

Noted.

PUBLIC OPTION, REMIXED: Think of the healthcare legislation **Barack Obama** signed into law on March 23 as the frame of a building that's far from finished. The serious work on the project of extending healthcare to all Americans and controlling insurance and pharmaceutical industry abuses remains to be done. Congressman **Alan Grayson** understands this.

Even as he argued for passage of the landmark legislation, he took the next step—introducing a **Medicare You Can Buy Into** bill as part of a reformulated public-option strategy that, in Grayson's words, is designed “to provide real competition to the private health insurance companies.”

His strategy: allow Americans to buy into the Medicare program at cost. “You want it, you pay for it, you're in,” he explains. In a matter of days, Grayson had attracted more than 50,000 signers on a petition backing the bill, and eighty House members had signed on as co-sponsors. JOHN NICHOLS

TERRORIST TV? In December the House passed a bill to sanction and label as terrorists Arab satellite providers that air “anti-American incitement to violence in the Middle East.” Though the bill targets the channels of **Hamas**, **Hezbollah** and other designated terrorist organizations, its broad language has been criticized as an attack on media expression in the Arab world.

Barely reported in the American press, the proposed legislation has simmered in Arabic newspapers and talk shows. In late January Arab information ministers met in Cairo, where they summarily denounced the bill, although the **Arab League** has been mulling over its own plans for increased satellite censorship.

HR 2278 defines anti-American incitement to violence as “the act of persuading, encouraging, instigating, advocating, pressuring, or threatening so as to cause another to commit a violent act against any person, agent, instrumentality, or official of, is affiliated with, or is serving as a representative of the United States.” The bill directs the president to submit an annual report to Congress with “a country-

by-country list and description of media outlets that engage in anti-American incitement to violence” as well as a list of the satellite providers that carry such broadcasts.

But it is the provision to tag as terrorists “satellite providers that knowingly and willingly contract with entities designated as Specially Designated Global Terrorists” that rattles observers. “Take something like **Khaled Meshal**, who's the political leader of Hamas,” **Marc Lynch**, an Arab media specialist at George Washington University, told WNYC. “No self-respecting Arab TV station can afford to not interview him. So if they're going to define any contact with Khaled Meshal as incitement to anti-American violence, then pretty much every TV station would have something to fear.”

Reporters Without Borders condemned the resolution as “discriminatory” and lacking “clarity.” The bill “contradicts American support for media freedom and could not be implemented in the Middle East today as crafted without causing great damage,” the organization said in a statement.

The bill passed by a wide margin of 395-3 in the House. The “nays” were two Texans, Democrat **Eddie Bernice Johnson** and Republican **Ron Paul**, and Democrat **Mike Honda** of California. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee is reviewing the measure. FREDERICK DEKNATEL

MEDIA MONOPOLY: During **George W. Bush's** presidency, when Republicans controlled the White House, Congress and the FCC, media reformers succeeded in building a left-right coalition to oppose FCC chair **Michael Powell's** moves to lift barriers to consolidation of media ownership. When the FCC voted 3-2 to lift the cross-ownership ban—which blocked newspapers from buying broadcast outlets and setting up one-size-fits-all newsrooms—there was an outcry from Congress, and the Third Circuit Court of Appeals blocked the rule change.

Four years later, Republicans on the FCC pushed through a partial relaxation of the ban on cross-ownership in any of the nation's top twenty markets. And the Third Circuit has now allowed the change to go forward. It's a bad decision that threatens to

reduce the number of newsrooms and put more reporters out of work in communities that have already suffered from the downsizing of journalism. New FCC chair **Julius Genachowski** and his fellow commissioners need to signal directly—and as part of the FCC's current policy review—that the agency wants more diversity, more competition and more journalism in the nation's largest cities. JOHN NICHOLS

TEXAS TEACHER: The **Texas Board of Education's** attempt to rewrite history through red-colored, conservative glasses is by now infamous. References to **Harriet Tubman** were eliminated and replaced by **Clara Barton**; the role of **Thomas Jefferson** was reduced, while those of conservative leaders like **Ronald Reagan** and **Phyllis Schlafly** were augmented.

Thankfully, there's **Rebecca Bell-Metereau**, a teacher and the Democratic board of education candidate in District 5, which represents fifty-one independent school districts and a half-million children. In November she'll face **Ken Mercer**, the Republican incumbent and social conservative who supported all the curriculum changes.

In March 2009 the board passed a provision encouraging students to question scientific theories, including evolution. To his opponents, Mercer wrote in the *San Antonio Express*, “Where is the evidence for one species changing to another?” In a TV broadcast, Mercer claimed his district did not want “how to” sex education discussing contraception—a claim quickly debunked by polls showing the exact opposite.

Bell-Metereau has been a teacher for almost thirty years, having taught students in the **Peace Corps** and now English and film at **Texas State University**. She has been instrumental in lowering the Texas college dropout rate, having spearheaded initiatives to increase preparedness.

She speaks from experience of being a teacher and even instructing teachers. “My plan is to work hard and to have a very simple message,” says Bell-Metereau. “We need someone who is more moderate. We need a teacher who has been working on education issues for the last thirty years.”

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