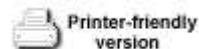


Obama Pushes Gov. Health Care; ABC Responds with 'Prescription for America' Coverage from White House

Networks balance reports on AMA speech, but ABC outrages public with week of health care coverage, 'World News,' 'GMA' to be aired from 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

By Julia A. Seymour
Business & Media Institute
6/17/2009 4:08:35 PM



The debate over plans to fix the U.S. health insurance system grew hotter June 15 as President Obama addressed the American Medical Association (AMA) in Chicago. But it was the ABC coverage that followed that sparked controversy.

Dr. Tim Johnson, ABC's medical editor and longtime proponent of government-run health care (see [Johnson Cheerleads for Universal Care](#)), lauded Obama's speech in a conversation with George Stephanopoulos on "World News." Obama or his supporters were featured by ABC three times as often as critics (55 to 18) during morning and evening news shows.

Stephanopoulos pointed out that Obama was applauded by doctors when he said the health care system should allow them to be healers instead of "bean counters." Johnson replied that "it was a [very tender moment](#) ... I think he struck a raw nerve with those words and he got an extended ovation during those words and I think he was right on target at reaching out to the heart of most physicians." ABC did acknowledge the boeing of Obama at the AMA speech.

Immediately following his conversation with Johnson, Stephanopoulos plugged a June 24 primetime special "Questions for the President: Prescription for America." According to ABC News, Johnson will be [participating](#) in that special which will be broadcast from the east room of the [White House](#).

A complaint posted on the Drudge Report from Republican National Committee Chief of Staff Ken McKay to ABC News said the RNC "requested an opportunity to add our Party's views to those of the President's to ensure that all sides of the health care reform debate are presented. Our request was rejected."



McKay expressed "concern" that the event would be a "[glorified infomercial](#)." Robert E. Moffit, director of the Heritage Foundation's Center for Health Policy, said that if Republicans are not also being included then "It's not a serious effort at a town hall meeting, it's a photo op like they had a few weeks ago (when Obama met with industry groups on the issue)."

Business & Media Institute adviser Grace-Marie Turner, president of the non-profit Galen Institute, said that if ABC's June 24 special turns out to be one-sided it would be "unconscionable."

Turner also said, "It is absolutely reckless of ABC to host a presentation from the White

House on this issue and to not include opposing viewpoints.” (Here is a [list of questions](#) conservative health care experts would like to see asked during the ABC special)

ABC News’ senior vice president Kerry Smith defended the network against what he called “false premises” in McKay’s letter and said the hour-long special from the White House will be “devoted to exploring and probing the President’s position and the giving voice to questions and criticisms of that position.”

Kerry Smith also said in ABC’s defense that the network has “had many critics of the President’s health care proposals on the air – and that’s before a real plan has even been put before the country. In the end, no one watching, listening to, or reading ABC News will lack for an understanding of all sides of these important questions.”

But an examination of ABC “World News” and “Good Morning America” stories on health care since January 20 found that Obama or supporters of his policies were included 55 times compared to 18 times for critics of those policies – a 3-to-1 margin.

Some network reports about Obama’s AMA speech, including Jake Tapper’s for ABC and Chip Reid’s for CBS, were balanced and even mentioned potential trillion dollar costs of a health care plan like the president is promoting.

The Congressional Budget Office found that one Senate health care plan would add \$1 trillion to the federal deficit between 2010 and 2019. Michael Cannon, director of health policy studies for Cato Institute, said that if Obama wants to insure all the uninsured it would actually cost twice that: \$2 trillion over 10 years.

While a few reports of the AMA speech included both sides, CBS “Early Show” co-host Harry Smith only consulted former Sen. Tom Daschle on June 15. Daschle would have been Obama’s Health and Human Services Secretary if not for his tax errors. Smith didn’t interview anyone opposed to Obama’s plan.

Harry Smith also repeated an administration claim about unnecessary care in that segment saying, “Yeah, because every time you get a hang nail, somebody says you should get an MRI. This is completely out of control.”

ABC, CBS and NBC have already shown favoritism toward Obama on the issue of health care. On May 11 and 12, immediately before and Obama delivered a speech about health care reform the networks told [only Obama’s side of the debate](#). Out of eight segments and two news briefs only one included a critic and a second included brief footage of a commercial opposing government-run health insurance.

The networks also have a lengthy [history of exaggerating](#) the breadth of the uninsured problem. As the Business & Media Institute pointed out in 2007, the claim that 47 million to 50 million Americans are uninsured is [false](#). According to the Census Bureau, 45.6 million people living in the U.S. are uninsured, but that includes [9.7 million non-citizens](#) as well as 7.9 million under 24 years old and more than 9 million who make at least \$75,000 a year and should be able to afford insurance without government assistance.

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