



Lawmakers Demand Answers on Tax-funded ObamaCare Propaganda

As the Obama administration spends tens of millions in taxpayer money on unconstitutional “public relations” contracts promoting its “ObamaCare” takeover of U.S. health care, lawmakers have been unsuccessfully demanding answers for months. If documents are not handed over soon, however, Congress may have to issue subpoenas.

Lawmakers [first tried to get answers](#) about the controversial schemes — critics say PR is just a nice term for propaganda gimmicks — back in May, sending a letter to Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius. The deadline to hand over information, June 1, came and went. The department never responded.

A follow up letter was sent to Sebelius on August 1, and again, HHS never turned over the material. Instead, it continually promised that the documents would be produced soon. They never were. Now, House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Dave Camp (R-Mich., left of House seal, above) and Oversight Subcommittee Chairman Charles Boustany (R-La., right of House seal, above) appear to be running out of patience.

“The department’s failure to provide a single responsive document to the Committee’s reasonable requests leaves only two possibilities: either the department is unable to keep track of the work products it buys with taxpayer dollars or the department is trying to delay any response until after this year’s election,” the two Republicans wrote in a [letter to Sebelius](#) last week. “Neither explanation is acceptable.”

Lawmakers concluded by telling Sebelius that if the request is not fulfilled by October 31, the committee would be forced to “consider issuing a subpoena” to compel HHS to provide answers. “This is not an action the Committee takes lightly, but it is one that appears required in light of your Department’s refusal to be transparent in its expenditure of taxpayer dollars,” they wrote.

The information and documents being sought include everything on the use of taxpayer dollars by HHS for ObamaCare “public relations” contracts, advertising, polling, “message testing,” and similar schemes. Estimates suggest somewhere around \$50 million in public money - possibly much more - has already been spent on propaganda propping up the health-care scheme in the public arena.

“These efforts have included costly contracts for ‘a big guerrilla campaign splash,’ in the words of one Administration official, to drive Internet traffic to pro-Obamacare websites and produce television commercials promoting the Administration’s positions,” the two GOP lawmakers wrote. “Recent reports also suggest public funds were used to push prime-time television shows to add dialogue with ‘people





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talking about the health insurance thing,' according to one former Administration official."

The largest and perhaps most controversial "PR" contract, worth about \$20 million, was first [exposed](#) in May. "The campaign will inform the American people about the many preventive benefits now available to those with Medicare, Medicaid, and private health insurance as a result of the Affordable Care Act," an HHS representative claimed about the expensive public relations ploy.

Also attracting fierce criticism was a ["stimulus"-funded HHS contract with Ogilvy Public Relations](#) to create what the administration described as a "Publicity Center." Another \$18 million in taxpayer money was spent sending mail to seniors about the supposed tax-funded "benefits" ObamaCare would allegedly bestow upon them. Much of the PR work has been described as [misleading](#), too.

Unsurprisingly, the controversial propaganda spending sparked a national outcry, especially among critics of Obama's federal health-care scheme and opponents of tax-funded "public relations" ploys. Indeed, [well over half of the money](#) spent on pro-ObamaCare marketing gimmicks came from taxpayers. Lawmakers promptly took action by sending letters, but so far, they have been largely ignored.

Even as Congress was trying to investigate past propaganda related to ObamaCare, however, the Obama administration, apparently undeterred by congressional inquiries, [spent another \\$3 million in taxpayer funds](#) to promote its so-called health "exchanges" in early October. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), part of HHS, gave the American people's money to PR firm Weber Shandwick for "a strategic plan with short- and long-term tactics for exchange outreach and education," according to PR Week.

Last month, meanwhile, a scandal exploded when it was revealed that California was [using federal taxpayer dollars to wage its own pro-ObamaCare](#) propaganda campaign. Among the most controversial aspects of the plan was an effort to have Hollywood promote the deeply unpopular health-care scheme in the plot lines of television shows.

"I'd like to see 10 of the major TV shows, or telenovelas, have people talking about 'that health insurance thing,'" California health exchange Executive Director Peter V. Lee was quoted as saying by the *New York Times* after awarding a nearly \$1 million "PR" contract to promote ObamaCare. "There are good story lines here."

Among the television shows being targeted were *Modern Family* and *Grey's Anatomy*. Also under consideration was a pro-ObamaCare "reality TV" show. Other elements of the highly controversial California propaganda blitz included advertisements in dozens of languages, according to [news reports](#).

Unsurprisingly, lawmakers were outraged after learning of the scheme. "Americans' hard-earned money should not be taken by government to subsidize Hollywood and insert propaganda into the popular culture," [fumed](#) Rep. Fred Upton (R-Mich.) and Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) in a letter sent late last month. "It should be going toward ensuring the cost of healthcare is being lowered for all Americans."

Popular conservative Sen. Jim DeMint (R-S.C.), meanwhile, highlighted numerous examples of what he called "HHS propaganda" spending. Among other key points, DeMint, a highly influential Republican, noted that some 60 percent of all pro-ObamaCare ads were actually being funded by taxpayers.

"Apparently, when this Administration complains about 'corporate interests' in politics, their 'solution' involves using taxpayer dollars to engage in advertising campaigns promoting a law the American people don't want," the Senator [said on his website](#). "With spending projects like these, is it any wonder



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that the federal government is running trillion-dollar deficits?”

Slavish Obama apologists justified spending tax money on ObamaCare propaganda by pointing out that the George W. Bush administration spent even more taxpayer funds promoting its controversial schemes. A front group financed by billionaire George Soros, for example, noted on “Think Progress” that the previous administration had even violated federal law with its massive propaganda operations.

“After President Bush’s successful effort to pass the Medicare prescription drug benefit (Medicare Part D), the Bush Administration undertook a significantly larger campaign to inform seniors about their new benefits,” [observed](#) Think Progress, attempting to deflect mounting criticism over the ObamaCare propaganda. It was not immediately clear how citing unconstitutional activities by the previous administration would justify Obama’s own lawless propaganda campaigns.

Perhaps even more alarming than the overt propaganda, though, was a “slush fund” set up under ObamaCare that was being used to distribute huge amounts of taxpayer dollars to news organizations. As *The New American* [reported](#) last year, the \$5 billion fund was doling out public cash to the *Washington Post*, NBC, Reuters, newspaper giant Gannett, and CBS, and numerous other media firms – none of which disclosed the taxpayer funding while reporting on ObamaCare.

Still, despite all of the multi-million dollar tax-funded PR gimmicks, most Americans favor repeal of the entire scheme, according to [polls](#). Multiple states are already working to [nullify it](#). Instead of begging the administration for documents or publicly complaining to score political points, however, U.S. lawmakers in the House of Representatives who claim to oppose ObamaCare could easily stop the unpopular scheme in its tracks.

While repealing the controversial legislation would certainly be a welcome development for ObamaCare critics, simply [cutting off all funding](#) — constitutionally speaking, all federal spending must originate in the House — would be far easier to do. With the supposedly anti-ObamaCare GOP firmly in control of that chamber, it remains unclear why the health-care takeover is still marching onwards.

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