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Where lawmakers come to blog

The Big Question: Will Obama's new plan give health reform a boost?

By Sydelle Moore - 02/22/10 11:50 AM ET

Some of the nation's top political commentators, legislators and intellectuals offer their insight into the biggest question burning up the blogosphere today. □□□

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Today's question:

Will President Barack Obama's new health reform plan generate momentum for the stalled legislation?

Damon N. Spiegel, entrepreneur and writer, said:

Taking a PR vacation from Healthcare is shamefully similar to Tiger Woods' vacation. It doesn't matter; the story is old, the deal is dead and at this point Obama is gasping for air.

This isn't new health reform but merely a different attack at a different angle. The administration can try their best to shove this down the throats of our elected officials but come November, someone is going to get the boot and in all likelihood it will be the Democrats.

Healthcare reform should start with two very basic pieces. One is to streamline the payment system between Doctors and private payers; and two is to address some solution for pre-existing conditions. Focus on those two elements and that will save millions, get bipartisan support and most importantly it will do some good toward the ultimate goal of healthcare reform –i.e. lower the financial burden of healthcare.

Michelle D. Bernard, president & CEO of the Independent Women's Forum, said:

The American people have soundly rejected the fundamental reform proposal that's being advanced by Congress and the White House. The tweaked bill that's being offered by the White House isn't going to change the consensus among Americans that a trillion-dollar government effort to micromanage the health care insurance of all Americans is the wrong direction.

Yet the White House and Congress don't seem concerned about the American people's attitudes per se. Their only priority is insuring they can convince

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enough House Members that something has changed and that there will be political benefits to passing health care once and for all so they can sneak the legislation through via reconciliation. It seems like it will be an uphill battle to convince vulnerable Democrats that somehow supporting this wildly unpopular initiative is in their political interest.

The White House would better serve the American people by going back to the drawing board and considering reforms that really could improve the system. They could start by thinking about some of the challenges that women face:

Today, health insurance is tied to employment, which means that women (who frequently take time out of the workforce and work in part-time positions that don't include health benefits) often face disruptions in their coverage. Buying health insurance on the individual market (instead of through an employer) can often be costly and difficult. Why is this such a problem? It's largely the product of ill-conceived government policy. In particular, employers purchasing health insurance receive tax breaks while those purchasing in the individual market don't. They could start addressing that problem by reforming the tax treatment to put employer-provided and individually-purchased insurance on a level playing field. You can check out more ideas for how to improve the system here: <http://www.iwf.org/files/228e1cb798b2957ae19a5ca4a78bb1f9.pdf>.

The President may be able to gin up a little momentum among those in his party to pass his health care reform. But that won't make the bill any better or more popular.

Ron Bonjean, Republican strategist, said:

The White House is wasting time and simply rearranging the deck chairs of the *Titanic* for the November elections. Today's announcement is basically the same old plan under a new PR umbrella with nuanced buzzwords and a gimmicky regulatory bureaucracy. The devil has always been in the legislative details on whether or not skyrocketing healthcare costs will actually come under control. Once the plan is actually drafted into actual legislative language, we will know whether vulnerable Democrats will really support this renewed effort.

Hal Lewis, professor of Physics at UC Santa Barbara, said:

As nearly as I can tell it is a bit loose to call the Obama plan new. It is the same-old same-old, with a couple of rough edges polished smooth, and is being touted as a compromise though strategic retreat is a better definition. You can certainly win victories by strategic retreat while chipping away at the opposition, but you can't change momentum. (I am a physicist, and momentum means mass times velocity---this proposal, as far as it is known to me, has mass but no velocity.) And a plan drawn up by one side in secrecy cannot honestly be called a compromise. Obama's narcissism is driving him to dirtier and dirtier politics, and is alienating the center that he so badly needs. Massachusetts should have provided an instructive lesson, but they chose to skip school.

Michael D. Tanner, senior fellow at [The Cato Institute](#), said:

Faced with public opinion polls showing that 58 percent of the public are opposed to his health care proposal, President Obama has gone back to the drawing board and brought forth a new health care plan that looks almost exactly like his old health care bill. Actually that's not quite true. This proposal is more expensive, pushing its cost up close to \$1 trillion in the first 10 years, and raising taxes by some \$629 billion.

Having apparently decided that the beatings will continue until morale improves, the president offers this health reform retreat as an example of bipartisan openness, while simultaneously preparing to force through a bill



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using "reconciliation." But it is hard to see how it changes the fundamental equation.

Neither Republicans nor the American public are likely to sign on to Obamacare 2.0 (Or by this time is it 3.0? 4.0?). That means the president will have to rely exclusively on nervous members of his own party, relying on obscure parliamentary maneuvers in the face of widespread voter anger. Given the powers and prerogatives of the presidency, and substantial Democratic majorities, he may yet ram this through. But if he does so, it will be on the basis of power politics, not because the latest version of Obamacare is new and improved.

Justin Raimondo, editorial director of [Antiwar.com](#), said:

I don't think the Democrats will be able to pass anything, but I have to say: Big Pharma and the insurance industry sure are pushing hard to pass this thing. I wonder how many billions in profits they expect to rake in? No one should doubt the origins of this legislation; this is a payoff if ever there was one. Nothing else explains the persistence of a proposal that is clearly wildly unpopular, and will be an albatross around the necks of Democrats in the next election. I hope the cash is worth it to them.

Dean Baker, co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research, said:

The insurance industry is creating the momentum for health reform with its rate increases. People were having a hard time understanding the need for reform. Then Rahm Emanuel infiltrated the corporate boardrooms and got them to impose crazy rate hikes. Now everyone knows why we need healthcare reform.

Craig Newmark, founder of [Craigslist.org](#), said:

It can, assuming it gets a fair shake from the media.

Peter Navarro, professor of economics and public policy at U.C. Irvine, said:

A simple reading of the Tea Party leaves tells us that the Obama administration agenda is cooked, over, and done as we have come to know and loathe it. If congressional Democrats want to accelerate the momentum of the electoral snowball coming at them in 2010, by all means they should try to regain some momentum on healthcare.

John Feehery, [Pundits Blog](#) contributor, said:

Without any bipartisan support, I don't see how it gains any more momentum. If he decides to jam it through, via reconciliation, he can do that, but if he does, it will be political suicide for the Democrats.

John F. McManus, president of [The John Birch Society](#), said:

Rather than gain momentum, it certainly appears that enthusiasm for a new healthcare plan is waning. Many Americans are awakening to the impracticality, cost and fundamentally un-American basis of the federal government's plan to take over the medical field. Especially some Democrat congressmen in swing districts are becoming leery of attaching themselves to a proposal that could cost them reelection in November.

The proposals put forth by Mr. Obama and his allies would essentially convince many Americans that healthcare is free. This would enormously increase the number seeking treatments of all kinds. "Free" medical care has resulted in many Canadians coming to the U.S. for treatment. They know that the long waiting lists in



COLUMNISTS

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their country for what's "free" has been a disaster. Sensible Canadians even tell their U.S. friends, "Don't do to your country what we have allowed to happen to ours with our healthcare system."

Momentum for federal healthcare? No, the momentum is swinging the other way.

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Just more of the same. More taxes and more spending with Government takeover. \$1 trillion plan when Obama said he would accept anything under \$900 billion. He cannot follow his own rules!

BY **ELWOOD BAAS** on 02/22/2010 at 12:13

The big rub here is federal health insurance premiums are steadily going out of site and they need more funds to help pay for them,the solution,make them pay for it.

BY **RICHARD** on 02/22/2010 at 12:24

flash ---year 2025---obama issues new healthcare reform---who cares and what is an obama

BY **TOM** on 02/22/2010 at 12:31

Liberts want to say Ronald Reagan had similar approval/disapproval ratings at the same juncture as obama, like there's hope for obama, yet. The Huge, Major Difference is Reagans' disapproval ratings were driven by a liberal lamestream press, obama's disapproval by The Voting, Taxpaying People. Also, the Great RR did every thing right to boost up America - this poor sap, obama, cannot do anything right, NOT ONE DAMN THING YET!!!! Peter Navarro says it best: It's already over for obama, he's done, finished, kaput - fastest fall from grace in American History!!! It's All Over, Na, Na, Na, Na, Na, Na, Na, Na, Hey Hey Hey GOODBYE!!!! What a Complete Loser. He had it all and f***** blew it!

BY **TJ JAY** on 02/22/2010 at 12:38

Hardly a "fair and balanced" panel of the "...nation's top political commentators, legislators and intellectuals..." I think the president is right to push ahead. In a democracy, it's a majority that rules - and this attempt to bring Republican's proposals out of the woodworks (and to show that the President's HCR actually incorporates many of these provisions) will provide the Congress with a legitimate reason to pass something that, when looked at point-by-point, is favored by majorities of Americans.

BY **STEVE VAN** on 02/22/2010 at 14:31

The majority of this odd group of commentators are um, an interesting selection. Spanning the ideological spectrum from the useless geeks of the Cato Institute to the clueless freaks of the John Birch Society...what would I EXPECT these people to say, unless President Obama announced that he was resigning and then committing suicide on the White House lawn? Pass the darn bill, now.

BY **THE REAL PATRIOT** on 02/22/2010 at 15:06

President Obama is proceeding as he always has. In January he told us that jobs was is number one priority. I don't see any evidence of that. He seems to be continuing on with his efforts to control a very large part of the US economy with a health care take over while he ignores the people and the US Constitution.

BY **RICHS** on 02/22/2010 at 16:29

Can the people who support this bill please quit claiming that people support this bill when they are told what the separate parts of it are? There is no way the bill is going to get passed like that, so bringing up such a point is completely irrelevant. Get back to me when this bill can be passed without the massive tax increases or the individual mandate. Because until that time, it is irrelevant if this bill "when looked at point-by-point, is favored by majorities of Americans." Hey Steven Van, get back to me when majorities of Americans like the bill as it is written and will be passed.

BY **OBAMA IS CARTER** on 02/22/2010 at 17:27

Steve Van, be careful how you do polls. Ask people if they want a public option and the answer is "yes". When they have to pay for it, they want nothing to do with it. Go point by point and tell the people polled the cost to them and who knows... Ask me if I want an "option" of any sort and only an idiot says "no". But ask me if I want an "option" that is to kill private health care and limits my choices and taxes rise and I want no part of it.

BY **VAN NOT** on 02/22/2010 at 17:32

Richs, exactly! Obama says he won't rest until everybody has a job. He won't rest until HC passes. He won't rest until the economy turns around...yet he is doing speeches, fundraisers and plays more golf than any president since 1960. He just talks and plays golf...Reid and Pelosi are running this country, not Obama.

BY **RICHS RIGHT** on 02/22/2010 at 17:35

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