Primary Considerations

By Eric Postal, MD [3]

Advice for presidential wannabes from a health care professional: stay out of it.

I’m far from what one might consider a political wonk. Yet, like many others, I find myself far more interested in this year’s lead up to the Presidential primaries than I have been for elections in recent memory.

Mostly, it’s the sheer entertainment value; this has become better than any reality TV show I’ve seen. Which isn’t saying much, I suppose, since I usually don’t bother with such stuff. Still, between incredulously shaking my head and laughing out loud in spite of myself at the latest gaffe or zinger (outdone only by the pundits’ inability to wisely predict how any of it will play out), I find myself occasionally trying to figure out whether, for a change, I support any of the candidates in particular…as opposed to considering the least unappealing.

It’s probably an exercise in frustration to do so. After all, if I decide that any given candidate is my favorite at this stage, the odds are excellent that s/he won’t be the one who manages to go the distance, and in the meantime I’ll develop an abiding dislike for whoever does.

Besides, I’ve heard little to no detail about the candidates’ platforms. Which isn’t to say they don’t have any; one or two of them might have said something about what they’d do if elected, but it probably got drowned out by a competing voice in the scrum. Even if I did hear a sensible proposal, AND the candidate in question actually won office, what are the odds their campaign promise would survive and make it into policy at all resembling its original form?

I’ve come to believe that a new prez, upon taking office and getting briefed about all the top secret stuff we commoners cannot be permitted to know, suddenly learns that everything he thought he knew while campaigning is wrong, and whatever he previously told us was the right thing to do now stands revealed to him as the most boneheaded blunder possible.

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The one area I think maybe I can hope to understand sufficiently to judge prospective candidates, should they say something on the subject, is health care. Heck, I’ve been in this field for awhile, and if you add the people years of experience from all the other medical folks with whom I’ve rubbed elbows that’s got to count for some sort of wisdom.

So what should a candidate say to appeal to me, a still kinda-sorta young physician with (hopefully) decades of work to go in the health care system? Not to mention probable usage of same at some point, as a consumer rather than provider?

I’m less clear on what I want to hear than what I don't. Things liable to turn me off: Sweeping, grandiose gazillion point master plans to rejigger everything, laid atop gazillion point master plans of yesteryear without bothering to remove what didn’t work before. New layers of oversight and control from presumably-capable and benevolent entities I’ll hope to never meet (since having to do so will probably mean unfriendly, guilty-till-proven-innocent scrutiny of my record). Further diminution of the physician’s role in practicing medicine in the ways they (and their patients!) see fit. In other words, more of what we’ve been seeing for the past years, if not decades.
I think the best thing a candidate could express to appeal to me, and many other docs I have met, would be an intention to do nothing else to us, but rather take a huge step back, and rein in the governmental/regulatory 800-pound gorilla while s/he’s at it. A simple, “We’ll get out of your way now,” and I think there would be resounding cheers. A groundswell of support from actual health care workers, rather than staged photo-ops with figureheads from the AMA and such. That, of course, would mean a major relinquishing of power, something government tends not to do, so I’m not holding my breath. Guess I’ll just keep watching Trump in the meantime.

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