

Not Lucy Ricardo, but not Godot (11/18/09)

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Washington Post: *President Obama has said he wants to sign health-care legislation by year's end, but is this deadline necessary or feasible?*

It's better to take more time rather than rush through a Pandora's box of perverse incentives like the 1,900-page House bill (HR 3962). The quality of the reform is far more important than the date of enactment. At the same time, that doesn't mean it's OK to kick back and relax for another 15 to 20 years.

Open the House bill and out flies a menagerie of stinging things: Job-killing employer mandates, payroll taxes and surtaxes. Hazy market rules to be set and re-set by a powerful "Health Choices Commissioner." A public option menacing private markets and amplifying the financial disasters of Medicare and Medicaid. Onerous red-tape and reporting requirements for firms and individuals. Dozens of new government agencies. New incentives for lawsuits. And a staggering price tag, according to the nonpartisan **Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS)** and the **Lewin Group** (which analyzed an earlier, but similar, version of the bill).

Reform that improves on the status quo must meet several conditions: Lower costs over the long haul. No damage to the quality of health care. No bureaucrats interfering with doctor-patient decisions about care. Easier shopping for health insurance. And above all, no threat to Americans' financial security.

HR 3962 fails on these counts and more. Far better to tear off a few more calendar pages than to rush through a destructive assault on one-sixth of the U.S. economy. No segment of society needs reform more than small business does. Millions of independent firms and their employees have struggled with suffocating costs and administrative burdens for nearly a generation. The status quo is unacceptable, but the House bill shows how to make things even worse.

So what's the ideal pace for the Congressional proceedings? The actual pace seems to alternate **Waiting for Godot** (talk, talk, talk) and **Lucy** and **Ethel** in the chocolate factory (1,900-page dump-and-vote). Something in the middle would be nice.

(NOTE: At this writing, the new Senate bill isn't out yet.)