

# The Washington Times

[www.washingtontimes.com](http://www.washingtontimes.com)

---

## The Most Destructive Disease

By Richard W. Rahn

Published July 22, 2009

---

### *Doctors lobby's endorsement violates the Hippocratic Oath*

Washingtonosis(n): a disease most often found in people working within three miles of the U.S. Capitol building in Washington, although pockets also are found in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles. It tends to infect elected officials, government bureaucrats, those working in the media, "government relations specialists," association executives and even top corporate executives.

Symptoms include an overwhelming desire to associate and be seen with those in power or those perceived to have power and/or fame. Those infected tend to lose judgment, values, principles and sense of honesty as well as common sense. They say silly things like, "I will vote for (or support) this (1,000-page) bill because it is absolutely necessary to protect the American people and we must do it now" -- having never read the bill, having only a vague idea of its provisions, having no idea whether it will do more good or harm and having no idea of what a billion dollars is, let alone a trillion dollars.

Last week, officials of the American Medical Association (AMA) revealed that they had caught the disease. They endorsed the House version of the health care bill even though it would reduce the incomes of many of their members, restrict their freedom to practice medicine as they think best and limit choices for their patients. As doctors who were paying attention to what was going on in Washington learned of the AMA's treachery, protests erupted and local chapters disassociated themselves with the AMA endorsement. A former president of the AMA, Dr. Donald J. Palmisano, who heads a physicians group, Coalition to Protect Patients' Rights, will be holding a press conference to express opposition to the bill as drafted and to the AMA endorsement.

A leading orthopedic surgeon, Dr. Robert P. Nirschl, wrote: "... the House version of health reform is in direct opposition to the Hippocratic Oath. The Obama pledge that patients can still see their own doctor is a blatant mistruth and irrelevant as the doctor will no longer be free to act in the best interest of the patient. The AMA endorsement of the bill as drafted is astounding and does not represent the position of most physicians in clinical private practice."

It is not particularly shocking that the AMA took a position contrary to that of, perhaps, a majority of practicing doctors in the country. The AMA has been out of step with many of its members for years and represents less than one-quarter of the nation's doctors. Association executives tend to play up to members of Congress, their staffs and other Washington power centers, thus identifying more with those they are lobbying than with their own members who pay their salaries.

Washingtonosis often infects those who claim to represent business interests. Back in 1993, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce endorsed Hillary Care. Most of its membership was strongly opposed and outraged. The chamber suffered a huge loss in membership and revenue, and those responsible for the debacle were replaced ultimately. The chamber had built a very strong reputation (brand) during the 1980s for philosophical integrity with a firm commitment to smaller government and lower taxes, and the organization had grown rapidly. Yet subsequently, a few individuals within the chamber who suffered from Washingtonosis and thus were more interested in cultivating their own relationships with the Clinton White House and the Democratic Congress almost managed to destroy a great legacy and institution.

Many businesses hire "Washington representatives" to help protect the business from destructive government actions. The Washington rep, in an effort to gain friends in Congress and the administration, often finds it easier and more psychologically comfortable to pressure the business to accept the policies of those in government rather than vice versa. The Washington rep arranges meetings between the pompous dons who inhabit Capitol Hill and the senior executives of the company (advising the managers not to offend these "powerful folks"). The politicians, who understand the game perfectly, then publicly flatter the corporate executives -- infecting them with Washingtonosis -- who then endorse measures that sell out their stockholders, fellow employees and customers.

President Obama often exhibits Washingtonosis, as illustrated by his contradictory claims that his health care proposal will: save money (despite the fact that the Democrat-controlled Congressional Budget Office finds the opposite), provide top-quality care for everyone, not impose health care rationing, not require tax increases on the middle class, and not blow another billion-dollar hole in the budget. As Lawrence A. Hunter, former staff director of the Congressional Joint Economic Committee and now chairman of the Social Security Institute, has noted: "The circle cannot be squared; it is a logical impossibility." Mr. Hunter also said: "At its inception in 1966, Medicare cost \$3 billion per year. At that time, the ... U.S. House of Representatives projected 'conservatively' the program would cost approximately \$12 billion a year by 1990. In 1990, the cost of Medicare was actually \$107 billion, nine times higher than estimated."

Those who vote for the health care bill will have "come down" with Washingtonosis and thus will be mentally impaired. The only known cures for Washingtonosis are political defeat, dismissal from a Washington-related job, or quarantine in a small town far away from Washington.

Fortunately, citizens still have the power to bring about these cures -- but they must act quickly.

*Richard W. Rahn is a senior fellow at the Cato Institute and chairman of the Institute for Global Economic Growth.*

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/jul/22/the-most-destructive-disease/>

Copyright © 2009 News World Communications, Inc. All rights reserved.