

## Our Opinion: Wrong kind of consistency

Tuesday, November 20, 2007

We will give Gov. Rod Blagojevich points for consistency — at least when it comes to abuse of his powers.

He did not like the fact that the budget sent to him this year did not fund his proposed expansion of publicly subsidized health insurance. So, Blagojevich took it open himself to veto nearly \$500 million from that budget.

Budget vetoes are a gubernatorial prerogative. If the governor believes the legislators are spending too much money, the governor can eliminate some of that spending. But Blagojevich had something very different in mind when he trimmed hundreds of millions from the current budget. He didn't toss that spending authority in the "nice try, but not this year" bin. Nope, he tossed it in the "now I get to spend it my way" bin.

His veto did not resolve the matter, however. Or at least that's what many thought. There was another hurdle for the governor to clear before he could launch into his massive expansion of health care.

Last week, the Blagojevich administration requested permission from the legislature's Joint Committee on Administrative Rules (JCAR) for an emergency expansion of the program.

The state had allowed families earning up to 185 percent of the poverty level — \$38,203 for a family of four — to participate in the state-subsidized program. The governor says it is an emergency to increase those eligibility requirements to 400 percent of the poverty level. That means a family of four earning \$82,600 could qualify for the program. Blagojevich says the new rules would make 147,000 more adult Illinois residents eligible for state-subsidized health insurance.

It is shocking to some that a family earning more than \$82,000 would qualify for a state health insurance program. Yet, Blagojevich and many others note that many people who are solidly in the middle class income level still face grave concerns about being able to afford health insurance.

People with concerns about moving toward socialized medicine have legitimate arguments. On the other hand, Blagojevich is not nuts to point out that health care is a major concern even for people who might drive newer mini vans to their kids' soccer matches.

One thing is certain: This is a debate that has yet to be resolved in Illinois as well as the United States. Blagojevich doesn't see it that way. He's already figured out who is right, and — surprise, surprise, it's him — no matter what the General Assembly says.

So, when the legislature voted 107-0 against his giant tax increase to fund the health-care program, Blagojevich took it as a “maybe” and forged ahead. Like we said, he is consistent when it comes to abusing his powers as governor.

So when the bipartisan legislative panel last week voted 9-2 against the governor’s emergency expansion request, only the uninitiated saw it as a gubernatorial stop sign. Blagojevich didn’t even see it as a speed bump. By Friday, we had learned the orders were already issued to expand the program. He says JCAR’s authority of rulemaking is only advisory.

Then why even ask? Why even pretend to play by the rules, governor? Maybe it’s time for Blagojevich to break out the crown and scepter and start ruling as the sovereign he apparently wants to be. The sad thing is Blagojevich’s disdain for working within the system may end up harming the cause to expand health-care coverage. It certainly has hindered progress in many other important areas: pension reform, infrastructure and school-funding reform, to name a few.

Consistency is generally a good thing. But it’s nothing to be proud of when you consistently screw up.