



## Joe Conason

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# Why John Boehner hates the same CBO he loved yesterday

When the Congressional Budget Office criticized the Democratic health plan, the GOP loved its numbers. Not anymore

BY JOE CONASON



AP

House Minority Leader John Boehner of Ohio on March 4.

When does scoring by the Congressional Budget Office count, and when should we just ignore those annoying numbers? If you're John Boehner, the answer is simple: CBO data only matters when it agrees with Republican dogma, and otherwise its nonpartisan analysis cannot possibly be correct.

While there are partisans on both sides who tend to admire or despise the CBO based on its positions of the moment (and feel differently about legislative rules depending on whether they're in the majority), the House minority leader has compiled a particularly blatant record of flip-flopping lately.

Boehner and his fellow Republicans are furious with the CBO today because its latest report on healthcare reform says that the bill Democrats are preparing to pass over the weekend will cut the deficit by \$130 billion over the next 10 years and by well over a trillion dollars in the following decade. Its reassurance on cost savings is expected to encourage wavering Democrats to vote yes. So last night, **Boehner told Fox News** that the CBO findings are nothing but "a fallacy" -- and others like Republican National Committee Chairman Michael Steele have gone further, accusing CBO of promoting "a lie."

Yet when CBO director Douglas Elmendorf testified last July that one version of the Democrats' healthcare bill would not achieve budgetary savings, every Republican leader and right-wing media figure in

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Washington praised his "devastating" analysis. At the time, Boehner said the CBO director's remarks proved "that one of the Democrats' chief talking points is pure fiction" and his office devoted an **excited press release** to coverage of Elmendorf's testimony. Its headline: "Exposed: CBO Confirms Democrats' Plan Will Increase Americans' Health Care Costs."

Echoing the Boehner line back then were all the usual suspects, from the **American Enterprise Institute**, the **Cato Institute**, the Heritage Foundation, et cetera, who described Elmendorf's testimony as a death blow to health reform.

Boehner **still loved the CBO** when it released a somewhat favorable analysis of the GOP's health proposals (which he quoted very selectively). But today the thrill is gone.

Meanwhile, one of Washington's most respected economic policy analysts, Robert Greenstein of the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, issued a statement today endorsing the bill. He is a progressive whose integrity and rigor have been recognized across the political spectrum for many years and **what he says** is worth reading in full.

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