



Obamacare Opposition Drives 2014 Election Results

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Passage and the botched implementation of the Affordable Care Act played a significant role in the November election outcome, according to many experts studying the results. On November fourth, Republicans gained control of the U.S. Senate, retained control of the U.S. House, held onto most of the governorships they started with while picking up surprise wins in the traditional Democratic bastions of Maryland, Massachusetts, and Illinois, and also picked up several state legislative chambers.

Grace-Marie Turner, head of the Galen Institute, a health care think-tank, cited pre-election polling by Public Opinion Strategies showing the health care law would be a deciding factor for a majority of voters in swing Congressional districts, with opponents of the law outnumbering supporters by a two-to-one margin.

“President Obama pledged to Democratic members of Congress in 2010 that if they voted for the law, voters would thank them,” Turner told *Health Care News*. “The opposite happened, and Democratic losses in 2010 and 2014 can be directly tied to Obamacare.”

Health policy scholar Michael Cannon of the Cato Institute shared Turner’s view. “Though Democrats tried to deny it, Republicans made a big issue of their opposition to ObamaCare during the election, and they won. That’s what you call a mandate. It’s also worth noting that Republicans who tried to implement Obamacare, like Pennsylvania Gov. Corbett, depressed their base.”

Corbett lost his re-election bid after expanding the state’s Medicaid program under the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare.

Campaign focus on health law

At one time it was thought by some campaign watchers that Obamacare might fade as a campaign issue. An August 19 story at [Bloomberg.com](#) by Heidi Przybyla began “Republicans seeking to unseat the U.S. Senate incumbent in North Carolina have cut in half the portion of

their top issue ads citing Obamacare, a sign that the party's favorite attack against Democrats is losing its punch."

As late as October 31, the *New York Times* ran an article with the same theme, titled "Repeal of Health Law, Once Central to G.O.P., Is Side Issue in Campaigns," stating that the issue had "largely receded from view."

But according to multiple analysis and statements by national campaign committees, Obamacare was the top issue cited in ads down the stretch by Republican candidates as well as national campaign committees and independent groups.

An analysis by Kantar Media's Campaign Media Analysis Group found that between October 6 and October 26, Obamacare was the top issue in ads run by Republican candidates for U.S. Senate. Over that period nearly 37,000 spots were aired by Republicans criticizing the law and their opponent's support for it, more than any other issue.

More evidence that Republican opposition to Obamacare came in a November 3 article by Sarah Ferris in *The Hill* citing National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC) spokesman Daniel Scarpinato saying that Obamacare is one of the most important issues of 2014.

"Now, it's not an abstract for people," Scarpinato told *The Hill*. "They've seen the problems with the website. They've seen their plans change. There are now specifics to talk about."

The same article also noted that nearly one-third of all NRCC ads in the cycle had been about Obamacare, more than any other issue.

Sally Pipes, president of the Pacific Research Institute, observed "House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) predicted in March that Obamacare would be a 'winning issue' for Democrats in the midterm election" despite polls consistently showing that 54 percent of Americans did not support the law. "The election results of November 4 reveal that the polls were correct, Ms. Pelosi was wrong, and the voters tossed out many of those candidates who were supporters of Obamacare," Pipes concluded, adding "Joni Ernst's win over former Congressman Bruce Braley in the U.S. Senate race in Iowa is a case in point."

'If you like your plan...'

Republican candidates were able to use the statements of many incumbent Democratic U.S. Senators about Obamacare against them in ads that began early. Democrats who voted for the law and repeated President Obama's pledge that people who liked their insurance plans could keep them faced serious headwinds when this turned out to be false.

As far back as January, the pro-free market group Americans for Prosperity unveiled ads against Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire, Kay Hagan of North Carolina, and Mary Landrieu of Louisiana. The ads specifically cited each for their statements echoing President Obama's claim that "if you like your plan, you can keep your plan."

Hagan lost, while Landrieu faces a difficult December runoff. Shaheen barely managed to hang on to her seat against Republican Scott Brown, a former U.S. Senator from Massachusetts. Other Democratic Senators hurt by similar statements included Colorado's Mark Udall, Arkansas' Mark Pryor, and Alaska's Mark Begich, all of whom lost or, in the case of Begich, are behind in the vote count at this time.

Botched implementation an issue in governor races

The botched implementation of Obamacare at the state level may have also contributed to two upset Republican wins in the Democrat-friendly states of Maryland and Massachusetts.

While many are familiar with the troubles of the federal exchange that failed upon launch in October 2013, many states also faced serious issues with their own exchanges. In Maryland, Democratic nominee Lt. Governor Anthony Brown was given the responsibility of overseeing the rollout of the exchange, a task that came back to haunt his election campaign.

When the site crashed immediately after opening for business, Brown drew heavy criticism for his failure to successfully oversee the implementation. Later reports revealed that in the year leading up to the launch there were several warnings that the project was not meeting its goals and would not function as needed, but those warnings were ignored by Brown and others in Maryland.

Maryland ultimately scrapped their exchange and started over, buying functional technology and software from Connecticut's exchange.

Brown's Republican challenger, Larry Hogan, made the failed launch of Maryland's Obamacare exchange a central point of his campaign in questioning whether the Lt. Governor was ready for a promotion to the Governor's office.

In an ad titled 'Weak Leadership' released in early September, Hogan blamed Brown for "\$169 million wasted" and "families unable to get health insurance" and concluded with the line "Anthony Brown: Just not ready to be governor." Hogan also brought up the botched rollout in debates, calling it a "complete disaster" and pointed out Brown's responsibility for the failure.

In Massachusetts, the Obamacare web site faced similar difficulties to those in Maryland and the federal site, even though the state already had a functioning exchange established years earlier that Obamacare was largely modeled after.

Attorney General Martha Coakley, the Democratic nominee for governor had a less substantial role in Massachusetts in rolling out the exchange than Brown did in Maryland, but she did take heat from her Republican opponent, health executive Charlie Baker, for the site's failure.

In Massachusetts the Attorney General appoints three members to the ten-person board of the Health Connector, as the exchange is known as in the state. Coakley strongly defended her appointees in the aftermath of the site's failure, even after it was shown her appointees knew about the exchange's troubles but ignored them and allowed the site to be launched.

Baker made her defense of the appointees a campaign issue, charging in a release, "'Beacon Hill needs real leaders willing to ask tough questions especially when it comes to spending hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars and the Attorney General proved she is not up to the task.'