



Skoch2010

Issues Update

December 30, 2009

Health Care—Now What?

The Senate did as many of us expected, and pushed through its version of health care "reform." The measure will soon move to both chambers of Congress to allow the differences in the two versions to be reconciled.

We were fascinated by comments attributed to both of our senators indicating we will benefit from its implementation. Blanche Lincoln said "I think the more people do understand about the health care bill, the more comfort they feel with it."

In other words, we just don't understand it now, but we'll be glad government is getting involved even more in our healthcare when we smarten up.

Wow.

More Bailouts

On Christmas Eve, the Treasury Department moved to make potential aid to Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac unlimited, lifting the previous \$400 billion cap on government money the two financial institutions could draw on.

Rep. Dennis Kucinich (D., Ohio) said "This cannot be used simply to purchase toxic assets at inflated prices, thus transferring the losses to the U.S. taxpayers and acting as a back door [Troubled Asset Relief Program]."

And TARP raises its ugly head again.

Government bail-outs are unconstitutional and bad policy, and people who vote for them do not deserve to be in office.

First Class Travelers

The *Wall Street Journal* published an insightful article on December 16th. It described a five-day trip taken by a dozen lawmakers to Scotland in November. The official purpose of the trip was to meet with foreign government officials and attend a session of the "NATO Parliamentary Assembly," but as the article describes it—like a lot of other congressional trips—this was a fun time of shopping, site-seeing, wining, and dining at our expense.

The complete article is here, and you might want to browse it to see how our congress is spending our money on what can only be described as taxpayer funded junkets.

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB126092430041092995.html>

Some interesting facts from the article:

- The conference ran Friday through Tuesday. Everyone except Rep. John Tanner skipped the last two days.

- Besides sleeping rooms, the delegation rented the hotel's presidential suite and two adjacent rooms as a control room to "provide work space, meeting rooms and easy access to American-style food." The hotel removed beds in those rooms and in their place set up a bar, a snack room and office space. The extra rooms were rented for five nights at a cost \$1,500 a night and were stocked with liquor, beer, chips and salsa, sandwiches, cookies and candy.
- The group stayed in top-floor rooms facing Edinburgh Castle. The rooms cost at least \$300 a night.
- The group flew on an Air Force plane at government expense.
- The spouses of nine of the 12 House members went along.
- The group had a bus and a Mercedes minivan at their disposal for touring, shopping trips and transportation to dinners and the conference. The cost of the two vehicles with drivers was \$2,500 a day.
- Military escorts helped the 11 who were leaving early to check out, while hotel staff loaded a truck with luggage and shopping purchases. The hotel billed the delegation \$200 for hauling suitcases and suit bags, seven brown boxes, a liquor box and a large white cooler.
- After they landed in the U.S., a van and a bus brought them back to Capitol Hill.

And we really enjoyed this comment: "The lawmakers, spouses and aides chatted in front of the Rayburn House Office Building. Rep. Baron Hill hugged Georgia Rep. Scott's wife and said: 'It was fun.'"

Why do spouses travel? Well, according to the article, "Lawmakers say traveling with spouses compensates for being away from them a lot in Washington." We can't help but wonder how this is taken by our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines who are deployed—without families—around the world often for a year at a time.

According to the article, the cost of government-funded overseas travel was \$13 million in 2008, a 70% jump from 2005. And the \$13 million didn't include the high cost of flying on Air Force planes, which lawmakers don't have to disclose.

We understand there are legitimate reasons our legislators need to travel, and we suppose on rare occasion there may be reason for a spouse to go along. But please read the article and note the shopping, spa trips and private "wining, and dining" that made up so much of this trip. We think you'll agree this kind of expensive behavior by our elected representatives is scandalous and an embarrassment.

One of the attendees (and one of the eleven who left early to go do other things) was our Congressman John Boozman.

This is the same John Boozman who on December 14th said in a press release (regarding increasing the national debt ceiling): "Congress must act responsibly with taxpayer dollars...Arkansas families are forced to tighten their belts and change their spending habits and Washington needs to do the same."

We wonder why that thought didn't occur to him in Scotland.

Until next time...

A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Bernie Skoch". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'B'.

Bernie Skoch