

Dr. Washington

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Health Care: The Census Bureau reported last week that the number of uninsured Americans jumped to almost 51 million last year. Is this a reason to become panicked and reform the system? No.

Yet "reform" is already here — in the form of a government-heavy overhaul the public did not want and still doesn't like but which had to be done, according to Democrats, because too few Americans have medical insurance.

For them, the numbers released Thursday — 50.7 million uninsured in 2009 vs. 46.3 million in 2008 — are proof their bold action was needed.

"The increase in uninsured Americans last year is clear evidence of how critical it was to take action to protect patients," Senate Finance Committee Chair Max Baucus, D-Mont., an ObamaCare author, said in a written statement. "And that's exactly what the Affordable Care Act will do."

Leaving aside for now the fact that the higher uninsured rate is tied directly to the job losses that Baucus' party is making worse, let's look at the historical data to see if his rhetoric is justified.

At 50.7 million uncovered, 16.7% of the country was uninsured in 2009. The ratio the year before was 15.4%. That's not a sharp change from one year to the next, nor is it a significant deviation from the recent historical norm.

The rate has varied from 12.9% in 1987, to 15.4% in 1995 and 1996, to 15.8% in 1998, then down to 15.1% three years later. Observed on a chart, the rate is a rather straight line that bumps up a bit in 2009 as the economy went cold.

Though ratios are helpful in defining problems and finding solutions, Devon Herrick from the National Center for Policy Analysis has another way of looking at the numbers. While the ratio of uninsured remains steady, the number of Americans with coverage has increased by 22 million over the last decade. At the same time the number without coverage "only increased about 5.3 million."

For this, the country has been saddled with socialized medicine that will cost trillions and erode the quality of treatment?

Under normal conditions we should expect the percentage of uninsured to drop when the economy recovers. But we're not living in normal times.

Bob Moffit of the Heritage Foundation believes that "the exodus from job-based insurance will only escalate under ObamaCare." He notes that "under the president's system, approximately 14 million Americans will lose or be moved out of their existing job-based coverage."

And into the government system, which, of course, is where the Democrats want every American to be, whether they like it or not.