

On Monday, the Supreme Court will consider the legality of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, also referred to as Obamacare. The high court will pore over Article 1, Section 8 of the Constitution to determine the true meaning behind the words, "The Congress shall have power to lay and collect taxes, duties, imposts and excises, to pay the debts and provide for the common Defense and general welfare of the United States; To regulate Commerce with foreign Nations and among the several states, and with the Indian Tribes." The 2012 Supreme Court must determine whether the Founders had any intention of mandating the behavior of private enterprises and individuals.

To me, the answer is obvious: absolutely not.

Our nation was founded on the Declaration of Independence. Freedom of choice and a free market are at the core of our nation's soul. A governmental mandate for the behavior of individuals and private enterprises is anathema to what our founders intended. The prospect of having an unelected panel of bureaucrats determining fundamental decisions about our individual health care is perhaps the most personal and intimate intrusion into our lives. The concept of this absurd and dangerous law surely ranks with the grievances laid down 236 years ago.

In January 2011, Florida federal District Judge C. Roger Vinson ruled the individual mandate unconstitutional, stating: "Never before has Congress required that everyone buy a product from a private company (essentially for life) just for being alive and residing in the United States. If [the government] has the power to compel an otherwise passive individual into a transaction... it is not hyperbolic to suggest that Congress could do almost anything it wanted." Today, this prediction is being attempted before our very eyes.

With Obamacare, insurance companies will be forced to provide contraceptive products free of charge. Why just contraception? Will the government next force insurance companies to provide surgical procedures free of charge? Where does it end? Perhaps supermarkets should be compelled to offer apples and carrots free of charge to ensure children have access to healthy food.

Beyond exerting oppressive control over individuals and private enterprises, Obamacare circumvents the foundation of our own legislative structure.

At the heart of the Affordable Care Act is the Independent Payment Advisory Panel (IPAB), made up of 15 unelected officials appointed by the president to reduce Medicare spending. The IPAB will be tasked with and given the authority to reduce costs to the government by, among other things, limiting reimbursements to doctors. It doesn't take a brain surgeon to recognize that this will lead to more physicians leaving the Medicare system, reducing access to care for our seniors and limiting available treatments.

But this isn't the most frightening part. Any recommendations by the IPAB automatically become law. The only way around this unprecedented amount of power for Washington bureaucrats is an act of Congress, with a three-fifths supermajority in the Senate. In other words, the unelected IPAB, appointed by the president, essentially becomes its own shadow legislative branch.

The fundamental structure of our government, with three co-equal branches and a careful system of checks and balances, is being usurped. Our freedoms and liberties are being chipped away, bit by bit. Our country is being transformed step by incremental step into a centrally planned, stringently controlled bureaucratic nanny state, and what I find most frightening is that a portion of our populace willingly dons the shackles, and like lemmings, marches to our demise.

Perhaps some Americans are simply unaware of the exorbitant monetary cost of this governmental behemoth. The numbers don't lie, and they are dangerous:

c \$1.76 trillion from American taxpayers to pay for Obamacare over 10 years, nearly double the \$940 billion forecast when the bill was signed into law (Congressional Budget Office). c \$52 billion in new taxes on businesses as employers are forced to provide health insurance. (CBO). c \$800,000 fewer U.S. jobs. (CBO). c \$47 billion in new taxes on drug companies and medical device makers, costs that surely will be passed down to patients, particularly our senior citizens.

c Families earning more than \$250,000 a year will see more taxes, as Obamacare adds a new tax to investment income, including capital gains, dividends, rental income and royalties.

c Insurance premiums are expected to increase 1.9 percent to 2.3 percent in 2014 and up to 3.7

percent by 2023 because Obamacare adds a premium tax on health insurers offering full coverage.

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act is unworkable and destined to fail. One need only look back a few years ago to the last big government program with the word "affordable" in it. Barney Frank's Affordable Housing Act managed, in less than a decade, to demolish the housing market, weaken financial institutions and wipe out the net worth of millions of Americans.

What makes anyone think government intervention in health care will be successful? Obamacare is unconstitutional, anti-constitutional and, most certainly, an awful piece of American policy. Let's hope after next week's Supreme Court decision it also becomes a short-lived piece of American history.

*Rep. Allen B. West is a Florida Republican.*