Top Story: EAI Making the Video Rounds


VIDEO: Rob Roper exposes VPIRG on Dialogues with Meg Hansen
Part 1: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bC6EJn8CBuA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bC6EJn8CBuA)
Part 2: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PDtcKKSrpL8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PDtcKKSrpL8)

Commentary: Rethink Healthcare and Health Insurance

*By John McClaughry*

Vermonters have recently witnessed, once again, the annual battle over health insurance rate increases for individual and small business plans. It’s worth taking a long look at just what the state thinks it’s doing, and how it does it.

Families and small businesses purchase health insurance plans to protect themselves from the risk of expensive medical treatments. The State has a long list of requirements that the two surviving carriers serving this market – Blue Cross Blue Shield of Vermont and MVP – must comply with to do business here. They include some thirty specific mandated benefits, prohibition of unfair business practices, minimum actuarial value ratios, community rating, guaranteed issue, and maintenance of reserves. The Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) added additional requirements.

Since 1984 the State has set annual limits on the rates that insurers can charge their customers. The law tells the insurers what care they must pay for, but the insurers can’t control what the providers charge. The regulators have to cap the insurer’s revenue growth to "contain costs". At the same time they have to make sure the insurers receive enough income to maintain adequate reserves.

In July the two insurers filed with the Green Mountain Care Board their annual request for premium rate increases. BCBSVT asked an average rate increase of 14.3%, and MVP of 10.9%. On August 7 The Board approved 12.4% and 10.1% respectively.

According to a VTDigger report, "the board acknowledged that the increases they approved for next year are not affordable for consumers, but in making their decisions they had to take the financial health of insurers into account." At a public hearing "dozens of Vermonters spoke out against the hikes and said they would stifle their access to health care."

Activists can always fill a room with people who want health care services at a large discount, or free, and demand that government (GMCB) either impose price
controls on health insurance or take over the whole health care industry. You rarely if ever hear an intelligent analysis of why health insurance and care cost what they do.

A month after the board’s rate increase action chairman Kevin Mullin urged Gov. Phil Scott to increase Medicaid expenditures by $70 million. Medicaid now enrolls 33% of the state’s population and pays far below the actual cost of services rendered by hospitals, clinics and doctors. The Medicaid (and Medicare) underpayments are covered by overpayments by the customers of the insurance companies through ever higher premiums.

A startling admission in the Mullin letter to Scott is that increased Medicaid spending is needed to help hospitals shift to the “All Payer” payment model that the Shumlin administration invented to replace the failed single payer effort. One has to be amused to learn that we have to increase Medicaid reimbursements to make All Payer, sold as a wonderful vehicle for achieving cost savings, actually achieve cost savings!

Vermont’s problem is that it has for thirty years expanded Medicaid coverage, seriously and chronically underpaid for Medicaid services, thus shifting much of the costs to private insurance premiums. Then it attempted Shumlin single payer to eliminate those “skyrocketing” premiums, and then replaced the abandoned single payer plan with All Payer to achieve cost savings, which now are said to depend on increasing Medicaid reimbursements. (Gov. Scott rejected Mullin’s request.)

Suppose you, reader, were one of the five GMCB members charged with decreeing the “right” premium and Medicaid payment increases to salvage One Care, the “accountable care organization” that is the centerpiece of All Payer. How would you go about making these crucial decisions, in light of conflicting and delusionary statutory goals, the need of the insurers to maintain adequate reserves, providers reluctant to become more efficient, individuals reluctant to avoid poor health practices, consumers clamoring for lower prices to them, taxpayers grumbling about the costs, and legislators alarmed that Medicaid is crowding out other state spending.

Does it occur to anybody that what passes for “reform” is critically based on politically determined percentages? Or that no regulatory body can determine what medical care is justified and what is not? Longtime health care analyst Hamilton Davis, an advocate for single payer, has stated candidly that “Neither the Green Mountain Care Board nor the Scott administration, nor the Legislature, nor the insurance industry, nor any other element of the regulatory system has any ability whatsoever to distinguish medically justified care from that which isn’t.” Ouch!

It should have become clear that this regulatory, economic and political excuse for “reform” is increasingly costly and unworkable. Vermont is long overdue for a thorough rethinking of how to help Vermonter maintain their wellness and access adequate care. That task is not the same as protecting every interest in the health care universe.

- John McClaughry is vice president of the Ethan Allen Institute

Commentary:
The Carbon Tax Is Back As a Top Issue for 2020

By Rob Roper
When the gavel fell on the 2019 legislative session with the house and senate deadlocked over the $15 minimum wage and a Paid Family Leave program, most of us thought those two issues would be front and center this January when the legislature reconvenes. But it doesn’t appear that Vermont’s highly vocal climate change activists will allow that to be the case. They want a carbon tax, and they want it now!

This all began with the Climate Strike and Week of Action at the end of September, a kind of primal scream of civil disruption preceding the all-out banzai charge to pass an economy-killing package of climate legislation that will achieve approximately nothing in terms of impacting future climate trends.

At the Renewable Energy Conference on October 11, Burlington Mayor Miro Weinberger (D), flanked by VPIRG, called for a massive, statewide carbon tax on Vermonters, which would ultimately lead to a roughly $1.70 per gallon tax on home heating and vehicle fuels. The proposal is similar to the carbon tax proposed by VPIRG back in 2014 only larger in scope and cost.

This latest proposal would start with a $30 per ton tax on CO2 emissions and rise at a rate of inflation plus 10 percent each year until 2034, after which point it would rise at inflation plus 5 percent indefinitely. This translates into roughly a 30 cent per gallon tax on home heating and vehicle fuels rising to $1.70 per gallon by 2034, and then on ad infinitum. If Vermonters didn’t like the first carbon tax proposal (and they didn’t), they will like this one even less.

A week after Weinberger’s announcement, a group from the Extinction Rebellion camped out for a few days on the State House lawn in hopes that their spectacle would intimidate lawmakers into taking “bold action” on climate. One rebel was quoted, “As we all know, last legislative season was a disaster for climate change. There just was total inaction. And so at this point, we're saying we don't trust the government to protect us. And we're here not asking anymore. We're demanding.” (VT Digger, 10/18/19)

But what they are demanding – net zero CO2 emissions by 2025 -- is insanely unrealistic. The cost in dollars and individual freedom to achieve that, if it’s even possible, would be beyond comprehension.

In 2007, Vermont passed CO2 reductions goals that said we should be 25 percent below our 1990 CO2 output by 2012, 50% below by 2028 and 75% below by 2050. As of now, we are 16 percent above 1990 levels – way off target. This, despite Vermont’s longstanding commitments to renewable energy, subsidies for weatherization and electric vehicles, and generally “green” values.

If we’re nowhere near getting CO2 output to 50 percent below 1990 levels by 2028 given all the money we’ve wasted on these programs, how, pray tell, do they expect to get to net-zero by 2025? It would require a totalitarian Green police state seizing control of the economy, forcing every individual to give up their fossil fuel vehicles and heating systems, and squeezing the taxpayers dry to subsidize replacing all that infrastructure with EVs and electric heat pumps – in just five years! Block all the traffic you want; this is not going to happen.

Regardless of the math and science, some legislators are buying into this agenda. Members of the Climate Caucus, a group of Democrats and Progressives, have been making presentations around the state pushing for adoption of the “Global Warming Solutions Act,” which would take Vermont’s aspirational goals regarding CO2 reduction and make meeting them mandatory under law.

Their thinking is that if they can con their peers and the voters into supporting a law mandating the ends, which may sound nice on the surface, the means --
will become justified, no matter how wacky or unpopular those means might be. Like, for example, the carbon tax!

Vermont lawmakers have a number of serious issues they need to resolve in 2020, including a public pension crisis with $4.5 billion in unfunded liabilities, a labor force crisis as young workers leave the state due to the high cost of living, water quality issues threaten our lakes and streams, and, again, to bring closure to $15 Minimum wage and Paid Family Leave legislation. The big question is, will house and senate leadership allow these issues to be derailed by a hoard of wailing, disruptive protesters demanding the impossible, or will they politely tell them to go pound sand.

- Rob Roper is president of the Ethan Allen Institute.

Events

**November 8.** Rob Roper will speak to the Caledonia and Essex/Orleans County Republican Committees at the Elks' Lodge in St. Johnsbury.

**February 29.** Rob Roper will speak to the Pawlet Republican Town Committee from 2:00 pm - 4:00 pm at the Modern Woodmen Hall in Wells.

To Schedule an EAI presentation in your community, please email rob@ethanallen.org.

News & Views

**Vermont Papers Redux** is the headline on a retrospective Sunday Times-Argus review by co-authors John McClaughry and Frank Bryan of their book The Vermont Papers: Recreating Democracy on a Human Scale, published 30 years ago. You can read it at https://vermontindependent.net/recreating-democracy-on-a-human-scale-vermont-papers-at-30/

**Keep Your Eyes on the Carbon Tax.** The Vermont Fuel Dealers Association (VFDA) has created a website, stopthetaxes.com, which illustrates just how burdensome Burlington Mayor Miro Weinberger's carbon "fee" proposal would be. According to the VFDA, this new scheme would impose an astonishing $1 billion tax on Vermonters, and could lower our state's GDP by about 1 percent.

**And the “Stealth Carbon Tax.”** "A Barre reader of [October 9] Vermont State House Headliners column about the multi-state 'stealth' carbon tax on gasoline and diesel fuel now in the late planning stages (TCI) offered the following thought: 'I wonder what it might mean to the school budgets to pay for gasoline to provide busing to merged schools and local schools and public transportation buses and trains themselves. Every place possible prices passed to consumers go up, up, up it seems. Buses are used as well to get addicts up to Berlin and in other communities for their daily dosages of suboxone." What it means is that schools, trains, and buses will raise their prices to cover the TCI tax.
**Vermont Has 3rd Lowest Murder Rate.** “Vermont reported the 3rd lowest murder rate (1.8) compared to other states. This was 3.1 points below the national average of 4.9 homicides per 100,000 individuals, according to a new report from safewise.com. In fact, the three states from Northern New England had the lowest murder rates.” (VBM, 10/23/19) Interestingly, the two states that beat us, New Hampshire and Maine, joined Vermont by adopting “constitutional carry” laws for firearms in 2017 and 2015 respectively. Are you paying attention, Chicago?

**VT AG Donovan Wants Background Checks for Ammo Purchases.** “Vermont Attorney General TJ Donovan has asked the U.S. Congress to enact mandatory background checks on purchasers of ammunition. In a Sept. 23 letter, Donovan and 21 other state attorneys general asked House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and several other leaders and committee chairs to enact the so-called “Jaime’s Law,” which would “require background checks for ammunition purchases, building on current federal requirements for background checks on firearms purchases.” Daily Chronicle of Vermont, 10/2/19.

**NYT on Medicare for All.** “If Vermont can pass a strong single-payer system and show it works well, it will not only be enormously important to this state, it will be a model,’ Mr. Sanders said in 2013. As it turns out, it was a model. But instead of showing us how it would work, it showed us why it would fail.” NYT, 10/10/19

**Yes, Scrap the State Board of Education.** “The Vermont Sunset Advisory Commission is considering recommending the elimination of the controversial Vermont State Board of Education (SBE), Co-chair Sen. Jeanette White (D-Windham) said today.” (Statehouse Headliners, ) Since the creation of a cabinet level Agency of Education under the executive branch the SBE has become redundant, and, given its horrid, heavy handed power grab in its role regarding Act 46 forced consolidation of school districts, it deserves to be kicked to the curb. Good riddance.

**Target Workers Learn Hard Reality of $15 Minimum Wage.** “Two years ago, Target announced it was raising its minimum wage to $15 an hour, but some store workers say the wage increases are not helping because their schedules have been cut. That's making it difficult to keep their health insurance, and in some cases, to pay their bills. "I got that dollar raise but I'm getting $200 less in my paycheck,” one worker said, who started working in a Florida store at around 40 hours per week. She now works less than 20 hours some weeks. 'I have no idea how I'm going to pay rent or buy food.’” (CNN, 10/14/19). A lesson for our legislators. Hopefully they are paying attention.

**California “Green” Policies Lead to New “Dark Age.”** California’s policies encouraging and/or mandating the use of renewable energy have created an infrastructure hazard. “For years, the utility [PG&E] skimped on safety upgrades and repairs while pumping billions into green energy and electric-car subsidies to please its overlords in Sacramento. Credit Suisse has estimated that long-term contracts with developers of renewables cost the utility $2.2 billion annually more than current market power rates. Now, in large parts of California, if you want to keep the lights on during the blackouts, you better have a flashlight or a gas lamp. Twenty-first century green dreams have led to
19th-century realities.” (Daily Signal, 10/13/9). Another lesson for our legislators. Hopefully they are paying attention.

**Marxists for Change, or the Real Climate Change Agenda.** The Marxist newspaper Socialist*Appeal (9/26/19) produced a triumphant headline following the September 20 Climate Strike: "Marxists join Climate Strike: for System Change, not Climate Change!" The article reports the enthusiasm of climate strike crowds in the U.S. and abroad for the replacement of climate destroying capitalism with socialism. (The article didn't explain how socialism is climate friendly.) There were no reports of climate strikes in socialist countries.

**Financing Climate Warriors.** Forbes annual list of the wealthiest Americans is out (10/31/19). #8 on the list is Michael Bloomberg. ($53.4 billion). "The former New York City mayor announced in March that he would not run for President in 2020, instead launching Beyond Carbon, 'the largest coordinated campaign to tackle climate change every undertaken in the United States.'" Look for his billions to finance a climate change group near you.

**Financing Anti-Carbon Tax Warriors.** Groups opposing a carbon tax (at least ours) get zilch from the major oil companies. Why? Because they are under legal attack for supposedly knowing that CO2 emissions will destroy the planet in a hundred years, but not telling anyone. Writes Josh Siegel (Washington Examiner, 10/15/19) "Fossil fuel companies have sought legal liability protection in exchange for them backing a carbon tax." Why should they care about a carbon tax? They'll just pass the cost on to their customers in higher prices.

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**Book of the Month**

**Trust Me, I’m Lying**

Confessions of a Media Manipulator

By Ryan Holliday

If you want to know where fake news comes from, Trust Me, I’m Lying is a pretty good primer, albeit a little dated having been published in 2012. Nonetheless, Ryan Holliday gives his reader a compelling if nauseating tour behind the scenes of how “news” makes it from obscurity to the thing you’re reading or watching right now.

Holliday is a blogger and public relations guy who uses every trick in the book to get his or his clients’ message into the public consciousness. To do this he manufactures controversy and manipulates the media. In one example of a movie he was promoting, I Hope They Serve Beer in Hell by Tucker Max, Holliday personally vandalizes posters for the movie that he himself put up, then photographs the vandalized posters and, using a number of bogus email handles, sends a “tips” to local bloggers about the public “outrage” surrounding the “controversial” film. Using more fake email handles, he pokes local feminist groups to protest the “misogynist” Max. Their responses stir more stories.
The low level blog chatter gets picked up by a “legitimate” local paper…. Step by step, he builds the snowball into an avalanche.

And, just as there are people out there manipulating the media, the media in many cases are out there manipulating their readers. Rather than enlighten, they objective is to spark outrage. Rather than explain a complicated issue and discuss solutions, they seek to polarize. Lazy reporters don’t bother to confirm the veracity, let alone the identity, of sources. If the story is too good to be true, run with it, get the clicks, and issue a correction later, which no one will read. Or, in many cases, the author will manufacture another cycle of fake news around the correction.

If you want to be better at filtering out all the nonsense that comes along through social media and, more and more, through the old-guard media, this book will provide you with a good tool kit.

Still, I would urge folks to take Holliday at his word – that he’s lying. While he confesses to a lot of bad behavior on behalf of some people who, in the aftermath of the 2012 publishing of his book, proved not too saintly, the book has the feel of a mob member ratting in order to save his own skin just as the feds are closing in. The confession is valuable, and hopefully it helps good people catch more bad people, but in the end, you really don’t want to see the guy on the stand walk away scot free.

- Reviewed by Rob Roper, president of the Ethan Allen Institute

The Final Word

November Survey: OneCare/All Payer
What do you think of the OneCare (or “All Payer”) healthcare experiment in Vermont?
- It’s working great, expand its budget and scope to $1.6 billion and 250,000 Vermonters.
- It’s not working yet, but we should expand its budget and scope to $1.6 billion and 250,000 Vermonters in hopes that the increases make it work.
- It’s not working yet but give it more time at its current scope and budget to demonstrate results.
- It’s not working. Scrap it now before it becomes “too big to fail.”
- I have never heard of this program.

Go to: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/OneCare-AllPayer to take the survey.

October Survey Results: Climate Strike
Did the Climate Strike acts of “civil disobedience” make you more likely or less likely to support the strikers’ agenda?
- More likely. 2.13% (1)
- Less likely. 46.81% (22)
- No difference, I didn’t support it before. 51.06% (24)
- No difference, I fully supported it before. 0% (0)