



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on August 21, 2010

## Putting Lipstick on the ObamaCare Pig

In a March 13 op-ed for the Washington Post, President Barack Obama's lead pollster, Joel Benenson, wrote: "When it comes to health care and insurance, once reform passes, the tangible benefits Americans will realize will trump the fear-mongering rhetoric opponents are stoking today."

"And when that reality kicks in," contended Benenson, "the political burden will shift from those who supported the plan to those who voted against" it.

Reality has since kicked in, and the political burden not only remains on those who supported ObamaCare but has become significantly heavier.

Indeed, the honeymoon for ObamaCare lasted about as long as that for [Britney Spears' first marriage](#). By June the *New York Times* was [reporting](#) that congressional Democrats, wary of voter anger over the passage of ObamaCare and other legislation, were avoiding town hall meetings in their districts, heeding "the advice of party leaders ... to avoid unscripted question-and-answer sessions."

Having found that by avoiding voters they are losing the public-relations battle, Democrats are now being advised to go on the offensive, albeit with a much softer approach, according to an August 19 *Politico* [report](#).

*Politico* obtained a copy of a [PowerPoint presentation](#) from an August 19 conference call organized by FamiliesUSA, "one of the central groups in the push for the initial [ObamaCare] legislation," according to the report. "The call was led by a staffer for the Herndon Alliance, which includes leading labor groups and other health care allies. It was based on polling from three top Democratic pollsters, John Anzalone, Celinda Lake and Stan Greenberg."

The third slide, where the meat of the presentation begins, asks, "Why research?" and answers: (1) "present positive case for reform"; (2) "make gains in support and build resistance to repeal"; and (3) "provide communications tools to address health reform." Thus, the essential goodness of ObamaCare is assumed; the problem is to convince the American people, who (in the researchers' opinion) have been duped by ObamaCare opponents, that the bureaucratic behemoth is their friend.

The presenters believe (and rightly so) that Democrats face a "challenging environment" — one in which voters don't trust the government, believing that healthcare "costs will continue to rise" and that ObamaCare won't help the economy but may "mean less provider availability."

All of these are valid concerns backed up by solid evidence. Why should the voters trust a President and party who repeatedly [lied](#) to them about what ObamaCare would be like? Why shouldn't they expect costs to [continue to rise](#) and scarcity to increase in a system that encourages people to make more use of healthcare services at others' expense? Why should they believe that a massive new bureaucracy and





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a mountain of mandates and taxes will help the economy?

To overcome these palpable worries, the Democrats are being advised to “use personal stories — coupled with clear, simple descriptions of how the law benefits people at the individual level — to convey critical benefits of reform.”

A sample story:

“My name is Lindsay. I’m 23 years old and I have a 6-year-old son named Jacob who has asthma. We got our health insurance from my husband’s employer, but he lost his job recently. He found a new job that pays OK, but his new health insurance company will not give Jacob coverage because he has a pre-existing condition. I wait tables too, but we just can’t afford to pay medical expenses out of pocket. I know the new health insurance law isn’t perfect, but starting in September, it will be illegal for insurance companies to deny children with pre-existing conditions healthcare coverage. I can’t tell you what a relief it is to me that Jacob will get the care that he needs. I really hope this law does not get repealed.”

This is certainly a warm, fuzzy story, and it is difficult not to feel for this family. It is a powerful emotional appeal that, unfortunately, glosses over the fact that ObamaCare, like most other government programs, tries to repeal the laws of economics and therefore will only lead to worse problems (for example, insurance companies’ refusal even to [write](#) policies for children anymore) and higher costs for everyone. However, when a party’s research shows that voters aren’t responding to “straightforward ‘policy’ defenses,” emotional appeals are about the only trick they have left.

The presentation suggests that Democrats “let voters know the healthcare law passed!” Apparently a significant portion of their target populations — non-college-educated women and Latinos are specifically mentioned — is entirely unaware that Obama’s signature achievement has become law. It’s no wonder the Democrats think their base can be so easily gulled into believing that ObamaCare is a good thing.

Most of the other suggestions are simply to repeat the Democratic Party’s talking points about ObamaCare in a nonthreatening way: the end of “discrimination based on pre-existing conditions,” the “small business tax credits” (that [hardly apply](#) to any small business and are dwarfed by other costs), the new taxes on “the rich,” the notion that the uninsured are a burden on the insured because they use the emergency room as their primary-care physician (never mind the fact that this happens because the federal government mandates that hospitals accept all comers), Congress’ participation in ObamaCare, and the supposed lack of Medicare cuts ([debunked](#) by House Republicans, among others).

There are also tactical recommendations. “Keep claims small and credible; don’t overpromise or ‘spin’ what the law delivers” is one such recommendation. Of course, in order to do this, Democrats would have to stop following most of the other recommendations in the presentation.

Second is: “Use transition or bridge language to meet public where they are and relax their defenses.” Such language is demonstrated: “The law is not perfect, but it does good things and helps many people. Now we’ll work to *improve* it.” (Emphasis in original.)

“Avoid overheated political rhetoric” is a third tactical suggestion. Good luck with that one when faced with a roomful of angry voters.

Finally, the presentation offers some “do nots” for Democrats, most of which are just reiterations of earlier recommendations in negative language. However, one stands out: Don’t “say the law will reduce



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costs and deficit.” Lying so blatantly now that everyone knows the truth is, it seems, a bridge too far even for Washington politicians.

This, then, is the approach Americans can expect to see from Democrats in the coming months as they struggle to maintain their majorities in both houses of Congress in the face of strong public opposition. There may be some who are won over by these warmed-over talking points, but it seems unlikely that most people will be convinced. It is, to borrow from Obama, an attempt to put lipstick on a pig.

ObamaCare is the biggest, ugliest hog of them all, and no amount of makeup is going to make it beautiful. The problem for Democrats is not that voters don’t understand ObamaCare; it’s that they understand it all too well.

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