



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on September 10, 2009

Obama's Healthcare Pitch to Congress

President Obama proved he had nothing new in his political bag of tricks in his healthcare address to Congress on September 9. The most important part of the speech was not that he was retailing the same two specific examples of insurance mendacity he had been using for months, but that he revealed no new means of paying for the budget-busting program.

Obama did [make an effort to pledge](#) that the healthcare "public option" would not add to the deficit:



Here's what you need to know. First, I will not sign a plan that adds one dime to our deficits — either now or in the future. Period. And to prove that I'm serious, there will be a provision in this plan that requires us to come forward with more spending cuts if the savings we promised don't materialize.

The problem is that all of the real plans — i.e., those actually submitted in Congress — add between [several hundred billion dollars](#) and [\\$1 trillion](#) to the deficit over 10 years, according to the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office. So Obama is talking about a deficit-neutral bill that exists nowhere on paper. It's a fantasy bill, which explains why he can make all kinds of promises about the wonderful benefits it will deliver.

"As soon as I sign this bill," Obama told Congress of his bill that does not exist (in a tone that falsely assumes the details of how the bill would work have already been ironed out), he will inaugurate the "public option," a federal government-run alternative to private care.

Even the way President Obama *claimed* he would pay for a new government-run health care program hardly inspires confidence in creating another government healthcare program. How would he pay for this new program, which would cost \$1 trillion over the next ten years? "Reducing the waste and inefficiency in Medicare and Medicaid will pay for most of this plan," he [told](#) Congress.

The existing "public options," Medicare and Medicaid, are massively wasteful. So the solution to cut costs is to create one more government healthcare program, in Obama's world.

Medicare and Medicaid are so wasteful, Obama [told](#) Congress, that cutting waste from them will not only pay for most of his new government program, they're budget-busters:

If we do nothing to slow these skyrocketing costs, we will eventually be spending more on Medicare and Medicaid than every other government program combined. Put simply, our health care problem is our deficit problem. Nothing else even comes close.



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Obama says the path of spending on health care from Medicare and Medicaid will break the federal budget. But his plan is not to spend less than what that path is, but to make cuts in the waste and then spend that budget-busting difference on a new government health care program. That's the "public option." This begs the question: If Medicare and Medicaid are going to break the budget on the current path, how can you spend all the saved waste and not break the budget anyway? Obama avoided that issue in his speech, just as he has studiously avoided it in the "town halls" across the country he set up last month to promote his "public option."

Obama retailed some well-used, old horror stories on his standard healthcare speech: the man whose chemotherapy was delayed because he didn't disclose gallstones and the woman whose mastectomy was denied because she didn't disclose acne.

And President Obama [continued to make political hay](#) of what he called "bogus claims" about his health care package:

Instead of honest debate, we have seen scare tactics.... And out of this blizzard of charges and counter-charges, confusion has reigned.... Some of people's concerns have grown out of bogus claims spread by those whose only agenda is to kill reform at any cost. The best example is the claim, made not just by radio and cable talk show hosts, but prominent politicians, that we plan to set up panels of bureaucrats with the power to kill off senior citizens. Such a charge would be laughable if it weren't so cynical and irresponsible. It is a lie, plain and simple.

But the real issue is: if Obama has yet to reveal any but the most vague details about his health care proposal, isn't it natural that people would tend to misunderstand what would eventually emerge from Congress?

President Obama closed his address with an emotional appeal to the memory of the late Senator Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts, who championed a federally controlled healthcare system. Obama [noted](#) that Kennedy and other legislators had what he called a "large-heartedness" that enacted programs in the past:

That large-heartedness — that concern and regard for the plight of others — is not a partisan feeling. It is not a Republican or a Democratic feeling. It, too, is part of the American character. Our ability to stand in other people's shoes. A recognition that we are all in this together; that when fortune turns against one of us, others are there to lend a helping hand. A belief that in this country, hard work and responsibility should be rewarded by some measure of security and fair play; and an acknowledgement that sometimes government has to step in to help deliver on that promise.

Of course, Obama pledged in his oath of office to "preserve, protect and defend" the U.S. Constitution, not to promote "large-heartedness" or "feelings."

President Obama [noted](#) that there are limits to what the federal government can do, without indicating how those limits are established. "Our predecessors understood that government could not, and should not, solve every problem. They understood that there are instances when the gains in security from government action are not worth the added constraints on our freedom. But they also understood that the danger of too much government is matched by the perils of too little; that without the leavening hand of wise policy, markets can crash, monopolies can stifle competition, and the vulnerable can be exploited."

And that's why the Founding Fathers wrote the U.S. Constitution, to tell politicians where that line



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between not enough and too much government lies. The Constitution details what responsibilities are the federal government's, and the unmentioned duties are left "to the states respectively, or to the people," as the [10th Amendment](#) specifies.

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