

# Obamacare has not left America better off than it was before

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**Kathleen Parker**

It is easy these days to imagine that one is living in a fairy tale, albeit a dreary one.

Objective truth, it seems, has gone the way of trolls, goblins and gremlins, by which one should not infer that Truth has taken up residence in the U.S. Congress.



Cognitive dissonance is a rational response to recent news that Obamacare will reduce the workforce, which is hardly helpful to the economy, and insure less than half of the uninsured — from 55 million down to 31 million.

Let's see if we can iron this thing out a bit. First, a few indisputable facts:

We are recovering from a recession, slowly. We continue to hope for improved employment numbers, even though we're

now told the jobless rate doesn't matter anymore. Only about 3 million people have signed up for health insurance through the new marketplaces, well below expectations.

But, says the White House, things are looking good. Hope wasn't for nothing. And please keep in mind, the economy isn't a speedboat. It's a big ol' ship that takes time to turn around.

Next: A Congressional Budget Office report issued earlier this month estimates that by 2017, the workforce will be reduced by the equivalent of 2 million full-time jobs and 2.3 million by 2021 — because of Obamacare.

Some people will quit their jobs either because of implicit marginal tax rates that significantly reduce wages and make working not worth it. In other cases, people will quit because their subsidies go down as their income goes up.

In the real world, we call this disincentivizing.

The CBO's headline-grabbing news has parted the seas in new ways. Republicans, barely disguising their glee, remind us that they told us so. And, this is actually true. Democrats remind us that those 2 million aren't being forced into unemployment but have the opportunity to choose not to work. No longer will people have to stay in boring, unfulfilling jobs just because they need health insurance.

As Nancy Pelosi (hereinafter Fairy Godmother) explained to Jon Stewart, one of the goals of Obamacare was to give people "life, a healthier life, liberty, the pursuit of your own happiness." Stewart replied, "Really?"

"Yeah, if you want to be a writer, if you want to be a comedian, if you want to be a camera person, if you want to start a business ..." In an earlier iteration, Pelosi even suggested that

Obamacare would allow people to quit their awful jobs to write poetry.

Well, bust my buttons! Why didn't you say that in the first place?

Not quite poetry, but I think it has potential.

Freeing people not to work has never been a national goal that I can recall, though everyone acknowledges the problem of tying insurance to employment. This is why Republicans have argued, belatedly, for portable insurance.

In the meantime, what the economy needs least is a federal program that prompts lower-and middle-class workers to drop out of the workforce. This is in addition to the many who are losing their jobs involuntarily or having their hours cut by employers who want to avoid the mandate to buy insurance or the fine for failing to do so.

Again, this is a simple matter of incentives and survival, which President Barack Obama seems to have recognized in postponing the mandate for midsize businesses until 2016. Or perhaps he is trying to head off another health-care controversy before the midterm elections? Shucks, do you suppose?

Add to the above the CBO's report last May that 31 million people will not have health insurance in 2023.

Any one of these things would be bad news. Combined, they boggle the well-ordered mind. If I may invoke our Fairy Godmother again, Pelosi was the most honest of all when she warned us that "We have to pass the bill (Obamacare) so that you can find out what is in it."

Today, knowing what we know, we are left with what we used to call a million-dollar question, though it is much more

expensive now: How does one defend spending \$1.2 trillion for a health-care overhaul that disincentivizes people to work and that leaves us with 31 million uninsured?

One writes poetry.

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