

Just Call Me Liar Of The Year

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Jan 24, 2011

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Tomorrow night, President Barack Obama delivers his State of the Union address to a chamber that just voted overwhelmingly to repeal his health care law. Before you believe anything I might have to say about that, however, there's something you should know: I am a liar.

Just before the holidays, the fact-checking journalists at PolitiFact.com gave their Lie of the Year award to the claim that ObamaCare is a "government takeover of health care." Backed up by the unanimous judgments of five ObamaCare supporters, PolitiFact [declared](#) that notion "simply not true," "inaccurate," and "ridiculously false."

Egad, I thought. I have written [entire reports](#) calling ObamaCare a government takeover. I've said it on television, in [op-eds](#), interviews and online. I was spreading the Lie of the Year!

ObamaCare is not a government takeover, I learned from PolitiFact, because it "uses the private health insurance system to expand health care coverage."

But wait. In my research, I found that distinction between public and private to be illusory: what difference is there between a public system where the government taxes and spends your money, and a "private" system where the government forces *you* to spend your money in the same way?

"It is irrelevant," I [wrote](#), "whether we describe medical resources (e.g., hospitals, employees) as 'public' or 'private.' What matters – what determines real as opposed to nominal ownership – is who controls the resources." I [detailed](#) how making private health insurance compulsory – as ObamaCare does – "would give government as much control over the nation's health care sector as a compulsory government program."

I even quoted President Obama's health adviser Jeanne Lambrew, who [acknowledges](#), "the government role in socialized medicine systems ranges from complete government ownership and salaried facilities and providers to *public financing of private insurance and providers*" (emphasis added) – which is exactly how ObamaCare operates.

Were these lies too? We may never know: PolitiFact failed to consider whether the public/private distinction might be misleading.

Fortunately, others have. Left-leaning columnist Michael Kinsley [wrote](#) of ObamaCare: "If the government requires insurers to accept all customers and charge all the same price, regulates all aspects of their marketing to make sure they aren't discriminating, and then redistributes the profits to make sure that no company gets penalized unfairly, in what sense is the industry still 'private'?"

The Congressional Budget Office [wrote](#) that if ObamaCare's minimum "medical-loss ratio" requirement were just 5 percentage points higher, private insurance would become "an essentially governmental program."

This "government takeover" business wasn't the first time PolitiFact warned me about telling lies.

After Sarah Palin's (in)famous "[death panels](#)" bombshell, I [wrote](#) – take a deep breath, now – that what she said was actually quite plausible. President Obama had just [proposed](#) a government panel that, under standard principles of administrative law, would have the power to ration medical care just as Palin predicted. For support, I quoted a former Medicare administrator and other Medicare scholars.

When PolitiFact [dubbed](#) "death panels" their Lie of the Year for 2009, I presented their fact-checkers with this potentially exculpatory evidence. They showed no interest.

From my vantage point, the evidence shows that ObamaCare is a government takeover of health care, and Sarah Palin's "death panels" claim was essentially true. If that makes me Liar of the Year, so be it.

But another way to look at it is this: PolitiFact has now misappropriated this award for two years in a row. Not only is each of these "lies" factually true, but – and this is more important – the people who made those statements *believe* them to be true, which means they fall short of the dictionary definition of a lie: "[An assertion of something known or believed by the speaker to be untrue with intent to deceive.](#)" There is simply no factual basis – and no excuse – for calling them *lies*.

PolitiFact's Lie of the Year award has proven as conducive to civil discourse as Rep. Joe Wilson's, R- S.C., dyspeptic "[You lie!](#)" outburst during one of President Obama's previous addresses to Congress. Rather than continue to poison the well by dispensing another award this year, PolitiFact should just let it lie.

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