, since Planned Parenthood helped fund his campaigns, DeFazio felt particularly obliged to vote for their causes. Every mouth in the room dropped, the head of

Planned Parenthood stiffened like a board, and a wave of shock could be felt through the whole auditorium as they stared at the bold pro-lifer. DeFazio replied that he'd never received campaign money from them. "Contributions are not allowed from nonprofit care providers," he explained. (In 2005 Planned Parenthood donated three times what DeFazio himself contributed to his campaign. Investigation, anyone?)

By the end of the meeting it was obvious DeFazio's mind on healthcare had not changed, but many in the audience were beginning to see through his sleight of hand.

Photo of Rep.Peter DeFazio: www.defazio.house.gov

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