

Last week on Christmas Eve, after many backroom deals were made, the Senate passed the healthcare reform bill with a strictly partisan vote. I was pleased that my colleagues in the GOP are on the right side of this bill.

Although this vote was a major step in healthcare reform becoming reality, they still have to reconcile the Senate bill with the House-passed version in conference committee.

This could prove even more difficult and costly than the Senate vote.

There was a little bit of controversy surrounding one particular Senator who was initially against the bill, but then, coincidentally, a large amount of Medicare funding specifically for his state was tucked inside and he ended up voting for it. One wonders how much more of that will have to go on to achieve final passage.

But this is how politicians in Washington deal with problems: they throw your money at them.

Healthcare reform is no different.

The Senate version of the bill, at last count, will cost \$871 billion.

The House version tops \$1 trillion.

But they tell us this is for the health of Americans, and how dare we count the cost?

Such is the arrogance of politicians. There seems to be no end to the problems they feel capable and duty-bound to solve through legislative proclamation and plenty of your money.

To hear them talk, one might think that a few words spoken on Capitol Hill would make problems just disappear.

All it takes it good intentions.

But no good can come from 2400 pages of Washington's good intentions.

I have observed quite the opposite throughout my political career in the House of Representatives, and fear that with this immense legislation, our healthcare problems are only just beginning. Over the last few decades, I have seen healthcare subjected to more and more creeping red tape that only creates bottlenecks and increases costs as new bureaucratic hurdles are put in place.

Politicians cannot solve the problems created by ever-increasing intervention by exponentially increasing their intervention. Similarly, they cannot improve the quality of healthcare and expand access to it for all Americans simply by legislative decree. If only it were that simple! The reality is the free market, when allowed to function, naturally increases access and drives prices down through competition.

The free market keeps service providers accountable by allowing people to take their business elsewhere.

This government intervention will eventually create a near monopoly of providers in health insurance as smaller companies are squeezed out and innovation comes to a grinding halt due to formidable barriers to entry. The government will determine prices and levels of service that will apply to everyone, regardless of want or individual circumstances. The true insurance model of healthcare cost management, meaning major medical coverage only, will basically become illegal.

Opting out of the system will incur heavy tax penalties.

Expanding government reach so deeply into this very sensitive area of our personal lives and such a major part of our economy means

more opportunities for waste, fraud and abuse of the system. One need only remember the recent bailouts for an example of how government handles systemic waste, fraud and abuse.

So while the Senate patted itself on the back last week for delivering a Christmas gift to Americans, time will prove it was instead a great big lump of coal.