

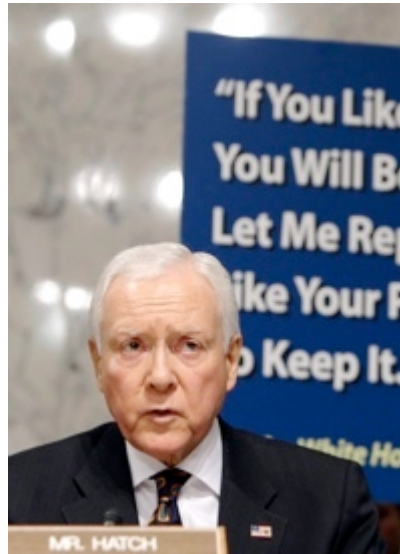


Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on September 22, 2010

Can Republicans Spin ObamaCare Opposition into Gold?

Republicans are trying to make political hay out of the public's increasing disenchantment with ObamaCare. There is little doubt they will end up with a few bales, but it remains to be seen if they can spin this straw into gold. Furthermore, just how likely is a GOP victory to result in repeal or even significant reform of this monstrosity?

The *New York Times* [interviewed](#) a wide range of Republican lawmakers, who said they were determined to chip away at the law if they could not dismantle it. They offered a variety of proposals short of complete repeal, which the *Times* notes is almost certainly impossible as long as Barack Obama is in the White House and the GOP doesn't have a two-thirds majority in both houses of Congress; and not even the most optimistic Republicans expect to gain that many seats this year.



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The first proposal, says the *Times*, is to withhold money that federal officials need to administer and enforce the law. House Republican Leader John Boehner of Ohio told the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, They'll get not one dime from us. Not a dime. There is no fixing this. Among the funds Republicans are considering withholding are those available to the Internal Revenue Service, which is charged with enforcing many of the law's provisions.

Utah Sen. Orrin Hatch (above left) has introduced a bill to repeal the ObamaCare employer mandate. Other GOP legislators have introduced similar bills, including some to repeal the individual mandate as well.

Republicans say they will also try to scale back the expansion of Medicaid if states continue to object to the costs of adding millions of people to the rolls of the program for low-income people, the *Times* explains.

The *Times* is quick to point out some hurdles faced by those who wish to repeal ObamaCare, including an increase in the number of uninsured individuals; the alleged savings that ObamaCare will bring about by the reckoning of the Congressional Budget Office (Medicare actuary Richard Foster, on the other hand, argues that the law will [cost far more](#) than the CBO estimated); the lack of an agreed-upon replacement plan (as if a surgeon, having removed a tumor from a patient, would ask him what to replace it with); and the difficulty of separating the popular and unpopular provisions.

The last problem may be the most vexing. Many Americans, still wrongly believing they can get something for nothing, favor the requirements that insurers accept all comers regardless of pre-existing



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conditions, not be permitted to impose lifetime benefit caps, and cover beneficiaries children until age 26. Thus, the *Times* notes, Sen. Lamar Alexander of Tennessee favors repealing ObamaCare but insists that Republicans would be careful to include [some of the popular mandates] in any final legislation. The Obama administration, of course, will use this to its advantage, claiming that GOP attempts at repeal amount to taking those benefits away, as Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius put it.

GOP opposition frequently appears less than principled. Many Republicans oppose portions of ObamaCare because they believe they will have negative effects, but few oppose it because its both unconstitutional and incompatible with liberty. Sen. Olympia Snowe of Maine, for example, wants to revisit the law because it could inadvertently create an incentive for employers to discontinue coverage because the financial penalties for not offering insurance are far less than the cost of providing it, reports the *Times*. Hatch, too, doesnt seem opposed to the idea of government-run healthcare in principle. The paper says he is working on alternatives that would give states more discretion about how to expand coverage. I would prefer to have 50 state laboratories doing it rather than the almighty federal government, he said.

Therefore, while the GOP may retake one or both houses of Congress in part because of its opposition to ObamaCare, repeal or serious reform is far from assured, as Mark Landsbaum of the *Orange County Register* explained in a recent [blog post](#) and [column](#).

Landsbaum points out that ObamaCare was deliberately designed to get Americans hooked on its benefits first and then hit them with the costs later costs that will be diffused, making opposition to them less likely. Almost never will the entire country simultaneously feel the entire pain of paying for what the government is doing, he writes. Obamacare segments the costs, which fragments the opposition by imposing separate levies on employers, individuals, pharmaceutical companies, medical equipment manufacturers, even punitive 40-percent taxes on those who still buy gold-plated insurance coverage and, incredibly, a 10-percent excise tax on tanning salons.

As for repeal or reform, Landsbaum writes:

Repeal it? What politician will risk his career by taking away benefits that voters imagine they gained from Obamacare? Reform it? When in history has the political class fixed something theyve created without adding more to it instead of subtracting from it? For those who imagine Republicans on white horses will save them from Obamacare, remember it was the most-recent GOP president who presided over, not the contraction, but the greatest expansion of federalized health care in four decades by granting more Medicare drug coverage.

Whos to say a new Republican congress wont fund *even more* of the parts of Obamacare their constituencies clamor for? So-called conservative senior citizens reliant on Medicare come to mind.

In fact, he actually finds it much more plausible that the government will increase Medicare spending than to expect government to roll back new, tax-financed coverage for middle-age Americans especially, when all it takes is a few more billions in deficit spending. Whens that ever been a deterrent?

Landsbaum wrote that on August 12. As if to prove his point, the September 20 *Times* report says that Republican lawmakers may try to undo some cuts in Medicare . Many want to restore money to Medicares managed-care program and clip the wings of a new agency empowered to recommend cuts in Medicare.

In the end, Landsbaum suspects that once comfortably reseated in power in Washington, the apparent



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single-mindedness of Republican victors will [sic] begin to fracture and sadly in many cases morph into the oligarchy that doomed that party the last time it had control.

Landsbaum says that he hopes to be proven wrong; freedom-loving Americans should hope likewise. It will be a shame, though no great surprise, if the GOP ends up pitching the hay it is making into the hungry maw of the ObamaCare beast.

Photo: Senate Finance Committee member Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah speaks on Oct. 13, 2009, during the committee's hearing on health care reform: AP Images



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