

INVESTOR'S BUSINESS DAILY™

We The People Losing Control Of Government

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Demagogue — a word of Greek origin — means a person who uses falsehoods, prejudices and emotional appeals to gain power. Huey Long, governor of Louisiana from 1928 to 1932, U.S. senator from 1932 to 1935 and creator of the Share Our Wealth Program, fit that definition.

Long stirred crowds with fiery denunciations of corporate greed. Ultimately, even fellow Democrats grew alarmed and backed away from his legislation.

Demagogue also describes how President Obama revved up crowds as he crisscrossed the country selling his health legislation.

"A big part of our campaign," he told audiences in Ohio, Pennsylvania and Missouri, "was about changing the way

Washington works — including the responsibility to live within its means. Over the last year, we've gone through the budget line-by-line looking for places to trim the fat out of government."

The truth is, as soon as he took office, the president signed bills that flooded the nation with new spending, resulting in a fiscal 2009 budget 19% above the previous year.

He also promised audiences that "for the first time, uninsured individuals and small businesses will have the same kind of choice of private health insurance that members of Congress get."

That's not true. According to the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, members of Congress "enjoy the widest selection of health plans in the country and can choose from health savings accounts, catastrophic plans with high deductibles, fee-for-service plans, preferred provider plans and HMOs."

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The Price Of 'Free'

These choices would be nice for all of us, but they are not in the offing. The health bill says you'll have to enroll in a "qualified plan" sold in your own state with a one-size-fits-all benefit package prescribed by the secretary of health and human services.

The president never said that insurance would be compulsory.

"All new insurance plans would be required to offer free preventive care to their customers," he pledged.

"Free" is a huckster's promise. In this case, there will be no co-pay or deductible for preventive services, but the cost of them is included in your premium. If you're buying your own insurance, it will cost 10% to 13% more if the bill is passed, according to the Congressional Budget Office (Nov. 30 report). That's the opposite of what the president claims.

"I want to give you more control over your health care," the president crooned.

But in fact, the Senate bill puts government in control of your care, even if you have Aetna, Cigna, Blue Cross or some other private plan. The bill bars doctors from participating in the private insurance system unless they implement whatever regulations the secretary of health and human services imposes (Senate bill, pp. 148-149).

Attacks on insurers and promises of free care can be counted on to get the crowd cheering. Then the president said:

"Opponents have tried to scare people, especially seniors, into thinking that we are going after seniors' Medicare benefits. . . . (T)hat's just plain wrong."

In truth, the Senate bill reduces future Medicare funding by nearly \$450 billion, including cuts in what hospitals will be paid to treat older patients. Experts are already warning that some hospitals will stop taking Medicare.

Warning Sign

The president vowed that government has a "special responsibility to be wise stewards about how Americans' hard-earned tax dollars are spent." Grants to local community groups to offer positive self-esteem classes (Senate bill, p. 612) hardly fit that definition.

"What we're proposing is a common-sense approach to protecting you from insurance company abuses and saving money, he said. "That's the proposal, and it's paid for."

He didn't mention the \$500 billion in new taxes.

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"I don't know how the politics plays," he said, calling on members of Congress to push ahead, no matter what the people think.

Backing up the demagoguery was a lot of arm-twisting until minutes before the House of Representatives voted.

The largest public union, SEIU, threatened Democrats in Congress with primary challenges in the fall if they voted against the health bill.

A congressman's brother was nominated to the federal judiciary, and a popular school-loan bill was inexplicably attached to the unpopular health bill.

After the health bill was rammed through with no bipartisan support, the president declared the vote historic. That's true. It's a warning sign that We the People are losing control of our government.

- McCaughey is founder and chairman of the Committee to Reduce Infection Deaths and a former lieutenant governor of New York State.