



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on August 14, 2009

White House E-mail Campaign Seeks to Go “Viral”

The Obama White House has engaged in an attempt to mimic the vibrant opposition to its healthcare agenda by sending out an e-mail from White House Senior Advisor David Axelrod. “Dear Friend,” the August 13 message began, “This is probably one of the longest emails I’ve ever sent, but it could be the most important.”

Axelrod explained that the e-mail was designed to counter opposition “viral emails that fly unchecked and under the radar, spreading all sorts of lies and distortions.”

“So let’s start a chain email of our own,” he said. “At the end of my email, you’ll find a lot of information about health insurance reform, distilled into 8 ways reform provides security and stability to those with or without coverage, 8 common myths about reform and 8 reasons we need health insurance reform now. Right now, someone you know probably has a question about reform that could be answered by what’s below. So what are you waiting for? Forward this email.”



The problem with Axelrod’s e-mail is that it doesn’t contain a single fact linking to an original source; it only retails the same stale talking points the White House has been putting out for months. Moreover, most of the talking points in the memo flatly contradict all publicly available facts, and sometimes even Obama’s own public statements.

Consider, for instance, Axelrod’s claim that:

We can’t afford reform: It’s the status quo we can’t afford. It’s a myth that reform will bust the budget.

Let’s assume as truth that the status quo is unaffordable and will “basically break the federal budget,” as [Obama himself has said](#). While Obama never issued a detailed fiscal proposal for health reform, if we use Obama’s own math from his public statements, the only conclusion a logical person could come to is that his healthcare would break his budget. Obama’s plan is to make some substantial cuts from the expected increases in costs Medicare and Medicaid will pay out over the next 10 years, but also to spend every penny of that savings on his new healthcare plan. Consider [his own budgetary language from his “town hall” meeting in New Hampshire August 11](#):

About two-thirds of those costs we can cover by eliminating the inefficiencies that I already mentioned. So I already talked about \$177 billion worth of subsidies to the insurance companies.



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Let's take that money, let's put it in the kitty. There's about \$500 billion to \$600 billion over 10 years that can be saved without cutting benefits for people who are currently receiving Medicare, actually making the system more efficient over time. That does still leave, though, anywhere from \$300 billion to \$400 billion over 10 years, or \$30 billion to \$40 billion a year. That does have to be paid for, and we will need new sources of revenue to pay for it.

If we are on a trajectory to "break the budget" with current spending projections, and Obama's plan is to spend every penny of that current trajectory, then it's still a plan to "break the budget." Where the money is being spent doesn't matter if the amount is the same.

Of course, the above is based upon President Obama's public and strictly oral math, which is not written down into any sort of a legislative proposal anywhere. As Axelrod noted in his e-mail message, "President Obama said at the town hall in New Hampshire, 'where we do disagree, let's disagree over things that are real, not these wild misrepresentations that bear no resemblance to anything that's actually been proposed.'"

So let's take that advice and only measure the healthcare proposals that have been introduced in Congress. Axelrod claims that "it's a myth that reform will bust the budget," and once again let's assume that the status quo would "break the budget." The non-partisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) analyzed the cost of all three major healthcare legislation proposals in Congress and found that every one of them would [increase the federal deficit by more than \\$200 billion](#) (Ted [Kennedy's version would increase the deficit \\$1 trillion](#)) over the status quo in 10 years.

So if David Axelrod and the White House claim that the status quo will "break the budget," how can they claim that increasing the deficit hundreds of billions over the status quo will not break the budget? They can't, unless they are knowingly engaging in "spreading all sorts of lies and distortions."

Axelrod also tried to dispel the "myth" that his plan for financing healthcare would not involve Medicare cuts:

Your Medicare is safe, and stronger with reform: It's myth that Health Insurance Reform would be financed by cutting Medicare benefits. To the contrary, reform will improve the long-term financial health of Medicare, ensure better coordination, eliminate waste and unnecessary subsidies to insurance companies, and help to close the Medicare "doughnut" hole to make prescription drugs more affordable for seniors.

Of course, if Obama is going to cut \$500-600 billion from Medicare and Medicaid over the next 10 years (in addition to ending the \$177 billion insurance subsidy), it's highly unlikely to come from anything other than benefits. The White House did propose empowering the president to implement changes recommended by a Medicare advisory panel, but the [CBO concluded](#) that the savings would be less than one half of one percent of the savings Obama projected he needed to finance his healthcare agenda: "CBO estimates that enacting the proposal, as drafted, would yield savings of \$2 billion over the 2010-2019 period (with all of the savings realized in fiscal years 2016 through 2019) if the proposal was added to H.R. 3200, the America's Affordable Health Choices Act of 2009, as introduced in the House of Representatives."

Obama could easily dispel the skepticism of opponents of healthcare, along with understandably skittish seniors concerned about losing Medicare benefits. All he has to do is lay out a public proposal detailing how he would save more than half a trillion dollars from Medicare without cutting benefits. But the White House hasn't done this, and such a proposal has yet to find its way into a bill in Congress.



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These are typical of the kind of wild misrepresentations in the Axelrod e-mail. The letter says, “It’s a myth that reform will mean a “government takeover” of healthcare and then in the very next sentence [claims](#) that “To the contrary, reform will forbid many forms of rationing that are currently being used by insurance companies.” If that doesn’t mean more government control of healthcare, then the English words have no meaning.

The basic problem the Obama administration is facing is that — despite his public claims of having the most open and transparent government in American history — he hasn’t given any meaningful details of his proposal to the American people. It’s currently impossible for opponents of Obama’s healthcare agenda to be “spreading all sorts of lies and distortions” since the Obama administration hasn’t given the public any truth to distort.

Photo of White House Senior Advisor David Axelrod: AP Images



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