

## Fact and Comment

*"With all thy getting get understanding."*



## You Can Do Something!

WHEN THE CLINTONS TRIED TO NATIONALIZE health care in 1993, the whole industry—doctors, nurses, pharmaceutical companies, hospitals, clinics, equipment makers, the business community and everyone else—rose up in righteous opposition. This time many of these same players are supping with the D.C. devils, figuring if they "have a place at the table" they can somehow survive and thrive. They're halluci-



nating, but that's where we're at.

The only way this latest nationalization scheme will be diluted or derailed is if the public rises up and says "No!" to government-run health care. Do your part. Go to the Web site [freeourhealthcarenow.com](http://freeourhealthcarenow.com) and sign the electronic petition. Then let your representative know what you think, and mobilize your family and friends. It's your life and the lives of those for whom you care.

## Parallel Universe—D.C. Style

FEDERAL SPENDING IS EXPLODING, AND TAXES IN ALL FORMS ARE headed up, too. But there's another part of Uncle Sam's reach into the economy that gets only sporadic attention yet is enormously impactful and costly: federal regulations. Everyone talks about them, but few realize just how consequential and far-reaching they are. We all know the volume of rules is growing, but the government doesn't issue—as it does with the budget—a handy compendium of what's actually taking place. Each year, however, the Competitive Enterprise Institute issues its own overview, "Ten Thousand Commandments: An Annual Snapshot of the Federal Regulatory State," by Clyde Wayne Crews Jr. ([cei.org/issue-analysis/2009/05/28/ten-thousand-commandments](http://cei.org/issue-analysis/2009/05/28/ten-thousand-commandments)). It's an eye-opening, if hardly reassuring, document that puts things in perspective.

Last year Congress passed and the President signed into law a total of 285 bills. Yet federal regulatory agencies issued 3,830 "final" rules. The total regulatory compliance costs of all these regulations hit \$1.172 trillion in 2008. That's almost as much as Uncle Sam raised in individual income tax collections and three times the \$345 billion in corporate income taxes.

With all that the Obama Administration wants to do regarding health care, energy and everything else, you can count on the regulations to mushroom just the way federal spending is now. There are already loads of rules in the pipeline: "61 federal departments, agencies, and commissions have 4,004 regulations in play at various stages of implementation ... 180 are 'economically sig-

nificant' rules, packing at least \$100 million in economic impact."

Crews and his colleagues do a remarkable job in pulling all this information together, but obviously the government should be doing it for us. There is much to be done in terms of disclosure, accountability and preventing excess regulation. At the least, "like federal spending, each agency's flow of regulations and their costs should be tracked and monitored each year." But this is just a starting point. There are various levels of cost-benefit analyses applied to many of these myriad rules, but as the report points out, "it largely amounts to agency self-policing; agencies that perform 'audits' of their own rules would rarely admit that a rule's benefits do not justify the costs involved."

CEI and Crews advocate going further: "Congress should answer for the compliance costs (and benefits) of federal regulations. Requiring expedited votes on economically significant or controversial agency rules before they become binding on the population would reestablish congressional accountability, helping to fulfill a principle of 'no regulation without representation.'"

Obviously the report does not take the simplistic approach that all regulations are bad, just as not all federal spending is wasteful and useless. But the public has a right to know the scope of what Washington does with all these rules and diktats: what they are supposed to achieve, what their costs are—and what they actually achieve. It's all about accountability, which, even by the easy standards of Washington, has been noticeably absent.

## Evil Agency—And It Ain't the CIA

MOST PEOPLE PROBABLY HAVEN'T HEARD OF ONE OF THE MOST powerful and destructive agencies in Washington: the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board (PCAOB). It was created

by the 2002 Sarbanes-Oxley Act, with the task of setting and policing the auditing standards for publicly held companies. The PCAOB not only conducts investigations of accounting firms but

