

Lerner: Nursing homes wrong to blame flaws on federal funding

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Steve Ackerson, the head of the Iowa Health Care Association, must have thought it important to take time out of his busy campaign donating schedule to criticize the recent Families for Better Care ranking of the quality of Iowa's nursing homes as 46th in the nation, down from 41st a year ago.

The data used for this ranking is, contrary to Ackerson's suggestion, empirical data from many of the same sources Ackerson, himself, relies upon.

Even more important than this fact, however, is Ackerson's unmitigated gall to blame poor caregiving on not enough taxpayer money funding his association's mostly for-profit member nursing homes.

Here's why: The Medicare and Medicaid programs are voluntary programs. Nursing homes can choose whether to participate in these programs.

If Ackerson's member homes lose money by participating, all they have to do is elect not to participate, not request federal "Certification," and, voila, they don't need to complain about losing money, and they aren't even any longer subject to federal oversight, or the "gotcha" regulation Ackerson is paid (in the six figures) to battle against.

They can accept all the private pay and insurance funded residents they like, without federal oversight!

Here's another fun fact, since Ackerson is so concerned about not enough taxpayer funding for his members: Ackerson and the IHCA are actually on our Iowa taxpayer Medicaid payroll, themselves.

A few years ago, his salary and benefits topped more than \$317,000, and IHCA's West Des Moines headquarters are valued in the millions. You see, the membership dues paid to Ackerson and his organization are your taxpayer dollars, courtesy of Iowa's politicians who Ackerson is busy courting for more money, and less regulation.

Maybe Ackerson will inform us when he last changed a bed pan or answered a call light (by regulation, he has a full 15 minutes to do so), or helped any nursing home resident, with anything.

Recently, Gov. Terry Branstad was asked about the state's critical need to address the shortage of well trained nursing home workers, and their poverty-level wages. Branstad had the audacity to respond, "It would be my hope and desire that those homes would use the savings from the property tax reduction, from the reduction in the employment tax, to increase salaries and benefits for the direct-care workers who are employed in those facilities."

So, there you have it: All of the Governor's miraculous tax cuts, "It is hoped, and desired," just might be used to take care of our loved ones in nursing homes. Or, maybe the IHCA and Ackerson will think of another way to spend Iowans' taxpayer money, with the help of his friendly politicians in need of campaign dollars.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dean Lerner is a graduate of Grinnell College and Drake University Law School. He retired from 30 years of Iowa public service as an Assistant Attorney General, Chief Deputy Secretary of State, and Deputy/Director of the Iowa Department of Inspections & Appeals. [Click here to read more of his work.](#)

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