HEY REPORTERS??? IT MIGHT BE WORTH POINTING OUT LIEBERMAN IS STUPID OR LYING…

As news outlets are reporting everywhere, Joe Lieberman is threatening to join a GOP filibuster of heath care reform. Brian Beutler reports the news without much elaboration on Lieberman's stated justification for doing so. (See below for Beutler's follow-up.)

> I told Senator Reid that I'm strongly inclined–i haven't totally decided, but I'm strongly inclined–to vote to proceed to the health care debate, even though I don't support the bill that he's bringing together because it's important that we start the debate on health care reform because I want to vote for health care reform this year. But I also told him that if the bill remains what it is now, I will not be able to support a cloture motion before final passage. Therefore I will try to stop the passage of the bill.

The AP provides just a hint of Lieberman's justification.

> Lieberman said Tuesday in a telephone interview with The Associated Press that he's worried a public option would be costly to taxpayers and drive up insurance premiums.

But the Politico reports Lieberman's stated justification.

> "I can't see a way in which I could vote for cloture on any bill that contained a creation of a government-operated-run

> insurance company," Lieberman added. "It's just asking for trouble — in the end, the taxpayers are going to pay and probably all people will have health insurance are going to see their premiums go up because there's going to be cost shifting as there has been for Medicare and Medicaid."
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> Lieberman said he "very much" wants to vote for health care reform but that he's worried about stifling "the economic recovery we're in" or adding to the federal debt.
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> "I feel this way about a national, government-created health insurance company — whether it's a trigger or not," he said. "My answer is — we're — we have the opportunity to do some great reforms here. These exchanges that we're talking about, I think, are going to drive competition and probably bring the cost of health insurance down or at least contain the cost increases for a lot of people. Let's give that two or three years to see how it works to see how it works before we talk about creating another entitlement that will end up increasing the national debt and putting more of a burden on taxpayers."

So here's what Joe Lieberman claims the public option will do:

- Be costly to taxpayers
- Drive up premiums
- Involve cost-shifting to private plans
- Create an entitlement
- Increase the national debt
- Put more of a tax burden on taxpayers

As DDay points out, this is utter nonsense.

> Lieberman's justification on this is just nonsense – the public option would SAVE money for the government, to the tune of $100 billion dollars over 10 years according to the Congressional Budget Office. It also would cost nothing to the taxpayer, being financed by individual premiums.

Now, there's the possibility that if the public option was set at Medicare +5, there might be cost shifting, if you ignored challenges to that claim, if you ignored the way insurance companies will game the system to push high cost people into the public option, and if you ignored the many other ways the insurance companies will be cost shifting themselves once this system is set up.

But everything else Lieberman said is horse puckey. He is either completely ignorant about health care works (unlikely, for a Senator from Connecticut). Or, he's lying his ass off as to his rationale.

Don't you think the press ought to call him on that?

Update: Here's First Read, abdicating its role as journalist by letting Lieberman's explanation go unchallenged.

Update: Kudos to CBS' Stephanie Condon for doing real reporting.

> Lieberman has said he opposes a public option because of the potential burden it could place on taxpayers. However, Democrats have crafted a public option that would be financed by premiums rather than federal funds.

Update: Ooohboy. The Hill goes above and beyond in credulously reporting Lieberman's BS. They even let him claim that he's not doing this because of CT's insurance companies.

> Sen. Joe Lieberman (I-Conn.), one of a handful of Senate wild cards in this fall’s healthcare reform debate, says his concern about the Senate bill is based on the national deficit — not the insurers that dominate his state.
>
> [snip]
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> “Insurers aren’t my biggest concern — I sued them once when I was attorney general, and I’m not afraid to end anti-trust exemptions,” Lieberman said. “I am really worried about what this could do to the deficit.”

Update: Beutler does a follow-up calling Lieberman on his BS.

> This is at great odds with the findings of most experts, who say that, by bringing efficiencies into the greater insurance market, and therefore lowering the government’s subsidy burden, a public option will actually save money.
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> I asked him to square his rationale with the experts consensus, but he was undeterred. “Well all the history we have of health entitlement programs, including the two big ones that I dearly support, Medicare and Medicaid, is that they end up costing more than we’re prepared to pay, and they add to the debt, and then they add to the burden on taxpayers.”

Update: Oh wait!! WSJ just unseated The Hill for being the most credulous on this story!! They let both Lieberman and Bayh get away with claiming they’re concerned about the deficit. And then they let Bayh argue for letting medical device makers off easy!

> Mr. Lieberman was not the only moderate to voice concerns Tuesday. Sen. Evan Bayh (D., Ind.) said he was concerned

> both about the impact of the bill of the federal budget deficit and the bill's impact on insurance premiums for families and businesses.
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> Mr. Bayh also said he would oppose a motion to proceed to the bill in its current form if a provision that would impose $40 billion in fees on the medical-device industry over 10 years isn't eased.
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> "Without that, they would definitely not have had my support," said Mr. Bayh. Medical-device makers have a big presence in his home state.

Update: Bloomberg doesn't call Lieberman out on his lies or ignorance either.

Update: Fox doesn't give Lieberman's excuse, so of course they don't debunk it.

Update: Jonathan Cohn shows other journalists how it's done.

> It literally makes no sense whatsoever. A public plan does not provide a new entitlement. It just doesn't. It's a different form of providing an entitlement. Nor is it more expensive. In fact, the stronger versions of the public plan would cost less money. Lieberman is just babbling nonsense here.
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> Another reason for his position, of course, is that Connecticut is home to some huge insurance companies, who don't want any new competition. But the other Connecticut Senator isn't threatening a filibuster.

Update: MSNBC has done several follow-ups. But they've not yet gotten around to actually reporting that Lieberman's entire premise is bogus.

Update: Mark Ambinder doesn't bother to call Lieberman on his bogus premise. Instead, he just assumes that Lieberman's "play for power"—one that relies on the flaccidity of the press—will work.

> Now — the final bill, post-conference, is going to look a bit different from the reconciled Senate bill. Lieberman is giving himself the power to influence the final bill. I doubt that the Senate leadership is going to press him too hard right now, preferring to see if he can be accommodated in the final debate.

Update: Dana Bash engages in he-said-she-said, but doesn't point out that CBO agrees with Dems that Lieberman's premise is bogus.

> Democrats call such claims fear-mongering and say a public option is the best way to bring competition to the market. President Obama has called a public option the best way to help achieve major goals of health care reform, including expanded coverage and lower costs.

Update: USA Today doesn't bother telling its readers that Lieberman's premise is bogus.

Update: Nor does CSM.

Update: Nor does the NYT.