

Massa doing the job he was elected to do

THE ISSUE | U.S. Rep. Eric Massa's remarks about health care reform.

OUR OPINION | Massa feels what he's doing is right, regardless of its popularity, which is what he was elected to do.

The honeymoon is over for Eric Massa.

The freshman congressman from Corning managed to fly under the radar for his first eight months in office but is now in the line of fire over remarks he made about how he intends to vote against the health care reform bill.

In a YouTube video, Massa tells a group of net bloggers he opposes the bill as it is currently written and won't change his vote no matter the level of opposition.

"I will vote adamantly against the interests of my district if I actually think what I am doing is going to be helpful ... I will vote against their opinion if I actually believe it will help them," Massa said.

For that, Massa has come under fire, locally and nationally.

How dare he go against the wishes of the people who put him in office, his detractors are saying.

Simple. Massa's an independent thinker who's willing to make a tough choice no matter how unpopular.

It's one of the reasons why this newspaper endorsed his candidacy and why he was elected over an incumbent last November. This most recent incident is the latest in a series of disagreements Massa has had with policies proposed by the Obama administration and the Democratic leadership.

Massa said several weeks ago that he agrees the health care system needs to be fixed, but had problems with parts of the solution outlined in the 1,000-page bill called HR 3200. Massa has issues with the bill's impact on Medicare, the overall cost, and how expenses would be unfairly levied on upstate New York residents.

In a related matter, Massa said he backs HR 676, which would provide a government-run, single-payer health care option that would, among other things, force private

insurance companies to lower premiums.

In both instances, Massa's position may not be shared by a majority of Americans or residents in the 29th Congressional District.

But it's difficult to tell where most Americans firmly stand on the health care issues because, frankly, much of the public opinion is based on incomplete information, misinterpretation and emotion. The reason is that most working Americans don't have the time, or inclination, to read and comprehend a 1,000-page bill. That's supposed to be the job for politicians.

To be honest, we don't know for sure if Massa is on or off target with his views on health care. The complexity of the health care system and the lack of details to fix it make it difficult to grasp with absolute certainty that a proposal is either completely right or completely wrong.

But Massa is sticking to his convictions, which are based on the 47 town hall meetings he's held and his claims to have read HR 3200 four times.

If readers disagree with him then they should remember that when the November, 2010 election rolls around.

But so far the alternative, namely Massa's Republican opponent Tom Reed, only recently read the legislation after getting heat for saying he wouldn't waste his time reading the health reform bill.

In his recent criticism of Massa, Reed indicated the opinions of the constituency would weigh more heavily in how he would vote on bills. But leadership based on public opinion is a slippery slope. Public opinion isn't always informed opinion and pandering to the emotion of the moment can lead to poor decisions.

When it comes to health care reform, Americans can't afford a poor decision.

ARTIST'S VIEW



FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL



COMMENTARY | CARL LEUBSDORF

Dems see end game for health debate

Overshadowed by the tumult and shouting at those town meetings, the great 2009 debate on health-care reform is entering its end game.

Those weekend statements in which Obama administration officials opened the door to dropping a government-run alternative to private health care are no real surprise, frankly, except perhaps in timing. A key health care player from the Clinton years suggested to me three months ago that that's what would ultimately happen.

Administration officials also are showing flexibility on other controversial aspects, such as willingness to drop the provision to reimburse end-of-life counseling that opponents have twisted into an opening to permit euthanasia.

Other substantive aspects may be even more crucial, most notably how to ensure the cost of health care begins to decline.

But the shape of the end game will depend as much on how President Barack Obama and congressional Democrats resolve the issue's political aspects as how they settle the substantive ones.

Already, there are signs that administration acceptance of substantive compromises might complicate the politics.

"You can't really have reform without a public option," former Democratic National Chairman Howard Dean said on CBS News' "The Early Show." He expressed skepticism a bill would pass without it.

That may be true in the House, where liberals form a substantial part of the

Democratic majority. That's why House leaders say they will retain the public option when their bill comes to a vote next month. But it may have to be dropped later when competing House and Senate versions are resolved in conference committee.

The situation is very different in the Senate, where any public option could cost the votes of some moderate Democrats, as well as most Republicans open to seeking a bipartisan bill.

That's one reason the administration still seems to hope the six Finance Committee negotiators can agree on a bill that would attract some GOP support. But the White House also needs to stick with its desire for a Sept. 15 agreement by the panel, given the pressure from liberal Democrats who fear too much compromise. Besides, time to finish action this year will soon begin to run short, given how long Congress takes to act.

The success of the Finance Committee effort may determine if Democrats feel they can pass a bill in the Senate through the normal legislative process, which could require 60 votes, or have to resort to the controversial budget reconciliation procedure, which would only require 51.

A bill that keeps the entire Democratic caucus together would only require one or two Republican votes.

Beyond those impending tactical political decisions, Obama and his congressional allies face an overriding strategic one that may ultimately determine if there is to be action this year.

Having promised for

years to provide comprehensive health reform, Democrats must recognize as a party that their failure to do so now would be disastrous, especially for many members of Congress facing re-election next year.

That realization won't require all Democrats to go along on every detail, especially in the House. A lot of the votes may be cliffhangers.

But in the end, a Democratic Party that wants to be seen as the natural governing party needs to show the same unity of purpose it displayed last fall in helping the Bush administration pass the bank bailout bill during last September's financial collapse.

At Harvard's post-election examination of the 2008 campaign, Republican pollster Bill McInturff contrasted that unity with the disorganized way individual Democrats followed their personal political instincts during the Clinton years, thus contributing to their party's disastrous losses in the 1994 elections.

While some Republican backing would give this effort at least a modicum of bipartisanship, Democrats realize they will have to provide virtually all of the votes if Congress is to pass a major health care reform bill this year.

And that means acceptance of the view that, despite some differences on details, they and the country will be better off by passing one.

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Massa's approach right on target

Shall we all gather stones and prepare to chuck them at Eric Massa?

Why? You know he said, in a moment captured on YouTube, that he'd vote for a

measure not supported by the majority of his constituents, if he thought it would really be in their best interests!

Ye gods, the nerve of

the man!

Except he's absolutely right and that's why he's the best congressman this area has had since Amo Houghton. We don't need another knee-jerk puppet like Randy Kuhl — or most of the clowns who've represented this area in Albany in recent years.

Kuhl almost never deviated from the party line. Except on extremely rare occasions when he'd oppose some measure beloved of George Bush and Co. Then he'd paper his district with press releases proclaiming his independence (while maintaining a relatively low profile in Washington.)

The trick was that he knew in advance there were so many party-line votes guaranteed that his opposition would have absolutely no impact on the outcome. But to the home folks, he'd look like a guy who thought for himself.

Eric Massa, thanks be to the Almighty, is an entirely different breed of cat.

He's a Democrat, for sure. But he's not one to automatically line up behind the president every time a vote is coming.

He thinks things through, with his constituents uppermost in mind.

But he doesn't necessarily go with the current flow. For instance, he finds considerable fault with the current health care reform proposals. (There's not just one, but dozens out there.)

And he's studied the proposals in depth, something the average voter is unable to do at this stage.

So he's telling the world that while many people may believe black is white, he sees an entirely different shade — and doesn't like what he sees, because it could ultimately adversely impact his constituents.

That kind of thinking is — or at least should be — totally acceptable.

Massa's a Democrat, yes, but he's also very independent. He doesn't even fall into the so-called "Blue Dog" category. He thinks for himself.

That, ladies and gentlemen, is what we should pray for in our congressman. So put down the stones, gang. He doesn't deserve it.

...

And as for his opponent, Republican Tom Reed, I can't even give minimal credibility to a guy who says he can't be bothered to read the most controversial proposal to have surfaced in Washington in decades.

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NATIONAL VIEW | MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL

Have backbone, not hysteria about health care

Score one for hysteria and lies. Score another for lack of backbone, an all-too-common malady that seems to mandate paralysis in this nation on serious problems. And it all portends badly for reason prevailing over fear in the national health care debate.

Lawmakers are declaring dead a provision that would allow health consumers to voluntarily get advice on end-of-life directives. They also are saying that a public health care option is now expendable.

First, the end-of-life directives. Talk to health care experts, and they will tell you that such directives are necessary in making sure that a person's last days go according to wishes. But this morphed into "death panels" and "pulling the plug on grandma" — fictions thoroughly debunked. And it didn't matter.

This perfectly reasonable provision would have allowed such visits to be paid for as part of sensible medical planning by consumers. It's been declared dead on the Senate side by so-called "centrist" GOP Sen. Chuck Grassley of Iowa.

This cedes far too much power to the fringe that pushed the lies and emboldens them to Swift-boat any other provision. That so many are willing to believe is a testa-

ment to the efficacy of fear-mongering in U.S. politics.

In addition, the Obama administration indicated last weekend that it is willing to forgo a public health care system to drive down prices in the private sector. In our view, this would have had to have been crafted so as not to unfairly compete with the private sector. But the reluctance to pursue this is not based on the ability or inability to do that but on denying the fringe yet another issue — the merits of the proposal be damned.

What we have coming to roost is the longstanding, purposely cultivated notion of government being bad, that more is therefore very bad and that any bold government pursuit epitomizes Big Government, socialism, even.

There are legitimate concerns to have about reform and its costs. But it's clear that too many simply seek wedges useful for the larger goal of killing all reform, making useful debate an early casualty.

That these provisions are so easily jettisoned says that the reformers, starting with the president, need to more clearly deliver their messages, that facts without backbone have limits in this charged political landscape and that, absent backbone, such blather about "death panels" and "socialism" will win every time.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Massa is no Houghton

TO THE EDITOR | In a recent interview on YouTube, Congressman Eric Massa stated that he would vote for the single-payer health care plan even if the people of his district opposed such a plan.

Perhaps Mr. Massa is not aware that this country is a representative democracy and he is supposed to represent the views of the majority of his constituents.

I reject his statement that he was justified in doing this because former Congressman Houghton had done this also. As a former New York State Assemblyman I was a long-term

friend and colleague of Amo Houghton; I can assure Mr. Massa, he is no Amo Houghton!

Donald R. Davidson
Canisteo

Beware the lies, hate mongering

TO THE EDITOR | The majority of good, honest, middle-class Republican people in this country need to wake up. Republicans, as well as other Americans, are being force fed lies by the ultra rich corporations through the propaganda machine that is Fox News.

O'Reilly, Beck and their ilk, are hate mongers that are inciting good people to intolerance, rage and possi-

bly violence. People are screaming at their congressmen, wearing automatic assault weapons to town hall meetings, even purporting bloodshed to "water the tree of liberty."

What's happening here? It's a frightening scenario. Just observe the so-called health care grassroots uprisings. They are not "grassroots" at all. They are corporate sponsored sinister vendettas to spread fear and lies and in turn protect the status quo so coveted by the "uber" rich health care industry. We can't let these corporations in doctrine us this way. We need to stand up and speak truth to power.

Tom Abbott
Horseheads

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