

Peggy Lee sings health care (2/24/10)

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Washington Post: *In advance of Thursday's health-care summit, the White House released its plan for merging comprehensive bills passed last year by the House and Senate. How would you assess President Obama's proposal and what impact if any will it have on action in Congress?*

Reading the 11-page [President's Proposal](#) reminded me of lyrics that [Peggy Lee](#) sang: "Is that all there is? Is that all there is? If that's all there is, my friends, then let's keep dancing."

Small business is not at all happy. The House and Senate passed deeply flawed bills, and the new White House proposal does little to improve them. The best that can be said is that a few especially bad provisions (e.g., the construction industry massacre) have dropped out.

But in some ways, the Proposal makes things significantly worse. The employer mandate becomes more expensive (and, hence, a bigger job-killer) for many firms and, it seems, no less expensive for any. This mandate simply orders firms to pay for insurance and/or pay stiff fines. It does nothing that will lead to lower costs or more options.

The Proposal increases entitlements, taxes, and federal government controls over health care. The Proposal tips its hat toward greater effort to combat waste, fraud, and abuse, but we already have the capacity to do that without a new bill.

Like the House and Senate bills, the President's Proposal does nothing to bring the cost of care down, and cost is the fundamental problem with our system. The problems of American health care are most acute in the small business sector yet neither the two bills nor the President's Proposal provides significant relief.

Then there are the missed opportunities. The best idea to arise during the Senate debate was the [Wyden-Collins-Bayh](#) Optional Free Choice Vouchers amendment. Today, this bipartisan proposal is nowhere to be seen.

Small business has always been at the table. Their voice has been heard and largely ignored. The President's Proposal does nothing to change that perception. The Proposal promises "[to put] small business owners in control of their own health care." But nothing in the document would actually make that happen.