

Kucinich throws his support behind Obama health care bill

David Walsh
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The decision by Rep. Dennis Kucinich, Democrat from Ohio, to vote and campaign among his fellow members of Congress for the White House health care bill falls under the heading of the entirely predictable.

Anyone who has paid attention to the career of this phony populist knew more or less how the process would unfold. Kucinich would slam the regressive measure until close to the end, then fold his tent and meekly bow to the pressure exerted by the Obama administration, and through the latter, the most powerful sections of the American ruling elite.

His most famous previous climb-down came in July 2004, when, after months of denouncing the presumptive Democratic nominee for president, Sen. John Kerry, for his pro-Iraq war views, Kucinich caved in prior to the Democrats' national convention and called for unity behind the Massachusetts senator. In a speech at the convention, Kucinich called on delegates and voters to "blaze a new path with John Kerry and John Edwards."

Kucinich now promises to vote for a reactionary bill that unashamedly protects the profits of the giant insurance and pharmaceutical interests while sharply reducing and rationing care for the majority of the American people.

The Obama administration, in the guise of "reform," has crafted a measure that will enable the health insurance companies to rake in untold revenues from millions of new customers forced to purchase bare-bones health coverage. Moreover, hundreds of billions of dollars will be cut from Medicare, the program for the elderly and disabled. There is nothing progressive about the health care measure; it is not a step or half-step forward. It represents a full-scale social regression.

No wonder polls indicate that a majority of Americans are suspicious of or openly hostile to the plan.

Kucinich knows all this perfectly well. As recently as last Sunday, in an op-ed column published in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, he pointed out, "Unfortunately, the president's plan...leaves patients financially vulnerable to insurance companies. It requires all Americans to buy private health insurance policies, while failing to ensure

those policies do what they are supposed to do—protect people from financial catastrophe caused by injury or illness... [T]he bill that the president is proposing is a step in the wrong direction." The piece clearly implied that Kucinich would vote against the measure.

Any number of press releases can still be found at his official web site denouncing Obama's measure. For example, on November 7, 2009, Kucinich explained:

"[I]nstead of working toward the elimination of for-profit insurance, H.R. 3962 [the Obama health care bill] would put the government in the role of accelerating the privatization of health care...

"By incurring only a new requirement to cover pre-existing conditions, a weakened public option, and a few other important but limited concessions, the health insurance companies are getting quite a deal...

"During the debate, when the interests of insurance companies would have been effectively challenged, that challenge was turned back... Looking ahead, we cringe at the prospect of even greater favors for insurance companies."

Three days earlier, on the floor of the House of Representatives, Kucinich thundered:

"The insurance companies are the problem, not the solution. This legislation, no matter how well intended, will likely not be able to deliver, cost too much and be another bailout for big business at the expense of the American people."

Pretty damning indictments, one would think. Has the bill changed for the better since early November? On the contrary, the Obama administration, as Kucinich himself predicted, performed "even greater favors for insurance companies" until the last moment. The "weakened public option," for example, became no public option.

Even more pointedly, Kucinich commented on October 29, 2009:

"If this is the best we can do, then our best isn't good enough and we have to ask some hard questions about our political system: such as Health Care or Insurance Care? Government of the people or a government of the

corporations?”

A day earlier, he released a statement that concluded:

“This is a moment of truth for the Democratic Party. Will we stand for the people or the insurance companies?”

The answers to these quasi-rhetorical questions were never in doubt. But, if further proof were needed, the nature and outcome of the health care “reform” debate have furnished it. The US is unquestionably ruled by a “government of the corporations” and the Democratic Party, including Rep. Kucinich, stands resolutely “for...the insurance companies.”

How did the Ohio congressman and two-time candidate for the Democratic Party presidential nomination (2004 and 2008) come to see the light on the health care bill?

It apparently didn’t take much.

The Obama administration has been fiercely seeking to round up enough votes in both the House and Senate to win the passage of the measure in recent weeks. Kucinich’s vote, and Kucinich himself, suddenly became a matter of interest to the administration. Did anyone in Obama’s inner circle truly believe it would take much to sway the Ohio congressman? One suspects not.

On Monday, a day after he subjected the White House plan to sharp criticism in the *Plain Dealer*, Rep. Kucinich accompanied President Obama onboard Air Force One as the pair traveled to a health care rally in Strongsville, Ohio, situated in the congressman’s district.

A flight on the presidential airplane and a dose of flattery were apparently sufficient. Politically stroked, Kucinich will do anything.

The congressman held an unusually well-attended press conference two days later in Washington to announce his change of heart. His statement on the issue made no logical sense whatsoever.

Kucinich began by reiterating his belief that “health care is a civil right,” and more or less acknowledged that the Obama bill recognizes no such right. He noted that all the measures which first led him to support the plan (a “strong public option” and “the right of people to pursue single payer at a state level”) were later removed, adding, “I do not think it is a first step toward anything I have supported in the past!”

Kucinich’s endorsement of the bill, as it turns out, amounts to little more than an act of public wishful thinking: “If my vote is to be counted, let it now count for passage of the bill, *hopefully in the direction of* comprehensive health care reform.” In other words, he wants his “yes” on the bill to be considered support for something actually rejected by the bill, and, as he said himself, toward which it is not even “a first step.” How pathetic!

At his press conference, Kucinich expanded on his reasoning. According to the *Washington Post*’s Dana

Milbank, Kucinich justified his vote for the rotten bill on the grounds that a “defeat on the legislation would destroy Obama’s presidency.” Kucinich told the media that an effort was underfoot “to try to delegitimize his presidency. That hurts the nation when that happens.”

He asserted, “We have to be very careful” that “President Obama’s presidency not be destroyed by this debate... Even though I have many differences with him on policy, there’s something much bigger at stake here for America.”

The twisted logic here is extraordinary. A bill that is harmful to the American people must be supported because to do otherwise would damage a presidency that is carrying out policies harmful to the American people! The “something much bigger at stake here for America” is...what? Kucinich’s career? The illusion that Obama is a progressive? The threadbare lie that the Democratic Party speaks for “the people?” Probably all three.

The utterly false premise from which Kucinich and the left-liberal circles to which he belongs—including the *Nation* magazine and the like—proceed is that the Obama administration represents something progressive that needs to be defended from the ultra-right. But this *is* a right-wing government, a representative of the financial aristocracy, in both its imperialist foreign policy and its assault on the jobs and living standards of the population in the US.

As for Kucinich...not much need be said. In the past, the WSWs received numerous letters from his admirers, rebuking us for our “sectarianism” in not endorsing this out-and-out charlatan. Those who continue to hold out hope for anything “progressive” from this individual in the future are victims either of ignorance or willful self-deception—or political scoundrels in their own right.



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