

Amnesty poison pill

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On Saturday, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid told a Las Vegas audience: "We are going to pass comprehensive immigration reform" this year -- using the "comprehensive" buzzword that everyone knows means amnesty for the 10.8 million or more illegal aliens now in the country.

But that amnesty means even more than it used to -- because Democrats this year broke with long-standing precedent to ensure that, if legalized, these aliens would immediately qualify for ObamaCare's health-insurance subsidies.

Reid's remarks were just the latest in a series of pledges from Democratic leaders in Congress, as well as from President Obama, that they'll really try to pass an amnesty bill this year -- no matter how controversial.

Yet the controversy should be worse than ever -- thanks to a disturbing change buried deep in the 2,400-page ObamaCare legislation: the effective end of the "public charge" doctrine.

This doctrine is nearly as old as US immigration law itself. It is the rule that no alien can be allowed into the United States if he is going to become a burden on the US taxpayer upon entry -- a public charge.

In 1996, Congress added teeth to the doctrine by imposing a five-year bar on legal aliens receiving federal means-tested public benefits. In other words, no feeding at the public trough until you've been supporting yourself for five years. But now Democrats have eliminated the five-year bar with respect to the new health-care benefits.

The new law's authors plainly realized this wouldn't be popular. While the House health-care bill stated quite plainly that the five-year bar did not apply, the Senate version that became law did it via a torturous process that involved defining the health-care subsidy as a "tax credit" (though it's available even to people who don't pay taxes) and declaring that a lawfully present alien who's not eligible for Medicaid (because of the five-year bar) *is* eligible for a health-care "tax credit."

Why sneak such a provision into the law, when it goes against the sound economics of the public-charge doctrine and further burdens American taxpayers?

Perhaps to create a long-term constituency for ObamaCare.

Barely 40 percent of the American public favors the new law. Elections this fall and in 2012 will likely slash support for it in Washington; without a constituency to fight for it, it could be doomed.

And the best way to build a constituency is to extend its benefits to as many people as possible. By setting aside the public-charge doctrine and allowing newly legalized aliens to become eligible for ObamaCare immediately, the amnesty would create 10.8 million new ObamaCare constituents, dependent upon Uncle Sam for free health care.

Five years later, those constituents would be naturalized citizens, voting Democratic to keep ObamaCare in place.

This hidden time bomb in the ObamaCare law was buried deeply and with deliberation. But when it explodes, the American taxpayer will feel the blast: Adding 10.8 million largely low-income people to those covered by the health "reform" will further explode the cost of an already unaffordable measure.

Obama and his Democratic allies will likely attempt to sell amnesty to the public with claims that it costs little and has nothing to do with health care. Both claims will be false.

But don't expect members of Congress to read the bill. And don't expect the few who do to find the hidden traps. In his remarks on Saturday, Reid also said, "We're going to do immigration reform just like we did health-care reform."

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