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Thursday, September 10, 2009

Inspecting Obama's health care claims

In his prime-time speech, President Obama said fixing health care would cost \$900 billion over the next decade and help millions of uninsured people get coverage. Tamara Keith checks out a few of his claims.

TEXT OF STORY

KAI RYSSDAL: In his speech last night, the president laid out his plan for health-care reform in public for the first time. He said the overhaul would cost \$900 billion over the next 10 years. And that millions of uninsured people would get coverage. He made some other bold claims, too. And this being the day after the big reveal, you know where this one's going to go. We asked Tamara Keith to check out a few of those claims.



President Barack Obama speaks on health insurance reform at the Eisenhower Executive Office Building of the White House in Washington, D.C. (Alex Wong/Getty Images)

TAMARA KEITH: President Obama pledged in no uncertain terms that his plan will cover the costs.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: I will not sign it if it adds one dime to the deficit now or in the future. Period.

None of the president's number crunchers were available, but the analysts I called weren't so sure about the deficit claim.

John Shields is with the Lewin Group, a non-partisan health consulting firm. He just analyzed the House health-care bill. It's a lot like what the president wants.

JOHN SHIELDS: Their bill is pretty much fully paid for in the first 10 years.

Buuuut...

SHIELDS: The following decade, we would increase the deficit by about a trillion dollars for the program.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: We've estimated that most of this plan can be paid for by finding savings within the existing health-care system, a system that is currently full of waste and abuse.

Cato Institute fellow Michael Tanner says waste and abuse can be pretty slippery.

MICHAEL TANNER: Yeah, we've been trying to find waste, fraud and abuse since, oh, Ronald Reagan I think came up with that phrase. Yet somehow it's still there.

The president also said his plan would tame health-care inflation.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: And if we are able to slow the growth of health-care costs by just one-tenth of one percent

each year. One-tenth of one percent, it will actually reduce the deficit by \$4 trillion over the long term.

I headed straight to a health economist to tackle that one.

STEPHEN PARENTE: I've actually got a spreadsheet open right now.

That's Stephen Parente, from the University of Minnesota.

PARENTE: So once you actually apply the math to, say, one tenth of essentially a percentage point of that change that you're talking about over a 20 to 30 year period of time, you can actually net out \$4 trillion.

Translation? The president's numbers check out, if you wait 20 or 30 years.

In Washington, I'm Tamara Keith for Marketplace.

COMMENTS

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By Steve Rosen
From Los Angeles, CA, 09/11/2009

As a long time listener and subscriber to KPCC I was appalled to hear Tamara Keith refer to John Shields as being "with the Lewin Group, a non-partisan health consulting firm." It is a well known documented fact that The Lewin Group is owned by United Healthcare, one of the largest health insurance companies in America. Calling The Lewin Group non-partisan is like calling Sean Hannity a Liberal commentator and defender of Obama's health reform. Please correct this misleading reference in your story.

By Tracey Croughwell
From Cardiff by the Sea, CA, 09/11/2009

As a long-time NPR listener, I too felt compelled to write because I am disappointed by your description of the Lewin Group as "a non-partisan health consulting firm." The Lewin Group is a subsidiary of United Health Group, an insurance company. If you are going to quote the Lewin Group at all, responsible journalism dictates that you disclose their ownership. Better yet, find a truly non-partisan group to comment. I hope that you will consider doing a corrective statement today.

By Winslow Kelpfroth
From Muleshoe, TX, 09/11/2009

with all respect, Dr. Parente, there have been many a business plan built up on a questionable spreadsheet with a couple of linear regressions thrown in. How about validating your model?

By Cheryl Grossman
From Columbus, OH, 09/11/2009

It was appalling that your reporter Tamara Keith used two biased sources for her report and even more appalling that Marketplace exercised no editorial control over this very dishonest reporting. And you wonder why journalism is in trouble?

By Mike Wright
From Sandy Hook, CT, 09/11/2009

You lost me at Lewin Group. Next time, find a better, actually non-partisan sources. I know they're out there.

By Danile Martens
From Mishawaka, IN, 09/11/2009

Using the Cato Institute and the Lewin group to fact check a health care bill is a decided give-away to the right. Neither is nonpartisan; you should not have billed the Lewin Group as such.

By Kris Edson
From st. louis, MO, 09/10/2009

I thought this story was supposed to be ironic.

By Mary K Ojeda
From Raleigh, NC, 09/10/2009

I thought it was just me who noticed this preposterous breach of journalistic 'background'! While I have never been under the impression that "Marketplace" was anything but right of center, this particular story, using The Lewin Group as a legitimate, non-partisan source for analyzing the Obama Healthcare Reform Bill, was just offensive. How stupid does Ms.Keith think her audience is?

By Yolanda Ochoa
From orange, CA, 09/10/2009

Lewin Group is not a non-partisan organization. I use to listen to NPR's Marketplace but I will no longer be listening to your information as it is tainted. Lewin Group is fronted by the United Healthcare Group who do not operate in the interests of people in America. Goodbye NPR.

By Annmarie Levins
From Boston, MA, 09/10/2009

The Lewin Group is "nonpartisan"? Are you kidding? They are the Republicans favorite fake experts, being wholly funded by United Health Care. While the Cato Institute is hardly objective, at least your average listener knows where they're coming from. But to help legitimize the Lewin Group is a disgrace.

By Shannon Walker
From New York, NY, 09/10/2009

You really should issue a retraction for calling the Lewin Group a non-partisan health care consultancy. Calling them non-partisan is a little like calling a United Health Care non partisan. You see, Lewin is a subsidiary of UHC. I suggest you do your homework and more thoroughly vet the PR BS put out against health care reform. Thank you, Shannon Walker

By m h
From MN, 09/10/2009

NPR, your credibility is in serious doubt with me now and I am considering revoking my sustaining membership. Between this and other stories with lazy Republican-of-the-day sourcing and having to listen to Cokie Roberts blather on every single week, I am increasingly turning away from NPR and to blogs that at least openly acknowledge their partisan leanings.

By Charles Soter
From Los Angeles, CA, 09/10/2009

My jaw dropped when you referred to The Lewin Group as "non-partisan." True, there may be a democrat somewhere in their office. But to refer to an organization that is fully owned by the insurance giant UnitedHealth Group, is sloppy journalism at best. Please research your sources before you cite them.

By Kevin Kooiker
From Spicer, MN, 09/10/2009

Well, just one more faithful NPR listener appalled at the ridiculous concept of going to the Lewin Group for a "neutral" perspective on the President's plan! This is like asking Wile E. Coyote for a neutral perspective on the Roadrunner.

By Garrison Krulewich
From New York, NY, 09/10/2009

I listen to, trust and donate to NPR because it is supposed to be a non-partisan source of news. After today, I will stop doing all three.

The Lewin Group has a significant and well-documented conflict of interest on the health care debate. Not identifying the Lewin Group as such is not only a breach of journalistic ethics, it is also wrong.

Calling the UHC-owned Lewin Group non-partisan is like calling the NRA a "non-partisan" organization in regards to gun rights.

If you are going to use partisan sources, they should be reported as such.

By Carrie Hamby
09/10/2009

Miss Keith, I heard your run-down of the President's health care plan by the numbers, in which you concluded that they check out "IF you're willing to wait 20 to 30

years" - this delivered with an audible sneer, as if you are decidedly not willing.

My numbers tell me that you were still a newcomer to grade school when Ronald Reagan was laying down fiscal policy that we are still suffering from 25+ years later. Baby, when you get to be my age, you will be grateful for plans set in motion 20 years ago!

(By the way, next time you should find an actual non-partisan group to help with your analysis.)

By Catherine Sveikauskas
From MD, 09/10/2009

Three right-wing sources to "fact check" Obama's health care speech. Way to go!! Shouldn't you have a better informed reporter on this?

By kate lint
09/10/2009

Wow. Marketplace used to be my favorite NPR show. Did that ever just go out the window.
The Lewin group is your fact checker.
Swears escape my lips.

By catherine sveikauskas
From MD, 09/10/2009

Washington Post also quoted Lewin Group today in an unsigned editorial about Obama's speech. They have become very right wing since hiring the former Wall St. Journal editor.

By jay cross
From AK, 09/10/2009

When you referred to the Lewin Group as non-partisan I thought I was listening to faux news.

By Jerry Markowitz
From Mount Airy, MD, 09/10/2009

<http://www.dailykos.com/storyonly/2009/9/10/780207/-NPR-story-includes-experts-from-Lewin-Group> Check your facts in the future.

By Kent Carter
From Chicago, IL, 09/10/2009

Wow...including a representative from the Lewin Group as a "non-partisan" commentator on Obama's speech. I really do expect more from an NPR program.

By Scott Berry
From Gaffney, SC, 09/10/2009

I suppose you could call them non-partisan as the insurance industry seems to own a fraction of the "centrist" Democrats, but then you have to call the Lewin group what it really is: and industry shill.

By Luke Maurer
From Eugene, OR, 09/10/2009

Your failure to disclose the Lewin Group's conflict of interest is about as clear-cut a breach of journalistic ethics as they get. "Non-partisan" is only very technically true, and its connotation of "disinterested" is highly misleading given the Lewin Group's ownership by United Health Care.

By Sharon Nichol
From TN, 09/10/2009

How is it possible that Ms. Keith on Marketplace could possibly refer to the Lewin Group, which has been identified time and time again, as a wholly owned subsidiary of one of this country's largest health insurance company's, United Health, how could she POSSIBLY REFER TO THIS GROUP AS NON-PARTISAN??? A representative from the Lewin Group should never have even been a reference in a fact check piece on healthcare reform...they are a mouthpiece for the health insurance industry. Do you have no desire to maintain one shred of journalistic integrity??? Is it simply ok to just lie to your listeners. I am so appalled at Ms. Keith, Marketplace, and NPR. It makes me question anything that I hear on NPR, which makes me wonder why I should even waste my time listening.

By Liz Schulte

From OH, 09/10/2009

Please correct your statement that the Lewin Group is non-partisan. They are a fully owned subsidiary of United Health Care.

It would be greatly appreciated if your show would make a greater attempt to represent all points of view in discussing such a critical issue as health care reform.

Thank you.

By Ronald Winkler
From Chicago, IL, 09/10/2009

Lewin Group is a right-wing front group for an insurance giant and you know it.

Propagandists!

By Paul Choberka
From Ogden, UT, 09/10/2009

The Lewin Group is 100% owned by United Health Care. United is my insurance company (through my employer) and I would not trust anything they have to say. United has another company that they own (I do not recall the name) that searches for discrepancies in the forms you are asked to fill out when you visit a doctor or hospital. Any discrepancy - cancellation! Nice.

By Debra Dick
From Dallas, TX, 09/10/2009

I CANNOT believe NPR did a piece with an so-called "expert" from the "non-partisan" group the "Lewin Group". They might be non-partisan, but since they are funded by one of the largest insurance companies in the US, they are HARDLY a disinterested party. Having them on air is perpetuating the lie that they are a neutral interest and is tantamount to asking the fox to tell us that what we need to do to secure the hen house.

I am appalled that not only did you have them on your show, but there was no disclosure regarding their interest in the story.

I am VERY disappointed that NPR included them in this story. This very essence of everything wrong in Washington. The Lewin group is a group whose sole purpose is to advance the interest of Insurance companies and NPR is aiding and abetting. SHAME ON YOU!

By john purtell
From north wales, PA, 09/10/2009

I'm appalled that you would characterize the Lewin Group as non-partisan! The Cato Institute? Are you kidding? Is this a Fox News affiliate? Please, in the interest of balance and fairness (and your show's credibility) issue a retraction.

By Sue O'Donnell
From Eden Prairie, MN, 09/10/2009

I, too, wish to comment about the Lewin Group. If you visit their About Us page, you will see that they are owned by United Health. Please don't call them non-partisan.

By Rocco Rizzo
From Rosendale, NY, 09/10/2009

I believe that you owe your listener-ship a correction. You stated that the Lewin Group is non-partisan. In case you were unaware, they are owned by a subsidiary of United Health Care, and therefore, by definition, partisan.

In an article in the July 23 Washington Post, it states, "The Lewin Group is part of Ingenix, a UnitedHealth subsidiary that was accused by the New York attorney general and the American Medical Association of helping insurers shift medical expenses to consumers by distributing skewed data. Ingenix supplied UnitedHealth and other insurers with data that allegedly understated the "reasonable and customary" doctor fees that insurers use to determine how much they will reimburse consumers for out-of-network care."

Here's a link to the above article: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/07/22/AR2009072203696.html>

I am surprised that you folks did not properly research this group, before citing them. I ask that you formally announce a correction to your statement on air. Thank You.

By Kate Pritchard

From Somerset, NJ, 09/10/2009

I have never been to this website or had a big enough problem with NPR programs that would prompt me to visit and send a negative comment. Not to beat a dead horse but...Lewin Group!

By Lynette Setzkorn
From Tulsa, OK, 09/10/2009

THE LEWIN GROUP IS A FRONT FOR UNITED HEALTH CARE!!! Why do you present them as nonpartisan? They are as partisan as it's possible to be!!!

And why do you refuse to address the fact that an enormous portion of our projected future deficit is related to rampant health care cost increases?

Are you shilling for corporate interests?

By Patrick Jackson
From Boston, MA, 09/10/2009

Well, it has already been well stated here, but I was just floored when I heard Ms. Keith characterize the Lewin Group as non-partisan. Just go to their website. Here is the real story: The Lewin Group is an Ingenix company. Ingenix, a wholly-owned subsidiary of UnitedHealth Group, was founded in 1996 to develop, acquire and integrate the world's best-in-class health care information technology capabilities. For more information, visit www.ingenix.com. The Lewin Group operates with editorial independence and provides its clients with the very best expert and impartial health care and human services policy research and consulting services. The Lewin Group is anything but non-partisan. Marketplace cannot make blunders like that and keep even a shred of its credibility in the future.

By Carla Rautenberg
From Cleveland, OH, 09/10/2009

I used to depend on Marketplace for information it was difficult to get elsewhere. NO MORE. Your credibility is nil, since you identified the Lewin Group as a "non-partisan" consulting group. Why didn't you tell the truth? How is it possible that you did not know that United Healthcare, the biggest health insurance corporation in the country, owns The Lewin Group? American Public Media and National Public Radio have both been permanently damaged by your ignorant and dangerous error. And to think, I used to recommend Marketplace to people. Never again. Tamara Keith and the entire team at Marketplace, you have taught me my lesson.

By michael kinal
From climax, NY, 09/10/2009

Hello, The Lewin Group is NOT an impartial healthcare research group. It is directly connected to health insurance giant United Healthcare Inc. A simple google search reveals this. Please be more careful in quoting sources that have a financial interest in the outcome of healthcare reform. Otherwise you are just another willful or unwitting mouthpiece for corporate interests.

By Brett Greisen
From New York, NY, 09/10/2009

A wholly-owned (since 2007) subsidiary of a large GOP supporter - UnitedHealthCare?? Have you heard of Google? See besides above cites, Huff Post 05 August 09 - article by Ryan Grim. Article notes that The Commonwealth Fund ended its relationship w/ Lewin sometime this year as its Chinese Wall claim didn't wash. Then there's The Cato Institute - except for their study debunking the "tax cuts = increased tax income" trope, neutral = no, they aren't! I know that UHC is hometown Twin Cities, but still... Yours truly,

By Karen Dumont
From Cleveland, OH, 09/10/2009

You have damaged your credibility by letting Tamara Keith's report go un-vetted in citing Lewin Group and the Cato Institute. By now, Lewin Group has been outed as a front for a health insurance company. The Cato Institute, which calls itself libertarian, has the effect of trying to restore the state of capitalism to its "good old days."

Please don't make such glaring errors. I don't want to start doubting the veracity of what I am hearing on MarketPlace.

By Ted Manekin
From Bowie, MD, 09/10/2009

Wow! Tamara Keith "checking out a few of [Obama's] claims and calling the Lewin Group "non-partisan." Being wholly owned by UnitedHealth Group and a mouthpiece for the health insurance industry, the Lewin Group shouldn't even be appearing in a fact-checking story, let alone be called non-partisan. I think that Marketplace can do much better than Tamara Keith's silly reporting.

By John Gregory Brown
From Sweet Briar, VA, 09/10/2009

Your statement that the Lewin Group is a "a non-partisan health consulting firm" is not merely misleading, it is inaccurate. Please see the website listed below for a discussion of the Lewin Group, which is in fact part of Ingenix, Inc., a wholly-owned subsidiary of the UnitedHealth Group. That group, funded by insurance company interests, has again and again produced "studies" cited by those opposing health care reform. I'm shocked that this program would deceive its listeners in precisely the same manner as those politicians who quote the Lewin group as though it were a disinterested, objective body.

http://www.healthreformwatch.com/2009/08/23/the-lewin-group-cited-often-owned-by-unitedhealth/

By David Confer
From Powell, OH, 09/10/2009

Washington Post re: Lewin Group. http://tinyurl.com/nr7264

By David Confer
From Powell, OH, 09/10/2009

... Lewin Group non-partisan? Haven't you read anything about the Lewin 'connection' to United Health Care Corp.? Like its being 'owned' by UHC.

Cato Institute? Which slant did you expect the spokesman from Cato to take? Are you still that naive?

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