

The Christian Science Monitor

## politics

# Three conservative reviews of Obama's healthcare reforms

**Too much government involvement in private medical decisions, say some critics. Too scanty on the details, charges another.**

By **Linda Feldmann** | Staff writer/ June 15, 2009 edition

*WASHINGTON*

Even before President Obama had taken the podium Monday at the annual meeting of the American Medical Association in Chicago, conservatives were prepared to counter his arguments.

Tom Price, a Republican member of Congress from Georgia and a physician, outlined his major concerns about Mr. Obama's healthcare reform in a conference call with reporters while he waited for the president to begin.

### **Two biggest show-stoppers**

Concern No. 1: Where will medical decisions be made? Dr. Price asked.

Decisionmaking will move from patients and physicians to "a government takeover of those medical decisions or a government-run plan," Price said. "That's unacceptable to the physicians of America. I think it's unacceptable to the patients of America."

Concern No. 2: There are no actively practicing physicians on the new 15-member Federal Coordinating Council for Comparative Effectiveness Research.

This council, funded by economic stimulus money and aimed at providing information on the strengths and weaknesses of different medical interventions, will define what is "appropriate quality care," Price said. The lack of practicing physicians on the board "ought to give Americans great pause," he added.

Price, in his "pre-buttal," anticipated that Obama would talk about the "public insurance option" that is being floated in Congress – a government-run health insurance system that consumers could use instead of private insurance. Though Obama insists that the public and private insurance systems would complement one another, Price sees a different outcome.

"Any plan that results in a government takeover of any portion of it will push, will crowd out those individuals all across this land who have personal private health insurance into that government-run program," he said.

### **Surely not another wasteful Medicare program?**

The CATO Institute, a libertarian-leaning think tank, also put out some pre-buttals before the Obama speech.

"The problems with Obamacare go well beyond the public option....," said senior fellow Michael Tanner. "The mandates on businesses and individuals, taxpayer subsidies, insurance regulation, and government interference in private medical decisions pose serious threats to American businesses, taxpayers, and most importantly patients."

Michael Cannon, CATO's director of health policy studies, noted: "President Obama says he can find and eliminate \$600 billion of waste in Medicare and Medicaid. If government health programs are so wasteful, why would he want to create another?"

### **A request for details**

After the speech, health-policy expert Dennis Smith of the Heritage Foundation said in an interview that the challenge is the bare-bones natures of the Obama plan so far.

"I still find it absolutely fascinating that the White House and different groups are ginning up this huge public relations campaign to support his plan, and nobody knows what his plan is," Mr. Smith said. "The important details are still missing. There are still a lot of pep talks and generalities, but we don't know what the president is really proposing on some very important and fundamental parts of reform."

"Expanding Medicaid is not reform," he added. "That's easy to do."

Obama's campaign promise that the average American family would save \$2,500 a year after healthcare reform? That's missing, says Smith.

"It's an admission that they don't really know how all these different pieces are going to work," he says. "They simply are promoting a big public relations campaign without the details."

If there's one concession to the president that these conservatives all agree on, it's this: There may be no better salesman on healthcare than Obama.