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# Health bogeymen cloud the issue

The Cape Breton Post

United States President Barack Obama says opponents of his health care reform agenda are mistaken in thinking that Canadians make a "good bogeyman." He doesn't find us scary, but neither is he modelling his health care reform on Canadian medicare, he assured Americans again this week.

Whether this or any other reasoned message can break through the screaming cacophony that's broken out in the U.S. over health care reform seems in doubt at the moment. Opponents of the complex reform plan, which still isn't nailed down in agreed legislative form, charge that it will promote euthanasia for the elderly, among other horrors, though there is no basis for the claim.

While Canadian health care flares into controversy from time to time, the public discourse is a genteel whisper by comparison. There is an interesting symmetry between the two countries, however. In the U.S., defenders of the status quo are on the right; in Canada, they're on the left. Yet each points to the other country as the bogeyman, the exemplar of the disaster that would ensue if either system were to change in any fundamental way.

A Nanos Research poll of 1,001 Canadians, out this week, shows an impressive 86.2 per cent of Canadians questioned supporting "public solutions to make our public health care stronger." The medicare defence group that commissioned the poll, the Canadian Healthcare Coalition, will no doubt promote the result as wholehearted endorsement of the current model, though there is room for interpretation. How many of those supporting "public solutions" would also support "private solutions" if asked, and must the two be mutually exclusive?

The fact is that Canada's health care system has remained a mix of public and private since the inception of medicare. The proportion of Canadian health care that remains privately provided and financed — everything from pharmaceuticals to dental care and physiotherapy — is usually stated as 30 per cent. Provinces, including Nova Scotia, have been experimenting for some time with using private clinics to provide diagnostic and some treatment services.

Release of the Nanos poll is intended to deflate the unveiling this coming weekend of a major Canadian Medical Association study that's expected to call for a larger role for private health care. The study is seen as the brainchild of outgoing president Robert Ouellet, who owns a chain of radiology clinics. For coalition co-ordinator Michael McBane, Ouellet serves admirably in the role of bogeyman for his "proposal to provide us with American-style two-tier medicine."

But the study in fact looked at five European countries that have evolved various approaches to universal access health care, and Ouellet himself has pointedly rejected so-called U.S.-style health care as a solution for Canada.

Modelling health care change on Europe rather than the United States doesn't automatically make it more palatable to Canadians but the CMA will do us all a favour if it can broaden the range of options that are worth looking at. For while the Canadian system ranks well in both cost effectiveness and outcomes against the United States, the comparisons are humbling in the broader field. We simply have to do better.

13/08/09



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**Away Caper from Scaper, Away writes:** 'Simply doing better' is not sneaking in a two-tier system so the greedy can make money from sickness and misery. Everyone knows there has to be improvements to medical care -- the biggest part of the problem is 'medical care' itself, not the funding -- but going backwards is not the answer, except for those who are always seeking to squeeze more money out of people for their own gain.

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**Sad But True from NS writes:** Unfortunately, people are always seeking to squeeze more money out of people for their own gain. I would always hear growing up that money makes the world go round, something you don't really want to believe. But as one gets older you realize it is true. People do not want to do anything for anyone anymore unless they are going to make a profit for it. Health care should not be in like that at all. The same services should be available to everyone, not only to people who can afford it. Can't blame the USA for not modeling their health care around Canada's. If you do a little research, you will find there is much better health care systems out there in the world than ours.

Posted 13/08/2009 at 10:28 AM | [Alert an Editor](#) | [Link to comment](#)

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