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gutting 'Sicko'

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Last month, Michael Moore and the California Nurses Association led a rally in Sacramento for government provided health care, what proponents call "single payer." Now Moore's Sicko has finally hit the theaters, and it's time for Americans to know the truth about a government monopoly health system, a sham of a health-care "solution."

At his Sacramento press conference, Moore railed against the Martin Luther King Jr. Harbor hospital in Los Angeles, where a patient died of a perforated bowel after lying on the emergency room floor for 45 minutes. Since 2004, the hospital has received more than a dozen state and federal safety citations. Hospital errors included leaving sick patients unattended (which resulted in death for three of them), giving patients the wrong medications, and using tasers to restrain psychiatric patients. This hospital is not private, however. It is owned by the County of Los Angeles. So much for reliable government care.

The filmmaker is so mired in unhealthy hysterics that he contradicts himself. For example, he attacks "for-profit" health care, ignoring the reality that 85 percent of U.S. hospitals are non-profit, and almost half of privately insured Americans have policies from non-profit health insurers.

The private insurers Moore criticizes are also burdened with government interference that raises the cost of their health policies. Most states force insurers to sell health policies laden with mandates that many individuals would not voluntarily purchase. The Council for Affordable Health Insurance has reported that mandated benefits have increased to the more

than 1,800 today. In some states, mandated benefits have raised the cost of individual health insurance by 45 percent.

Government solutions that create more government amount to nothing but expensive salt in the wound. We should encourage insurers, and all players in American health to be more competitive, not scrap them for big-government bureaucracy. Mr. Moore prefers to abolish private insurance in favor of government-run, single-payer health care, the blueprint for California Senator Sheila Kuehl's SB-840. This will not create universal care, only a government monopoly. SB-840 would prohibit private health insurance, and allow government take over of both insurance and the hospitals.

In Canada, the labor unions keep the government health monopoly breathing in exchange for union dues. Moore's sidestepping in Sicko overlooks the 2005 Canadian Supreme Court ruling that government monopoly health care is a blatant violation of Canadians' human rights. When Mr. Zeliotis, the winning plaintiff in this case, needed hip surgery, he tried to pay privately for his operation rather than wait in the government queue (which takes two to four years). The government stopped him. The denial of such a choice prolonged his pain and threatened his safety.

Mr. Moore is also fond of the single-payer system in Cuba, a one-party communist dictatorship. Some 11 million Cubans attend run-down facilities, receive dated prescription drugs, and are even required to bring their own sheets, food and soap to the hospital. Communist Party bosses get better treatment, but when it's time for the great dictator Fidel Castro to go under the knife, he chose to fly in a specialist from Spain.



It's a presumption throughout Michael Moore's new documentary: Only universal coverage will fix the country's health care woes. But will it ever happen? (AP Photo/Reed Saxon)

Meanwhile, government-run health care already presents problems right here at home. Medicaid was instituted in the 1960s for the poor, but it has grown far beyond its capacity, putting taxpayers under great strain. In order to keep costs down, Medicaid underpays physicians, who have increasingly stopped accepting Medicaid beneficiaries as a result. Government restrictions also make it challenging to get prescription drugs for Medicaid patients.

Mr. Moore's fictitious remedies fail as health care reform and don't even amount

to effective propaganda. He should get on a Canadian waiting list for treatment, try the "second" system that serves most Cubans, or follow a Medicaid patient's struggle to get health care from the government. The states, and Congress, would be wise to ignore hysterics and pursue reforms that put individual Americans, not the government, in charge of their health care.

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