



Democrats Break Ranks

By: Michael Falcone – November 14, 2013

NOTABLES

- **DEMOCRATS JOIN THE FIX-IT BRIGADE:** Senate Democrats are sending a big fat message to the White House on Obamacare: We are not happy. ABC's ARLETTE SAENZ reports that new Democrat-sponsored bills to fix the Obamacare problem seem to be trickling out daily on fixes ranging from extending the enrollment deadline to allowing consumers to keep their healthcare plans if they like them. But it's not just vulnerable red state Democrats like Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La., and Mark Pryor, D-Ark., who are backing these bills. Even Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., has thrown her support behind Landrieu's bill to let people keep their healthcare plans. White House Chief of Staff Denis McDonough will meet with Senate Democrats today to talk about healthcare, but it's clear these senators will continue to roll out and work on their own fixes until the administration comes up with one of their own.
- **OBAMA PIVOTS:** With the Obamacare mess and the stunningly low enrollment figures consuming much of Washington, President Obama travels to Cleveland today to tout the oil boom and his economic agenda, ABC's MARY BRUCE notes. Later this afternoon he delivers remarks at a steel manufacturing plant, ArcelorMittal, where he will discuss his energy policies and plans to boost job creation. He is expected to highlight a new report on the rise in American energy production and claim his policies are to thank for it (which is not entirely true, according to oil experts). No word yet on whether he will mention the enrollment figures in his remarks. Later, the President travels to Philadelphia to fundraise for the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee.
- **HEALTHCARE.GOV ENROLLMENT FALLS FAR SHORT OF EXPECTATIONS:** Only 26,794 people, a far smaller number than expected, successfully chose a health insurance plan using the glitch-plagued Healthcare.gov website in its first month, the Obama administration announced yesterday. ABC's ABBY PHILLIP reports. In total, 106,185 people signed up for health insurance in October, and most of those individuals — 79,391 — used the 15 state-run websites, not the troubled federal site. As problems with Healthcare.gov persisted into its second month, it became clear that the site would not meet the administration's own projects. The total enrollment figure for the first month was about one-fifth of the 500,000 enrollees who were predicted to sign up, according to a Sept. 5 administration memo obtained by The Associated Press and confirmed by ABC News. And the total represents 1.5 percent of the estimated number of enrollees that should sign up for health insurance using the websites by the March 31 deadline, according to the Department of Health and Human Services report.

THE ROUNDTABLE

ABC's RICK KLEIN: If you want a true measure of the impact of the botched Obamacare rollout, look beyond numbers that wouldn't fill Nationals Park. House Republicans didn't need an excuse to consume time on Obamacare – all those repeal votes over the past three years prove that – but now they've got it. Immigration reform died yesterday, a few hours after House Speaker John Boehner's breakfast was crashed by a pair of young advocates, when Boehner declared that a conference committee wouldn't be happening, "ever." Tax reform? Even the Republican-led effort, championed by House Ways and Means Chairman Dave Camp, won't get oxygen while this fire burns. Gun control? A budget agreement? Good luck with that. The concept that House Republicans would feel pressure to act on Democratic priorities, no matter how modest their goals, is predicated on the ability of the president to create said pressure. That doesn't happen while the president's approval ratings slide. In fact, as an Obamacare vote on the House floor tomorrow will show, the pressure is all flowing to the other side.

ABC's JEFF ZELENY: President Obama can't brush off the latest round of criticism and frustration about the health care law: It's coming from Democrats and it's coming to a boil on Capitol Hill. The growing chorus of Democratic senators pushing for a fix that would allow Americans to keep their current insurance, as the president repeatedly promised, has become too loud for the White House to ignore. The clock is ticking for the administration to try and allay the concerns of Democrats, many of whom are panicking that their mid-term election campaigns next year will become consumed by a wave of Obamacare outrage. A closed-door meeting today between Senate Democrats and top White House aides could calm the anger, but that's only likely if the president agrees to more than a symbolic fix and a promise that Healthcare.gov will get better.

ABC's MICHAEL FALCONE: A pretty compelling chart is being circulated this week by Robert Blizzard, a pollster at Public Opinion Strategies, a well-known Republican polling firm. Blizzard's chart shows the second-term job approval rating of four presidents — Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama — as measured by Gallup. During the first two years of their second terms, both Reagan and Clinton stayed above the 50 percent mark – heading into the midterm elections with a 63 percent approval rating (Reagan, 1986) and 66 percent approval rating (Clinton, 1998). Bush, however, spent much of his second term languishing in the 30's and 40's, hovering at a 37 percent approval rating just before the 2006 midterms. The stunning part of Blizzard's chart is how closely Obama's trend line matches up with Bush's one year into his second term. Can President Obama pull himself out of the tailspin between now and Election Day 2014? Sure. But he's in a real deep hole.

ABC's SHUSHANNAH WALSH: Democrats are out with a new messaging push hitting Republicans as they try to rebrand ahead of 2016. The launch plays off of comments RNC Chairman Reince Priebus said Sunday on CNN when he said the GOP will be the party that is "fresh and new in 2016." The DNC has jumped on those comments, launching a video that features news clips detailing the \$24 billion lost due to the government shutdown, new anti-abortion legislation proposed by Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, and the likely failure of any type of immigration reform this year, something confirmed by

Speaker John Boehner just yesterday. At the end of the video text on the screen reads, "The GOP. Not fresh. Not new." The DNC stresses this "fresh and new" messaging isn't just a video and will be a new narrative and extended campaign the DNC says they will use repeatedly when discussing congressional Republicans, the 2016 contenders and their policies, and in the the 2014 governor's races. One event they are already targeting is one this weekend when Rep. Paul Ryan of Wisconsin attends Iowa Gov. Terry Branstad's annual birthday party fundraiser. The DNC says they will be using this frame to discuss both Ryan, Branstad and their policies, and it will include an online ad component in the attack. With the troubled Obamacare roll out, it has been a very difficult few weeks for the party and with this new messaging they are trying to turn it around ahead of 2014 and 2016.

BUZZ

STATE EXCHANGES A BRIGHTER SPOT FOR HEALTH CARE ENROLLMENT. State-by-state data indicates that many state-run health care exchanges have experienced robust participation, ABC's ABBY PHILLIP notes. California alone has signed up more than the entire federal exchange, with more than 35,000 who have selected plans. New York has signed up more than 16,000 people. Other states have reported far lower numbers, especially if their exchanges were one of the 36 run by the federal government. Delaware accounted for 97 enrollments, North Dakota, just 42, and Alaska 53. The insurance marketplaces rely on healthy, young people to sign up in order to offset the cost of older and sicker enrollees that insurance companies are now obligated to cover, regardless of pre-existing conditions. But Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius declined yesterday to release demographic data about the composition of enrollees. She noted, however, that a substantial number of people — 975,000 — have completed their applications and are eligible for coverage, but have not picked a plan.

BOEHNER PREDICTS OBAMACARE WILL 'NEVER' WORK. As Republicans prepare to vote on a measure that capitalizes on what they say is President Obama's "broken" promise that Americans could keep their current health plan under the Affordable Care Act, House Speaker John Boehner predicted the president's signature health care law would never work and that there was no way for Congress to fix it, ABC's JOHN PARKINSON reports. "When you step back and look at the totality of this, I don't think it's ever going to work," Boehner, R-Ohio, said in a news conference on Capitol Hill yesterday. "There are all types of health insurance policies out there based on your financial circumstances and how much risk you're willing to take, and so the idea that the federal government should come in and create a one size fits all for the entire country never was going to work." The House is expected to vote Friday on the Keep Your Health Plan Act, which would allow people to keep their current health insurance plans in 2014 without penalties.

BUDGET CONFEREES NO CLOSER TO AVOIDING ANOTHER SHUTDOWN. The bipartisan group of lawmakers known as the "budget conference committee" said they have made little progress on a long term budget deal to help avoid another government shutdown, ABC's JAMESCIA THOMAS reports. During the group's second meeting yesterday, House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan, R-Wis., and Senate Budget Committee Chairwoman Patty Murray, D-Wash., acknowledged that both sides have

differences of opinion on how to deal with the budget issue but said each meeting and discussion moves the conversation forward. "Today's meeting will keep the ball rolling," Ryan said. "The reason we are here is to get an agreement. We've spent a lot of time talking about our differences. We've got that part down cold. That's the easy part. The hard part is figuring out where we agree. "It is extremely important and we agree that we need to step out of our partisan corners and make some compromises lay down a foundation for some long term bipartisan agreements," Murray said. Most negotiating is occurring behind closed doors, but today's meeting provided the group of 29 lawmakers with a briefing by Congressional Budget Office Director Doug Elmendorf, who addressed the long-term and short-term economic and budget outlook.

GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN LAWNMOWER MAN GETS REWARD: CASH AND A CHAINSAW. Remember the guy who pushed a lawnmower around the National Mall during the 16-day government shutdown? The volunteer mower, Chris Cox, was back in Washington, D.C., on Wednesday, but this time, he wasn't cutting the grass, ABC's ERIN DOOLEY notes. Instead, he was being honored for his efforts by two organizations, one of which presented him with an enormous chainsaw. Cox found fame after tourists spotted him doing maintenance work around the national monuments during October's two-weeks-plus shutdown. He'd "stepped up" to keep them well-groomed for visiting veterans. "That's the big daddy there, guys," Cox said at an informal ceremony at the Lincoln Memorial as a representative from STIHL, the nation's largest chainsaw manufacturer, presented him with the MS660 magnum, valued at over \$1,000 and described by the company as "the chainsaw of choice for so many professionals." Cox also received over \$1,900 from Crowd It Forward, a nonprofit organization that "rewards those who deserve recognition through random acts of crowd-funding," according to its website.

LAWMAKERS CLASH OVER CHAMPIONSHIP HORSE ABUSE BILL. The welfare of Tennessee Walking Horses, celebrated for their high-stepping gait known as the "big lick," took center stage today on Capitol Hill as industry insiders squared off over alleged widespread abuse of the famed horses, ABC's MEGAN CHUCHMACH and SHUSHANNAH WALSHE reports. The first ever Congressional hearing on the topic was convened to discuss legislation, introduced in April, that would eliminate the industry's current self-regulation of the horses' care and turn over responsibility for examining show horses to USDA-licensed inspectors. During the hearing, lawmakers played video of an ABC News "Nightline" report from May 2012 that showed the walking horses being tortured and beaten in an effort to force them into their unusual prize-winning gait. "I observed the reaction the world had to this video and expose and knew I could no longer allow this lie to be perpetuated," Marty Irby, a past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association, said at the hearing. Irby was referencing a part of the ABC News report in which undercover video shot by the Humane Society of the U.S. captured apparent brutal animal abuse.

TRIBAL NATIONS SPEAK OF 'REDSKINS,' BUT ONLY IN PRIVATE. More than 300 tribal nations sent their leaders to Washington yesterday – some in buckskins and feathered head-dress, some in coat and tie – for the annual summit at which President Obama reminded them that as a presidential candidate in 2008 he was adopted into the Crow Nation by a Native American couple, ABC's ANN COMPTON writes. "As a proud adopted member of the Crow Nation," he began, "let me say, 'Kaheé – welcome – to all of you.'" The tribal summit is considered a meeting of sovereign nations coming together, built on a history,

as turbulent as it was, of treaties and a Constitution. "That's the relationship we're called upon to sustain for the progress of all of our peoples," Obama said today. "And while we should be proud of what we've achieved together in recent years, we also should be focused on all the work that we still have to do." Unspoken in public was the growing debate over the term "Redskins," and the Washington NFL franchise under pressure from some tribes to abandon a name many Indians consider a slur. Obama agreed last month, telling The Associated Press, "Native Americans feel pretty strongly about it. And, I don't know whether our attachment to a particular name should override the real legitimate concerns that people have about these things."

IN THE NOTE'S INBOX

DEBATING THE RIGHT TO BEAR ARMS. The next Intelligence Squared US debate (moderated by ABC's John Donvan) will be held tonight covering the topic, "The Constitutional Right to Bear Arms Has Outlived Its Usefulness." Debating are four top constitutional scholars. For the motion are Alan Dershowitz, Professor of Law at Harvard Law School, and Sanford Levinson, Professor of Law and of Government at the University of Texas. Against the motion will be David Kopel, Research Director at Independence Institute/Associate Policy Analyst at Cato Institute, & Eugene Volokh, Professor of Law at UCLA School of Law. The debate will take place in front of a live audience at Kaufman Center in New York City from 6:45 to 8:30 p.m.