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Lying for Health Care Reform - LBJ's Example for Today's Democrats

[Ronald Bailey](#) | August 26, 2009, 2:40pm

NPR's Morning Edition show aired a rather disturbing segment today on how President Lyndon Johnson's political chicanery and outright lies got Medicare (socialized medicine for seniors) through Congress. The segment featured an interview with James Morone, co-author of *The Heart of Power: Health and Politics in the Oval Office*. Morone cheerfully explains LBJ's Medicare duplicity:



Johnson maneuvered every step of the way getting this bill through Congress, and one of the things he did — and this is a little dicey in today's climate — was suppress the costs. So this young kid gets elected from Massachusetts, Ted Kennedy, in 1962, and Johnson is explaining to him [over the phone] how you get a health bill through. And what he tells him is don't let them get the costs projected too far out because it will scare other people:

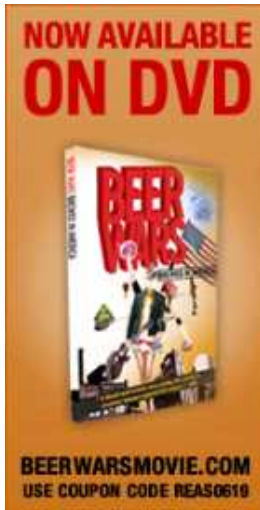
"A health program yesterday runs \$300 million, but the fools had to go to projecting it down the road five or six years, and when you project it the first year, it runs \$900 million. Now I don't know whether I would approve \$900 million second year or not. I might approve 450 or 500. But the first thing Dick Russell comes running in saying, 'My God, you've got a billion-dollar program for next year on health, therefore I'm against any of it now.' Do you follow me?"

We believe, after looking at the evidence, my co-author [David Blumenthal] and I, that if the true cost of Medicare had been known — if Johnson hadn't basically hidden them — the program would never have passed. America's second-most beloved program would never have happened, if we had had genuine cost estimates.

As history has shown even LBJ's carefully hidden projections of Medicare's costs were way off base

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As the Cato Institute's Michael Tanner and Chris Edwards point out, the Congressional Budget Office and other agencies have a history of **wildly underestimating** future government medical program expenditures:

A further concern is that initial cost estimates of federal health programs are usually very optimistic. When Medicare was launched in 1965, Part A was projected to cost \$9 billion by 1990, but ended up costing \$67 billion. When Medicaid's special hospitals subsidy was added in 1987, it was supposed to cost \$100 million annually, but it already cost \$11 billion by 1992. When Medicare's home care benefit was added in 1988, it was projected to cost \$4 billion in 1993, but ended up costing \$10 billion. Or consider that when Massachusetts Commonwealth Care was put into place in 2006, it was expected to cost about \$725 million annually, but the expected cost for 2009 is now almost \$1 billion.

The NPR segment was intriguingly titled, "Democrats Could Learn From LBJ's Medicare Push." I have no doubt that many Democrats who are pushing health care reform, especially the government-run insurance option, know that their cost projections are wildly underestimated. But like LBJ, contemporary Democrats don't care because they also know that once their health reform programs are enacted they will be almost impossible to kill. Enacting government health care is more important than telling their constituents the truth about what it will cost them. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose!*

Bonus Ronald Reagan quote from NPR segment:

"One of the traditional methods of imposing statism or socialism on a people, has been by way of medicine. It's very easy to disguise a medical program as a humanitarian project — most people are a little reluctant to oppose anything that suggests medical care for people who possibly can't afford it. Now, the American people, if you put it to them about socialized medicine and gave them a chance to choose, would unhesitatingly vote against it."

Hearteningly, **recent polls** suggest that this may still be true.

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[Pro Libertate](#) | August 26, 2009, 3:03pm | <#>

I once read that LBJ used to make staffers and I think even Congressmen have discussions with him while he was sitting on the toilet. I think that says everything you need to know about the man.

[Mike M.](#) | August 26, 2009, 3:03pm | <#>

We believe, after looking at the evidence, my co-author [David Blumenthal] and I, that if the true cost of Medicare had been known – if Johnson hadn't basically hidden them – the program would never have passed. America's second-most beloved program would never have happened, if we had had genuine cost estimates.

I have no doubt that this is true, especially if they had known back then that the country would be on the precipice of bankruptcy less than fifty years later.

That's what makes the political landscape today, and the democratic party in particular, so depressing to contemplate. We're all the way through the looking glass and beyond.

[Hacha Cha](#) | August 26, 2009, 3:11pm | <#>

reminds me of what Hunter Thompson wrote about Lyndon Johnson, "told his manager to start a massive rumor campaign about his opponent's lifelong habit of enjoying carnal knowledge of his own barnyard sows." The campaign manager protests that nobody will believe that the guy's a "pigfucker."


"I know," Johnson replied. "But let's make the sonofabitch deny it."

[Amber Waves](#) | August 26, 2009, 3:12pm | <#>

"LBJ used to make staffers and I think even Congressmen have discussions with him while he was sitting on the toilet."

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[SugarFree](#) | August 26, 2009, 3:17pm | <#>

Paging SugarFree.

Ugh. No, please.

But I do offer: [Slate's Guide to Ethical Shitting](#).

There are plenty of simple, low-tech things you can do to cut down on toilet-related water consumption. Make sure you check regularly for leaks using a dye test; a leaky toilet can waste about 200 gallons a day, according to the EPA. If you have an older toilet, reduce the size of each flush by putting a milk jug or soda bottle filled with water or sand in the tank. (Avoid using bricks, which can muck up the plumbing.) For the more daring among you, there's always the time-honored "if it's yellow, let it mellow" strategy—endorsed by Cameron Diaz, no less—and the "pee in the shower" strategy, which a Brazilian environmental group is touting this month via an extremely catchy commercial featuring Stephen Hawking, Mahatma Gandhi, the Statue of Liberty, and a gaggle of singing children.

[Johnny Longtorso](#) | August 26, 2009, 3:20pm | <#>

If we weren't so racist, they wouldn't have to lie to us to get what they want. Their lies are our fault.

[stuartl](#) | August 26, 2009, 3:20pm | <#>

Although those poll number are heartening, Obama is a lot smarter than Hillary was in '94. She didn't hide the fact that she thought us little people objecting were stupid. While many progs/dems/etc do feel that way now, Obama realizes that he needs to sell us. And he is a good salesman. She wasn't.

[The Wine Commonsewer \(TWC\)](#) | August 26, 2009, 3:21pm | <#>

When we were kids we used to call him Long Blow Job. It was not because of his politics, we just thought it was hilarious.

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