



## Savaging Santorum

By David Catron

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*The left is hard at work assuring that Santorum remains an "also ran."*

Rick Santorum wanted people to pay attention to him. Well, he got his way. Now his every utterance is being parsed by the media and he is receiving special scrutiny from progressive pundits, who have been frantically quote-mining for material to use in their obligatory hit pieces. Among the nuggets they have unearthed involves an exchange Santorum had a month ago with a student at Dordt College, a small Christian school in Sioux Center, Iowa. The student cited a 2009 study about the number of people who allegedly die every year for lack of health insurance and averred that God does not appreciate "the fact that we have 50 to 100,000 uninsured Americans dying due to a lack of healthcare every year." Santorum replied, "I reject that number completely, that people die in America because of lack of health insurance."

Little notice was taken of this comment at the time. Since Santorum's stunning performance in Iowa, however, a spate of "news" stories and blog posts about the Dordt confrontation flooded the Internet. Predictably, most portrayed Santorum as a knuckle-dragger in denial about the carnage our health system supposedly wreaks on the uninsured. The *Huffington Post* hysterics of Alan Grayson, whose antics as a Congressman prompted his constituents to fire him in 2010, were typical: "How many more people have to die? How many more sacrifices on the altar of Almighty Greed?" Even the normally sensible Jonathan Turley wrote that the student should have known better than "to cite an academic study to Santorum during an election in which experts and intellectuals have been denounced as virtual threats to the nation."

Actually, what the student "should have known" is that the statistics he cited were produced by a group of Harvard-based single-payer activists, Physicians for a National Health Program (PNHP), notorious for publishing "research" so tendentious that it frequently fails the laugh test. In 2008, for example, PNHP published a survey claiming that 59 percent of America's physicians favored a single-payer health system despite the inconvenient fact that its own membership has never exceeded 2 percent of the country's 800,000 doctors. PNHP is, in fact, responsible for manufacturing much of the propaganda promulgated by the establishment media about the U.S. health care system, including a deliberately misleading "study" concerning the role of medical expenses in personal bankruptcies.

The specific study quoted by the Dordt student was widely panned by health policy experts. **John Goodman** of the **National Center for Policy Analysis**, for example, did an excellent job of debunking PNHP's methodology at the *Health Affairs* blog: "[T]he researchers interviewed the

uninsured only once -- and never saw them again. A decade later, the researchers assumed the participants were still uninsured and, if they died in the interim, lack of insurance was blamed as one of the causes." PNHP's recommended solution for its fictional problem was to expand Medicaid eligibility. This has now been done, much to the chagrin of the states, via ObamaCare. Unfortunately, as Goodman goes on to point out, "[P]eople enrolled in Medicaid have a much higher mortality rate than the uninsured."

Thus, Santorum was wise to reject the absurd mortality statistics quoted by the gullible Dordt student. Like any informed participant in the health care reform debate, he knew the study being cited was not credible. Unfortunately, few of the progressive journalists and bloggers covering the Republican primary race have bothered to do their homework on the actual number and plight of the uninsured. If they were willing to do their jobs honestly, they would know that no legitimate study has succeeded in showing any real connection between the lack of insurance and increased patient mortality. As Goodman points out in his *Health Affairs* write-up, a number of organizations have attempted to fake it since 1993, but none have succeeded in convincing genuinely nonpartisan health policy experts.

The accuracy of such studies is unimportant to progressive journalists because, for them, the main thing is to get the President reelected. This is what prompted their sudden interest in that brief exchange between Santorum and his uninformed Dordt interlocutor. It is also the source of tawdry comments such as the following made by Eugene Robinson about the behavior of Santorum and his wife in response to the loss of their son, Gabriel: "Not everybody is going to be down, for example, with the story of how he and his wife handled the stillborn child. It was a body that they took home to kind of sleep with it, introduce it to the rest of the family. It's a very weird story." And it is such partisanship that provides the impetus for the religious bigotry implicit in Maureen Dowd's recent reference to Santorum's "über-Catholicism."

In their quest to get Obama reelected, the first goal of the progressive punditocracy is to take down any candidate who threatens Romney. Unlike the Republican establishment, they and their White House allies know that Romney will be a weak candidate in the general election. Former DNC Chair Donna Brazile admitted as much after last Saturday's GOP debate: "Mitt Romney won tonight...and for Democrats... It was good news." Most observers dismissed that remark as a head fake, but it was nothing of the kind. It will be child's play for the Obama campaign to portray Romney as a flip-flopping Wall Street parasite with a lousy job creation record as the Governor of Massachusetts. His only memorable "accomplishment" was a health reform law that served as the prototype for ObamaCare. This is the man they want to run against.

Santorum has fewer liabilities than the other "unRomneys" who have suddenly jumped to the front of the GOP pack only to eventually fall back among the also rans. As Charles Krauthammer phrased it, "He is the first challenger to be plausibly presidential: knowledgeable, articulate, experienced, of stable character and authentic ideology." Krauthammer goes on to point out that Santorum possesses a "common-man, working-class sensibility [that] would be highly appealing to battleground-state Reagan Democrats." Thus, the left-leaning media will continue mining Santorum's record for anything, no matter how cheap, trivial or irrelevant, they can use to hobble him in his race with Romney for the GOP presidential nomination. They don't want to see him on a debate stage, standing next to Barack Obama.