

President Bill Clinton, a shrewd and tenacious politician, has the best shot to reshape the health-care system of any president since Johnson—and every one of them has tried. But compare Clinton's situation to that of Lyndon Johnson. Clinton won by a mere 43 percent of the vote—less than the 46 percent Michael Dukakis accumulated in losing to George Bush four years ago.

Clinton faces more sophisticated lobbyists with deeper pockets. He must deal with a health industry of well-heeled insurers, doctors, hospitals, pharmaceutical companies, medical equipment manufacturers, unions, health maintenance organizations and nursing homes, each seeking to protect its take out of a business that will be running at a one-trillion-dollar-a-year clip by the end of 1993. According to the Citizens Fund, health PACs doled out \$24 million in strategically-targeted contributions for the 1992 election cycle, about evenly divided between Republicans and Democrats. To top it off, the President faces a more complex health-care system, an aging population, and a technology revolution that all require an intricate legislative fix.

Clinton does have the benefit of tremendous demand for reform from a variety of interests, millions of citizens, and businesses which can no longer afford health care. But without campaign finance reform, private dollars will blunt that demand, and sensible health-care proposals to give us all quality care at reasonable cost will once again land in the bin of legislative leftovers.

*Joseph A. Califano, Jr.*

## Phony Debates

Phony debates are back again. Both proponents and opponents of granting \$1.6 billion in foreign aid to Russia are marshaling patently untenable arguments. Those who favor the aid maintain that it will save democracy and capitalism in the former USSR; that otherwise we will lapse back into a Cold War, an arms race, and huge American military expenditures to defend ourselves from a suddenly threatening Russia, one dominated by resurgent Communists or right-wing extremists. At

the very least, this camp argues, the \$1.6 billion will “stabilize” Yeltsin and allow him time to turn his country around.

Yet the fact is that the funds at issue are to be drawn from those previously set aside for aid to Russia and hence entail no net increase in foreign aid. (No wonder the Russian press skipped right over this controversy; the arguments, after all, were geared to sway the American public). The \$1.6 billion under discussion can help Russia as much as you could reduce the deficit by volunteering to pay taxes that are due anyhow.

Most important, the amount of money at stake—even if increased at a later date and amplified by what other countries will pitch in—is paltry. To gain a sense of how little \$1.6 billion is, note that the Germans are spending about \$100 billion a year for at least ten years on developing an area, the former East Germany, that is much smaller than Russia, and in much better shape. In addition, the Germans are supplementing this financial effort by drawing on a large number of Westerners for both economic management and democratic government. Hence, even if we granted Russia \$160 billion a year, there is no guarantee that this sum would suffice; \$1.6 billion is like trying to bail out the Titanic with a dixie™ cup.

Opponents to monetary aid to Russia argue that we need the money for our own economy. But the domestic debate is hardly more genuine than the foreign one. Democrats and Republicans have duked it out over a \$16-billion stimulus package. Clinton advisors argued that this amount is required to ensure a firm economic recovery—above all, lots of jobs. Opponents have maintained that the sums will only add to the deficit, and be wasted as the economy is, it is recovering quite well anyhow, thank you.

Once again, these politicians have engaged the American public in a game with high stakes but play money. The fact is that \$16 billion would have no lasting effect on either our multi-trillion dollar economy or our gargantuan deficit one way or the other. It may have created quite a few temporary summer jobs, but real jobs that outlast the sunshine are very costly to develop. Moreover, even a small cut in interest rates would boost the economy and reduce government spending more than these government expenditures.

Why these debates? They take us back to the shadow boxing of symbolic politics. The aid to Russia is probably engineered to ensure that nobody can charge the Democrats with having “lost” Russia, the way they were charged with having “lost” China. (Or the charges and countercharges may be aimed at some other such narrow purpose one can only guess at, given the unrealistic arguments being advanced). Similarly, the stimulus package was largely a symbolic gesture to satisfy liberals who want the pain of belt-tightening that deficit reduction entails to be associated with some palliative (or some other such hidden agenda).

One of the virtues of the last election is that we started to outgrow the fairy tale of voodoo economics, and that nursery rhyme about our need to build ever-more nuclear weapons to defend ourselves from a country that can hardly make its trains run on time. The public emerged from its hibernation sensing correctly that change was afoot—that the frank talk about the dangers of the deficit and of a gridlocked Congress captured by lobbyists was allowing us to participate in an authentic debate over what must be done. President Clinton should resist those of his advisors who are urging him to resort to phony politics. On occasion, they may win him an approval point for a day, but in the longer run they erode our trust in government and undermine our willingness to support it.

*Amitai Etzioni*

## The Language Stretchers

Derek Humphry knows that words matter. A leading figure in the euthanasia movement, Humphry says his side lost at the polls in Washington state largely because it first lost the battle over language. The pro-euthanasia campaigners talked broadly about “aid-in-dying.” But the media and public, Humphry says, “used the real words with