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Republicans setting strategy for Obama's health summit

By: [Susan Ferrechio](#)**Chief Congressional Correspondent****February 19, 2010**

With less than a week to go before they attend a nationally televised summit on health care reform, Republicans are hoping public opposition to the Democratic plan will help them come out on top, despite being at a political disadvantage.

"I'm hopeful we can present ideas that would actually reduce the cost of health care," Rep. Dave Camp, R-Mich., who is invited to the summit, told *The Examiner*. "That is what the American people want to see, and they want us to do it without creating new taxes and raising the debt."

President Obama is setting the guest list and holding the event on his home turf, so Republicans know they face a politically treacherous situation, especially because Democrats have signaled they plan to have a final version of their plan completed and posted online before the start of the event, scheduled for Thursday at Blair House, the guest residence for the White House.

"We have to prove that we can win a battle of ideas," said a top GOP House leadership aide. "And we can, because the American people are on our side -- but the White House is a hell of a home-field advantage."

Republicans have tentatively agreed to show up but want Democrats to put aside their health care legislation and start over, and the latest polls show the GOP has the public to back it up.

A Rasmussen Reports poll taken last week found that 61 percent of voters thought Congress should start over on health care, while only 35 percent favored passing the existing legislation.

"Republicans have had hundreds of town halls and meetings across the country, and what we've heard is that Americans don't want another 2,700-page bill that raises taxes and slashes Medicare for our seniors," said Don Stewart, spokesman for Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., who is among the Republicans invited to the summit.

Most Democrats have rejected the idea of starting from scratch, so Republicans at the summit will have to fight a televised battle against the plan without looking like obstructionists.

One obstacle will be reaching consensus among themselves.

"They don't have a plan they all agree on," said Michael Tanner, a health care policy scholar at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank. "This is going to make it more difficult for them to get a clear message across."


Republicans insist they are unified around several key principals, such as allowing interstate insurance sales and introducing malpractice reform. The House authored its own health care proposal that included these provisions. Their plan would only insure an additional 3 million people, compared with 30 million under the Democratic plan, but it would lower health care costs overall, the Congressional Budget Office determined.

"Obama's primary goal is to expand access and the Republican goal is to reduce cost," said Republican strategist Dan Schnur. "So the one message that they need to come out of this summit is that they want to make health care more affordable before doing anything else."

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