

002594 MAY 7 1993 Smock, Pa. 15480
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Dear Brian,

I've thoroughly enjoyed C-SPAN'S Airing of health care.

I constantly heard of the Canadians fleeing to the U. S. for health care.

I wrote this Letter to the Editor of the Washington Post National Weekly Edition in the October 1989 issue of the Post.

Feel free to quote me if you wish.

Thankyou

P. S.

LOWER LEFT COLUMN

LETTERS

A Real Catastrophe

The editorial "Catastrophic Retreat" [Sept. 18-24] raises the ire of every taxpaying senior citizen who understands the implications of Public Law 100-360 ("Medicare Catastrophic Protection Bill").

The Medicaid provisions of this law provides "catastrophic" coverage for millions of people of all ages at the expense of a small group of taxpayers over 65. Included in these millions are disabled people, children born with either the AIDS virus or drug addiction, and "near-poor" pregnant women.

When the provisions of this law as they relate to the disabled and impoverished become known to hospitals, clinics, doctors, etc., the cost will be catastrophic!

The editorial states that "Ronald Reagan was right: This program should not be financed out of general revenues." President Reagan had the audacity, in the last budget he submitted to Congress, to show \$8 billion of the catastrophic bill surtax as general revenue! The Bush administration budget shows \$6.5 billion of this surtax as general revenue.

I don't agree with the editorial's conclusion that "when it passed the bill last year, Congress moved money from rich toward poor."

A person with a tax liability of \$25,000 in 1988 will pay \$26,050 in 1993—a 4.2 percent increase. A person with a tax liability of \$1,000 in 1988 will pay \$1,280 in 1993—a 28 percent increase.

At the time this law was passed, it was estimated that only 7 percent of the people paying the cost would benefit from it. I am willing to pay my fair share of taxes to provide medical care for the less fortunate of our citizens, but I resent being singled out by Congress as one of a small group of taxpayers that is expected to bear the full burden of a social problem that is the responsibility of all taxpayers!

Berlin, N.H.

O, Canada

This letter is in response to the article headlined "A New Push for National Health Insurance" [Sept. 11-17].

Dr. Robert McAfee of the American Medical Association's board of trustees was quoted as saying, "We are very much against" any system where doctors work directly for the government or where the government directs care and prescribes fees. Do I take this to mean Dr. McAfee would abolish the Department of Health and Human Services and the Food and Drug Administration?

I underwent neurosurgery for epilepsy at the Montreal Neurological Hospital in 1977. The neurosurgeon I wanted was in Africa and wasn't due back for six months, so I took the doctor the hospital assigned me. I wasn't covered by Blue Cross but by the Laborers District Council of Western Pennsylvania, a member of the AFL-CIO.

I didn't choose Montreal by accident, either. I sent an inquiry to Ruth Dudley, chief of the Office of Scientific and Health Reports at the National Institute of Neurological and Communicative Disorders and Stroke in Bethesda, Md. I asked which would be my best choice for epileptic surgery—Johns Hopkins University, the Mayo Clinic, Baylor University or Montreal? Her reply was Montreal. I'm glad I took her advice! I haven't had a seizure in 11 years, two weeks and three days.

So before you start knocking Canada's health insurance (simply because it doesn't fatten your wallet as much), or the quality of that care, place yourself on the slab in one of Canada's hospitals!

Smock, Pa.

OP-ED

The Politics of Trash Disposal

In just a few months Congress will be buried in discussions on the many bills designed to solve the country's landfill crisis. But will any of our politicians be insightful enough to address the long-term impact such legislation will have on our planet?

Sure, there'll be the usual variety of self-serving, special-interest bills. Senators and representatives from highly populated regions where landfill space has already run out will push to ban all plastics, while politicians from farming states will advocate adding cornstarch to plastic products to make them biodegradable. Some will call for incineration and others will extol the virtues of recycling. Then the environmental groups and the plastics industry lobbyists will tangle, the media will portray the whole thing as a bloody battle, and none of us will be any closer to understanding how we can solve our trash nightmare.

As a researcher who has spent the past 30 years working with rubber and plastic compounds, I've seen firsthand the lack of scientific knowledge that exists not only in our capital buildings, but in our private homes and newsrooms. Very few people in this country are interested in learning about the pros and cons of any technological advance. When I've briefed legislators on scientific and environmental issues I've been shocked by how little they know about important details that they should take into account when voting on complex issues such as the landfill problem.

Take, for instance, the Suffolk County, N.Y., officials who last spring banned all nondegradable plastics from their landfills. They never considered that degradable plastics designed to break down into their original components can contaminate soil and groundwater, while the plastics themselves do not. Even plastics mixed with cornstarch leave plastic pieces, and corn-

starch will only decompose in the presence of sunlight and oxygen, two elements often missing in landfills. Fortunately for Long Island residents, the state Supreme Court blocked the ban and ordered an environmental impact study.

Iowa legislators exhibited their technological ignorance by requiring all state agencies to buy only starch-based garbage bags beginning in July. But even the bag manufacturers warn that starch bags are too new to have passed long-term environmental-impact tests.

To add to the confusion, recent studies have proved that the new, biodegradable products aren't the only kinds of trash that aren't decomposing as they should. Archaeologists studding landfills have unearthed whole carrots, hotdogs and completely legible newspapers that were buried for more than 15 years. Scientists have concluded that many of the country's landfills lack the moisture and oxygen needed to initiate the decomposition necessary to make room for new trash.

Some sensible local legislators have instituted recycling programs for glass, aluminum and some plastics. Environmentally, this is a promising solution to the landfill problem, but politicians must consider who will pay for sorting and collecting the recyclables and what markets exist for these products. Luckily, university and industry researchers are working hard to create new processes that make using recycled products more economical for businesses.

Clearly the best long-term solution sends most legislators scurrying for cover. Incineration is a dirty word in many regions where neither politicians nor their constituents understand the technology behind burning trash. City council members in Minneapolis and St. Paul refused even to consider incineration to solve their landfill problem because, they said, residents of those cities thought that burning plastics was dangerous. Instead, the councils banned

Not Uncommon Conflicts

The Wall Street Journal has published an interesting piece about a newspaper columnist and his "conflicts of interest." He has close ties to officials of a foreign government. He advises American businessmen—for a fee—on their dealings with that government. And he gives diplomatic advice about that government through his column, television commentaries and speeches. He is also sometimes on stage at certain Republican Party affairs.

The columnist/commentator is Henry Kissinger, the former secretary of State, whose work is syndicated by the Los Angeles Times and appears in The Washington Post and other papers. The government in question is China.

If Kissinger were a mere reporter, would his labyrinthine involvements be tolerated? Not on your tintype, says Ben Bradlee, The Post's executive editor. He would be fired out of hand for "an obvious conflict of interest."

But the politician/pundits we have brought into the news business operate in an ethical world of their own making. And obviously we regard them as special cases who, as The Post's editorial page editor Meg Greenfield observes, have not been subject to "the strict limitations and rules" that apply to others in the news-business.

The future of the Democratic Party was the theme of a recent gathering of "top Democratic strategists and thinkers." These "strategists" included Elaine Kamarck, a columnist for Newsday whose opinions also appear elsewhere in this issue;

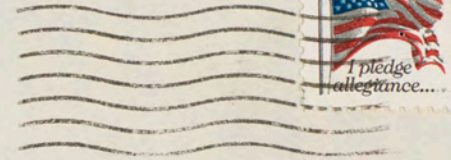
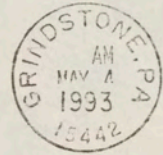
William Schneider, a columnist for the Los Angeles Times Syndicate; Mark Shields, a columnist for The Washington Post and a political analyst for the McNeill/Leherer news program; Robert Squier, a political commentator on NBC's Today show; and Laura Tyson, a member of the board of economists at the Los Angeles Times.

I have no idea how commonplace these practices are nor how long they will continue. But the ethical spasms that recently have seized Congress are beginning to seize the news business as well and may, in the goodness of time, have a cathartic effect.

Out in California, the birthplace of trends, the Capitol Correspondents Association recently called to account a television correspondent who for five years held lucrative contracts with the California Highway Patrol to teach troopers "how to deal with the press."

At the Minneapolis Star Tribune, a dialogue has begun over the necessity or lack of it to disclose the affiliations of its writers. Should readers know if the religion reporter attends a particular church or synagogue, if the children of an education writer attend private schools or if the labor reporter is a union member or official? Spy, a Manhattan magazine that regularly needles The New York Times, tweaked the paper in August for its highly favorable review of a television show produced by the son of Times editor Max Frankel. The Post last year decided not to assign Myra McPherson, a longtime writer for the Style section, to the campaign of Michael S. Dukakis because her husband is a prominent Dem-

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