

A plain blog about politics

Tuesday, March 8, 2011

Catch of the Day

CATO's Michael Cannon [reads](#) Ezra Klein's claim that Republicans "[need a health-care plan](#)" and asks: why? Cannon:

Exactly what political factors are forcing the GOP to put up or shut up? Their base is happy; it wants an all-out assault on ObamaCare and congressional Republicans are giving it to them...So why should Republicans all of a sudden stop attacking ObamaCare and start talking about their own refor--ohhhh...I see. Klein is trying to talk the dog off the meat wagon. Good luck with that.

Klein [doubles down](#) in response, saying that "By 2012, the party is going to have to be able to agree on something, because their presidential nominee is going to have to have a plan of his or her own." To which I'd say: why? The Republican presidential nominee will certainly need some health care rhetoric, but that's not the same as a plan. And it's easy to see what the rhetoric will be: the nominee will say that both parties agree about pre-existing conditions, and making health care accessible and affordable, but that Republicans will do that without the socialist Obama plans for mandates, regulations, taxes, and cuts in grandma's Medicare by using free-market, common-sense ideas. Republicans will empower individuals and the doctor-patient relationship; Democrats put all the power in politicians and Washington bureaucrats. And there will be a couple of pages of mumbo-jumbo on the web site about high-risk pools and selling insurance across state lines and other stuff like that. I don't know that they'll "need" that much, but they certainly won't need more -- if you ask the question "or else?", what do you get? Or else...serious policy wonks will say that they don't have a plan. Uh huh.

Actually, I do have something to say here. Platforms, especially in the form of detailed plans, are most needed for supporters, not opponents (who aren't interested) or swing voters (who are mostly low-information voters, and therefore also not interested). That is, swing voters, to the extent they want anything, want rhetoric. Partisans want details; they actually want and expect something to happen on certain issues, and therefore they really care about what the politicians they support plan to do. So one way you can tell whether a party really cares about something is by seeing whether their nominees are "forced" to developed serious policy proposals. Of course, this can get tricky...sometimes a party coalition really differs on some issue area, and then politicians must choose whether to take sides or to try to straddle the divide. All of which means that nomination politics is terribly important -- if you're interested in how democracy actually works, pay attention to how parties decide things, beginning with nominations. But it doesn't mean that pols must develop real policy plans on every issue.

The real question on this one is whether there's any pressure within the GOP coalition to develop a real health care plan, and it sure seems to me that there isn't.