

THE SENATOR HENCEFORTH TO BE KNOWN AS JAY ROCK

I've been threatening to do this for a while: ditching the moniker "Jello Jay." And while I was going to hold out until we actually got a public option through the Senate, I gotta say that nothing seems to have gotten under MaxTax Baucus' skin so much as Jay Rock picking apart, detail by detail, the many ways in which the MaxTax is a big giveaway to the health care industry. Here's Jay Rock echoing Wendell Potter. And here he is noting how impotent Congress has been at trying to reign in the helath care industry with measly little laws.

Update, via Digby: Jonathan Cohn explains why Jay Rock showed up to champion health care.

Over the last few weeks Jay Rockefeller has emerged as the Senate's most visible spokesman for a public insurance option. And, purely from a public relations standpoint, this is something of a mixed blessing. He comes from West Virginia and is pretty popular there, so that certainly helps bring non-coastal credibility to the cause. But Rockefeller speaks in a plodding, rambling style that doesn't always make for great television. He's also pretty stubborn, which makes him a loud advocate but not necessarily an effective one, at least given the way the U.S. Senate works.

But Rockefeller gets something better than almost anybody I've seen—something he's expressed in interviews and, most recently, during this weeks hearings of the Senate Finance Committee. It's how everyday people, particularly those without a lot of money, interact with the health care system. It's easy to

treat health care as an abstraction—to make it all about economic theories and Congressional Budget Office projections. (I’m surely guilty of this myself.) Rockefeller sees it through the eyes of West Virginians making \$30,000 a year—people who just want to know they can pay their premiums and that, if they do, the insurance they get will protect them when they get sick.

Rockefeller’s ability to channel these feelings may seem odd, given his privileged pedigree. But it makes sense given what he’s done with his career. Remember, West Virginia didn’t choose him. He chose West Virginia, starting with his service as a VISTA volunteer. He knows his constituents very well. And he acts that way.

It’s a great piece, but I’d add one thing. I actually think Jay Rock’s stubbornness may be effective, partly because others in the Senate can explain it in terms they understand. A bunch of them—MaxTax Baucus, perhaps—will just attribute it to pique over MaxTax’s bypassing Jay Rock’s Sub-Committee. It seems to me that boorishness is forgivable in the Senate when motivated by defense of privilege and protocol. That may not be why Jay Rock is doing this—Cohn makes a good case it’s not. But I think Jay Rock will be excused for being stubborn here, which will give him license to be as stubborn as he needs to be to be effective.