



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on April 19, 2012

Passing ObamaCare a “Mistake,” Says Barney Frank

This, said Frank, was “the same mistake [President Bill] Clinton made.” Although Obama succeeded where Clinton had failed, his success begat precisely the same political outcome as Clinton’s failure: Democrats got creamed at the ballot box the following November. Averred Frank, “I think we paid a terrible price for health care.”



In 1994, following Clinton’s attempt at a blatant government takeover of the healthcare sector, Republicans took both houses of Congress and won a large number of state and local elections as well. In 2010, after the passage of ObamaCare, Republicans took 66 seats in the House of Representatives, giving them control of that chamber once again. A [study](#) in the journal *American Politics Research* concluded that Democrats’ support for ObamaCare was a significant factor in their defeat.

Frank claims to have seen this coming. “I would not have pushed [healthcare reform] as hard,” he told *New York*. “As a matter of fact, after Scott Brown won, I suggested going back. I would have started with financial reform” — which he also got in the form of the [monstrous](#) Dodd-Frank financial act — “but certainly not health care.”

Despite his misgivings about the political fallout from ObamaCare, Frank “didn’t think it was a big enough mistake to vote against,” [Michelle Malkin](#) observed.

Republicans were quick to pounce on Frank’s comments. The National Republican Congressional Committee issued a press release stating, “Even Barney Frank admits that ObamaCare has been a disaster.”

Frank fired back, accusing Republicans of “twisting” his words for political gain. “No, I have no issue with the subject matter of the bill itself,” Frank told [Talking Points Memo](#). “I was just commenting on the politics. And I was saying it was a mistake to have done it first.”

A fair reading of the Congressman’s remarks bears out his contention. Nowhere did he state that ObamaCare was a bad idea. Indeed, in the [full transcript](#) of the *New York* interview he said he believes that “as the health-care bill goes forward, it will be less and less plausible that it was doing any damage to anybody, and more and more people will be seeing the benefits of it.” He merely argued that it cost his party politically.

Why did passing ObamaCare harm Democrats? In Frank’s opinion, it is because the upper and middle classes are greedy and don’t want to help the poor:

The problem with health care is this: Health care is enormously important to people. When you



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tell them that you're going to extend health care to people who don't now have it, they don't see how you can do that without hurting them. So I think [Obama] underestimated, as did Clinton, the sensitivity of people to what they see as an effort to make them share the health care with poor people.

This, by and large, is nonsense. Frank is right that people get nervous when the government is tampering with something as significant as their healthcare, but opposition to ObamaCare has not been predicated on its extending coverage to the poor (except insofar as doing so adds to the mountain of federal debt). Most opponents have objected to being forced to purchase health insurance; the case currently before the Supreme Court, for example, challenges the law's constitutionality on the basis of the individual mandate. Others are concerned about the myriad rules and regulations contained in the law and issued on the basis of it, many of which are highly intrusive and some of which (e.g., the contraceptive coverage mandate) impinge on their religious freedom.

Nevertheless, "the overall problem [Frank] identifies makes sweeping market-oriented reforms difficult too," wrote *Forbes'* [Avik Roy](#). That is, just as taking over the entire healthcare sector in one fell swoop was bad politics because it unnerved people, so might repealing ObamaCare, Medicare, or any other major entitlement be.

Frank himself said that he thought Democrats "could have gotten some pieces of" ObamaCare before 2012 if they had passed financial reform first and then tackled healthcare. This is, in fact, how much of the welfare state has been built: incrementally, not with big, headline-making programs.

It may well be, therefore, that the welfare state would most easily be dismantled in the same fashion. Unfortunately, few in Washington are talking about dismantling it at all. Republicans promise to "shore up" entitlements and to "repeal and replace" ObamaCare — and are promptly vilified by Democrats as those who would end Social Security or Medicaid and leave seniors and the poor to die in the streets. Both parties speak of vague cuts to the federal budget, but those are always mere reductions in the rate of increase — and invariably years down the line. White House Chief of Staff Jacob Lew summed up the Beltway consensus well when he [told](#) *Meet the Press* that "the time for austerity is not today." In Washington, it never is.

The longer the welfare state is permitted to metastasize, however, the more difficult incremental reductions become and the more likely the whole edifice will have to be cashiered because Uncle Sam is simply broke. At that point, politics will be forced to give way to reality, and everyone will wish politicians — and the people who elected them — had had the guts to rein in entitlements slowly rather than have them coming crashing down all at once. And as long as Barney Frank is saying ObamaCare was a mistake, what better place to start hacking away at Leviathan than by repealing — and not replacing — that unconstitutional behemoth?

Photo of Barney Frank: AP Images



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