



August 10, 2009 - Topic: Health Care Reform

Obama Defends Health Care Reform Proposals in Weekly Address

In his **weekly radio and Internet address** on Saturday, President Obama responded to recent opposition and criticism to his health reform plan and sought to make the case that reform is essential to the country's economic recovery, the **AP/Miami Herald** reports.

Obama said, "We've begun to put the brakes on this recession and ... the worst may be behind us," adding, "We must lay a new foundation for future growth and prosperity, and a key pillar of a new foundation is health insurance reform" (Sidoti, *AP/Miami Herald*, 8/8).

According to **Roll Call**, Obama attempted to alleviate some concerns regarding his reform plans and also distinguish his plans from the "status quo." He said, "Let me start by dispelling the outlandish claims that reform will promote euthanasia, cut Medicaid or bring about a government takeover of health care," adding, "That's simply not true. This isn't about putting government in charge of your health insurance; it's about putting you in charge of your health insurance."

Obama continued, "Right now, we have a system that works well for the insurance industry, but that doesn't always work well for you," adding, "In the end, the debate about health insurance reform boils down to a choice between two approaches." He said, "The first is almost guaranteed to double health costs over the next decade, make millions more Americans uninsured, leave those with insurance vulnerable to arbitrary denials of coverage, and bankrupt state and federal governments," adding, "That's the status quo" (Koffler, *Roll Call*, 8/8).

GOP Response to Obama

In the **GOP's response** to Obama's address, Bob McDonnell -- the party's nominee for governor of Virginia - said Republicans are committed to helping the uninsured get the health coverage they need, "not through nationalizing the system with a costly government-run plan, but rather by supporting free-market incentives and helping small-business owners make coverage more accessible and affordable, and ensuring that Americans can keep their individual private policies" (*AP/Miami Herald*, 8/8).

Obama To Be 'Very Direct' in Responding to Critics

A senior White House official said Obama will be "very direct" in challenging critics of his health reform plans over the August congressional recess, **Roll Call** reports. According to *Roll Call*, White House officials are concerned that opposition to the Democrats' reform plans has risen in recent weeks, but they say Obama will not hold back in responding strongly to attacks expected over the next month.

"It's been confusing for people and there's a lot of misinformation, so the president is going to use August to set the record straight," the senior official said, adding, "He'll make the case for reform and make the case that the people trying to stop reform are the ones happy with the status quo."

Last month, Obama hosted two town-hall meetings in North Carolina and Virginia in an effort to have a more direct dialogue with voters on health reform, and he is scheduled to conduct another meeting in Portsmouth N.H., on Tuesday. Several more events are being planned, *Roll Call* reports (Koffler, *Roll Call*, 8/10).

Seniors Raise Opposition to Reform

Growing apprehension in recent weeks about Obama's reform plans among the "powerful and highly

organized voting bloc" of elderly U.S. residents has prompted White House officials to develop strategies to gather their support, the *Washington Post* reports.

On Saturday, White House officials said several options are being considered -- including a Web site and public appearances by the president -- to address false claims in the media and from opposition groups to Obama's reform plans.

According to the *Post*, recent polls have found that only about one-third of seniors favor a health care overhaul, as many have expressed fears that proposals to cut more than \$500 billion in Medicare spending over the next 10 years to extend health coverage to millions of younger, uninsured people would affect their medical care.

A recent mailer from the 60 Plus Association, which claims to be the "conservative alternative to AARP," suggested that the proposed Medicare changes might lead to "longer wait times at hospitals and doctors' offices, less money for new treatments, restrictions on care, prescriptions and what's best for you -- the patient!"

On Monday, AARP will launch a television and print advertising campaign in support of health reform, the *Post* reports (Connolly, *Washington Post*, 8/9).

Republican Opposition

A number of Republican representatives spoke out against health reform in recent days. Former Alaska Gov Sarah Palin (R) on Saturday called Obama's health plan "downright evil" and suggested that it would create "death panels" to determine the availability of medical care for severely ill patients, *The Hill* reports.

In a posting on her Facebook page, Palin wrote, "The America I know and love is not one in which my parents or my baby with Down Syndrome will have to stand in front of Obama's 'death panel' so his bureaucrats can decide, based on a subjective judgment of their 'level of productivity in society,' whether they are worthy of health care."

In an appearance Sunday on ABC's "**This Week**," former House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) defended Palin's statements by citing an article written by Ezekiel Emanuel -- a health care policy adviser and brother of White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel -- that implied the possibility of population control.

Gingrich said, "You're asking us to trust turning over power to the government, when there are clearly people in America who believe in establishing euthanasia, including selective standards" (Fabian, *The Hill*, 8/9).

However, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) on "Fox News Sunday" rejected suggestions that Republicans do not plan to support any of the health reform proposals by Democrats. McConnell said, "I'd like to make a deal, but I'd like to make the right kind of deal," adding, "This isn't about embarrassing anyone politically, it's about getting it right." He added that Democrats were "missing the point" by dismissing the concerns raised by protesters at recent town-hall meetings nationwide, which he believes are an indication of the frustrations people have about Obama's reform plans (Billings, *Roll Call*, 8/9).

Chamber of Commerce To Launch Anti-Reform Ads

This month the U.S. Chamber of Commerce is preparing to launch a \$2 million print and Internet ad campaign against Obama's proposal for a public health insurance plan option, the *AP/Boston Globe* reports. The ads will target moderate Democrats and Republicans in five states (Kuhnhen, *AP/Boston Globe*, 8/8).

Role in Health Reform of DNC Arm Examined

The *Los Angeles Times* on Monday examined the role of Organizing for America, the grassroots arm of the Democratic National Committee, in managing "its trained organizers and 13 million e-mail addresses" to push Obama's health reform and policy goals.

According to the *Times*, some of OFA's members say the group is still trying to determine its role in the

reform debate, which some believe "has been slowed by tensions over tactics, disenchantment among some core supporters and an effective GOP resistance" (Wallsten, *Los Angeles Times*, 8/10).

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