



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on February 25, 2010

Lights, Camera, (In)Action: President Obama Convenes Healthcare Confab

CSPAN was the broadcaster of Thursday's bipartisan healthcare summit. The political cenacle convened at Blair House in the nation's capitol to hash out a compromise agreement for the still very unpopular A to Z restructuring (read: nationalization) of the American healthcare industry (from the insurance policies that cover treatment to the method and manner of the treatment itself).



The venerable council composed of representatives, Senators, community leaders, lobbyists, and activists was presided over by President Barack Obama. Although time was allotted for the assembled lawmakers to make points and counterpoints, from the outset the President established his primacy in the summit by declaring, "[I don't count my time because I'm the President.](#)" That is to say, "I'm the decider."

As the confab got rolling, one of the first to speak up against the President's proposal for overhauling healthcare was Senator Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.). In an analogy taken from the recent woes of Toyota, the Senator from Tennessee declared that "this [health care reform] is a car that can't be recalled and fixed.... We ought to start over." Such a notion is anathema to the President's zeal for reorganizing and redefining the universe of medical care by any means necessary. With all due respect to Senator Alexander, if it was that easy, there wouldn't be a need for the ascent up the political Parnassus to confer with the [swami of summits](#) (remember the "beer summit"?).

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President Obama sensed the theatre of the moment (probably due to his being the stage director in chief) and alternatively struck poses evincing conciliation, concern, consternation, and captaincy. This is a man trained from his days as a community organizer to [rely on meetings and chin wagging and leave the arm twisting to others.](#)

Instead of instantly jumping to the defense of the principal plank of his legacy's platform, upon hearing Senator Alexander's pronouncement that the health bill was DOA, President Obama merely posed and shifted in his seat. This pregnant pause had a gestational period just long enough to birth one comment too many from the Senator unfamiliar with the rule of rhetoric followed by Cicero, Caesar, and all powerful speakers of history: when you've made a solid point, sit down. Alexander pushed himself right over the cliff by invoking the Congressional Budget Office.



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This fateful remark was the silver iodide that seeded the clouds of budget predictions and analysis and down came the rain and the deluge began. Various accounts of the CBO's estimate of \$100 billion deduction in the federal deficit over the first decade of the measure's existence, followed by deeper cuts over a lifetime. The Republican bloc offered counterpoints highlighting that the cuts were being made at the expense of Medicare, an obvious attempt to score tactical points by pandering to the aged end of the electorate.

The Democrats were not above demagoguery, themselves. Senate Majority Leader, Harry Reid (D-Nev.), tugging mightily at the heartstrings of viewers reported that, "Harvard just completed a study that shows 45,000 Americans die every year because they don't have health insurance, almost 1,000 a week in America." Bottom line: If we don't pass this legislation, and do so quickly, thousands of longsuffering Americans will die agonizing deaths; all of which could have been avoided if we just could have passed one lifesaving bill. Albeit an unpopular, unconstitutional bill that would forever enlarge the boundaries of government while demolishing the boundaries of federalism.

For CSPAN, a network familiar with being a televised cure for insomnia, there were a couple moments of fiery repartee. After being attacked by Senator John McCain (R-Ariz.) for championing a scheme whose legislative existence persisted in large measure on last-minute largesse in the form of kickbacks and exemptions written into the bills passed by both houses, President Obama countered, "We're not campaigning anymore, John. The election is now over."

McCain shot back, "I'm reminded of that ever day."

Not one to surrender the last word, the President responded in turn, "We can spend the remainder of our time with our respective talking points, but we're supposed to be talking about insurance."

There was one additional dramatic tableau, this one featuring the President and House Minority Whip, Eric Cantor (R-Va.). The latter was punctuating his points by signaling the impressive stack of documents on the table in front of him, thousands of pages of legislation he used as props in his performance. The President chastised Cantor, calling his behavior "political" and preventative of meaningful conversation.

These little sparring matches were as close as the much vaunted summit came to a real clash of ideas. In all, admirers of powerful drama were disappointed. Every word of the meeting sounded scripted, and they were.

Republicans, regardless of soi-disant conservatism, went out of their way to claim to be just as committed to substantive restructuring of the health care system as their opponents on the other side of the aisle. The ways and means were up for debate, claimed the GOP, but the ultimate goal of providing healthcare to the "millions" of uninsured, was indisputable.

As expected, Democrats bragged that all of their versions of healthcare reform (and that of the President) was the pinnacle of having your cake and eating it too. While the government would be growing and money would be flowing, the deficit would shrink and Americans would be healthier. Rhetoric, it seemed, trumped reason.

Irrespective of party affiliation, not one of the speakers referred to the fact that regardless of the charitable nature of extending healthcare to all Americans, there is no authorization in the Constitution for legislating in this area, particularly the Tenth Amendment-busting mandate that all Americans purchase a qualifying medical care insurance policy. There was not to be found a single defender of our nation's founding document or of the holy trinity of Republican government: separation of powers,



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federalism, and enumerated powers.

As cameras quit rolling and the spotlights were killed, the televangelists from both sides went home without converts. Republicans vowed to employ every parliamentary tactic in defense of their position against comprehensive “reform,” while their Democratic counterparts vowed to fight on and reaffirmed their steadfast resolve to pass some iteration of healthcare legislation, even if that means relying on reconciliation. Besides, arm twisting and deal making play better in back rooms where the cameras never roll.

Photo of President Obama at healthcare summit: AP Images



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