

Health care reform, Dakota-style

Our Say

I'm fond of the bumper sticker "Don't Complain About Farmers With Your Mouth Full."

I thought of that sticker when I read that at a recent town hall meeting on health care, someone who said he was against government-run health care had his kids enrolled in a federal insurance program for children.

I just hope the guy wasn't a farmer.

I haven't heard of farmers opposing government health care reform. It has to be pretty tough to argue that government screws everything up if you are a corn, soybean, wheat or sugarbeet producer. Sure, there are glitches in farm programs sometimes. But that's what associations are paid to fix.

Hypocritical?

I wonder how many people who oppose health care because they are anti-government went to college on the GI Bill, bought a home with a Federal Housing Administration loan, received Medicare or Medicaid, got a Conservation Reserve Program check, used the 1031 tax exchange to buy farmland, fished Lake Oahe or visited Mt. Rushmore?

About the only farmers I know who can say "keep government out of my life" with a straight face are dry edible



beangrowers.

Year after year, these North Dakota producers tell their congressional delegation that they don't want loan rates, deficiency payments or anything else Congress can dream up to "help" them. They trust the future of their crop to the market.

Beef, dairy and hog producers probably have most right to complain about government intrusion in their lives. Ethanol subsidies are blamed

for helping turn their businesses upside down. But government helped keep corn prices low and stable for the 30 previous years.

Co-op idea

Sen. Kent Conrad's idea to form health insurance co-ops rather than a single government plan might be worth looking into.

Co-ops work. They brought electrical, telephone and Internet service to the

Dakotas when private firms weren't interested. They trade grain and sell fuel, seed and fertilizer successfully today. There are even two health care cooperatives operating successfully today in the Twin Cities and Seattle.

Conrad, D.-N.D., would create 50 co-operatives, one for each state. Small states could merge with other states to create bigger pools of members. The co-ops would be run by directors elected by members, would be funded by members' premiums, and would negotiate with doctors, clinics and hospitals for the best prices. In theory, co-ops would be able to offer health insurance for individuals, the self-employed and small businesses — who now must pay some of the highest rates for commercial insurance — at a lower cost, because they would create larger risk pools. It may take \$3 billion to \$4 billion in seed money from the federal government to get the cooperatives up and running.

If there aren't enough votes in Congress to pass the government option, co-ops might be just what the doctor ordered.



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