Politics as Performance Art

From National Review Kevin Williamson writes McHealthcare Deluxe- The Affordable Care Act is a failed political product.

> *There are better and worse ways to fail, and it pays to be conservative when trying out new products, most of which fail, or investing in a new business, most of which fail. Learning to do that well is what makes a wise venture capitalist successful and an innovative executive effective. It's also why conservatives like federalism, using the states as 50 "laboratories of democracy," as Louis Brandeis put it. Trying it out in Utah and failing costs less than trying it out coast to coast and failing — and what works in Utah may not work in New Jersey. The more robust and immediate feedback mechanism of local democracy is also why conservatives like subsidiarity, mitigating problems at the lowest effective level of government rather than treating everything as a national question.*
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> *Feedback matters. One of the reasons the private sector often is so much more effective than government is that market competition forces firms and entrepreneurs to admit error or suffer dire financial consequences. Capitalism will slap you upside the head if you do something dumb — ask President Trump's bankruptcy lawyers about that. In the marketplace as in nature, the instrument of evolution is death: Bad products and bad ideas don't make it, and capital eventually flees bad firms and bad investors. A good company doesn't punish an executive for trying something new and failing — it punishes him for refusal to admit failure when that failure is obvious and for continuing to shovel precious resources into the bonfire of his vanity.*
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> *Politics should be more like that, but it's getting less like that. Because our political identities are shaped by tribalism rather than by reason, creating a political culture*

> *that embraces healthy experimentation and iterative, incremental reform is difficult for us to do. What we do instead is put together unwieldy bundles of legislation that promise to solve a particular problem for now and for all time – and then accuse the other side of being evil for opposing it. That isn't government – it's performance art.*

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The health care debates is so contentious because it focuses the differences in political and economic philosophies into a single issue. Does this require a central government solution or is it better served by solving it locally in the 50 laboratories we call states?

One of the greatest advantages of market solutions is not that it always picks better solutions, but that it recognizes failures quicker and better. The opposite happens in government. Self serving bureaucracies institutionalize failures. Instead of admitting failure and redeploying assets into better and different solutions we institutionalize failures and increase their funding.

Trying to agree on component solutions is so arduous that we think that systemic solutions is the preferred path. But these solutions are so plagued with compromise that it has become impossible to make them effective. One side wants to build a bridge, the other side does not. We compromise by building half a bridge, spending 90% of the money and failing to provide the perceived need to cross the river.

The unwillingness to admit failure and implement corrective action is a big reason to be skeptical of expensive central solutions.