



Doubling Down

Obama Focused On ObamaCare Instead Of Fixing The Ailing American Economy

In Des Moines Register Interview, Obama Has No Regrets That He Focused On ObamaCare Instead Of The Economy. *DES MOINES REGISTER*: “Yes, that begs a question from us, Mr. President. Some say you had a super majority in your first two years and had this incredible opportunity, but because of what you were talking about, as you were running, you had to go to get ObamaCare done. Do you have any regrets taking on some of the economic issues, some of the issues that we're talking about for your second term, that when you had the chance, so to speak, during your first -- do you have any regrets that you didn't do that at that time?” OBAMA: “Absolutely not.” (President Barack Obama, [Interview With The Des Moines Register](#), 10/23/12)

OBAMA IGNORED CALLS FROM TOP ADVISERS TO FOCUS ON THE ECONOMY INSTEAD OF OBAMACARE

In January 2009, “The Vice President Begged Obama To Make His Early Presidency About Jobs” Rather Than Health Care. “As a pure political proposition, Axelrod advised Obama to dedicate himself to the economy and maybe education, that perennial political winner. Now Axelrod suddenly had reinforcements elsewhere in the new administration. At a meeting in January 2009, the vice president begged Obama to make his early presidency about jobs. The people who'd given him his mandate would understand that times had changed, Joe Biden said. “They'll give you a pass on this one.” (Noam Scheiber, *The Escape Artists*, 2012, p. 140)

- **During A January 2009 White House Meeting, Biden “Railed That The Government Was In No Fiscal Shape To Pursue A Health Care Overhaul” That Year.** “At one January meeting to discuss the budget, Mr. Biden railed that the government was in no fiscal shape to pursue a health care overhaul this year — to the dismay of many present and others who heard about it.” (Mark Leibovich, “Speaking Freely, Biden Finds Influential Role,” [The New York Times](#), 3/28/09)

Throughout 2009, Then-Obama Senior Advisor David Axelrod Advised Obama To Focus On The Economy While Then-Chief Of Staff Rahm Emanuel “Begged” Obama Not To Pursue Health Care Reform. “At various points, Vice President Joe Biden, senior advisor David Axelrod and Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel advised the president to focus entirely on the economy and leave comprehensive health care for another day. ‘I begged him not to do this,’ Emanuel told me when I was researching my book about Obama's first year in office.” (Jonathan Alter, Op-Ed, “Barney Frank Makes A Misdiagnosis On ObamaCare,” [Bloomberg](#), 4/19/12)

- **Obama Insisted That ObamaCare Be A Year One Priority, “Even Waiting A Year Or Two Was Out Of The Question.”** “Still, the man with the most important vote was unmoved. Obama told his aides that if he couldn’t reform health care, another generation would pass before a president tried again. Even waiting a year or two was out of the question. ‘The president’s view was, yes we had to deal with the economic emergency at hand,’ said a White House aide. ‘But if we didn’t move on health care in the first few years, we’d probably never be able to get it done.’” (Noam Scheiber, *The Escape Artists*, 2012, p. 141)

“[E]ven After Winning The Presidency, Obama Was Loath To Accept That The Economy Was Singularly Important” And Disregarded Calls From Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner For It To Be The Immediate Focus. “But even after winning the presidency, Obama was loath to accept that the economy was singularly important. During a conference call with several senior aides early in the transition, Geithner remarked to his new boss that ‘your signature accomplishment is going to be preventing a Great Depression.’ ... Even so, Obama’s response was slightly jarring. ‘That’s not enough for me,’ said the president-elect.” (Noam Scheiber, *The Escape Artists*, 2012, p. 15-16)

- **“It Suddenly Dawned On Geithner That He And His Colleagues Were A Sideshow Rather Than The Main Attraction.”** (Noam Scheiber, *The Escape Artists*, 2012, p. 15-16)

AS OBAMACARE BECAME OBAMA’S SOLE PRIORITY, THE AILING ECONOMY FELL TO THE WAYSIDE

“There Was A Strain Of Messianism In Barack Obama, A Determination To Change The Course Of History” That Minimized The Importance Of The Economy. “There was a strain of messianism in Barack Obama, a determination to change the course of history. And it was this determination that explained his reluctance to abandon his presidential vision. Recessions would come and go, even recessions as painful as this one. But the big achievements—like health care and climate change—were the accomplishments that posterity would recall.” (Noam Scheiber, *The Escape Artists*, 2012, p. 16)

- **Even With The Economic Crisis, Health Care “Remained His [Obama’s] Priority.”** “Comprehensive health care reform, though, remained his priority. The world knew that from his campaign. What the world didn’t know was that his top advisers, led by incoming chief of staff Rahm Emanuel, disagreed, arguing that it would require too much effort. Survival had to come first. But to Obama, health insurance for everyone as a new entitlement was the major unfulfilled task of the political movement of which he was a part and now led. It was now or never, he said. So it would be now.” (Bob Woodward, *The Price Of Politics*, 2012, p. 12)

Obama’s Democrat Allies In Congress Disagreed With His Decision To Focus On ObamaCare Rather Than The Economy

Then-Sen. Evan Bayh (D-IN) Said That Democrats “Over-Interpreted” Their Mandate And “Overreached” Rather Than Focusing On Jobs. “It is clear that Democrats over-interpreted our mandate. Talk of a ‘political realignment’ and a ‘new progressive era’ proved wishful thinking. ... We also overreached by focusing on health care rather than job creation during a severe recession.” (Sen. Evan Bayh, Op-Ed, “Where Do Democrats Do Next?,” [The New York Times](#), 11/3/10)

- **Rep. Gerry Connolly (D-VA) Admits ObamaCare Was “A Distraction” From A Public Focused On “Stubborn Unemployment.”** “Rep. Gerry Connolly (D-Va.), the president of this Congress’s first-term Democrats, said that his party’s months-long battle to pass healthcare reform might

have come off as a distraction considering the tough economic climate in the U.S. 'I think that the focus of the public, with stubborn unemployment remaining so high, was on the growing the economy and creating jobs,' Connolly said Tuesday during an appearance on TBD TV in metropolitan Washington. 'And anything else seemed like a distraction.'" (Michael O'Brien, "Key House Dem: Health Reform May Have Seemed Like Distraction From Economy," [The Hill](#), 8/31/10)

- **Then-Rep. Brian Baird (D-WA) Said "We Took Our Eye Off The Ball" By Focusing On Health Care And Cap And Trade.** "Retiring Democratic Congressman Brian Baird said Wednesday that he isn't surprised his seat was snatched up Tuesday night by 32-year-old Republican Jaime Herrera. ... Baird said Congress erred in turning its focus toward health care reform and energy legislation when, in hindsight, the focus should have been primarily on jobs. 'We took our eye off the ball early on,' he said." (Tony Lystra, "Baird Says Failure To Focus On Economy Hurt Democrats," [The Daily News](#), 11/3/10)
- **Gerry McEntee, President Of AFCSME, Says Democrats Did Not "Really, Truly Attack This Problem Of Jobs."** "'I don't think that there was enough effort, and maybe there just wasn't enough knowledge, or maybe there wasn't enough support in the Congress to really, truly attack this problem of jobs,' he said. 'You can talk about the tea party, you can talk about the coffee party, you can talk about all kinds of things, but you've got to talk about jobs.'" (Ben Smith, "Democrats Find Common Ground: It's The White House's Fault," [Politico](#), 11/3/10)
- **Sen. Jim Webb (D-VA) Said White House Pushed Health Care And Climate Change Legislation When They Should Have Been Focused On Jobs.** "He said the 'momentum of the campaign' convinced the White House to move forward with health care and climate change legislation when jobs should have been their priority." (Marc Ambinder, "Webb: Obama Had Wrong Focus In The Beginning," [The Atlantic](#), 10/1/10)
- **Former Rep. Jane Harman (D-CA): ObamaCare "Sopped Up All The Brain Cells For A Year While Other Problems Festered."** HARMAN: "I agree with that and I think it was an important thing to do but it had a huge cost as it spun out. Because first of all, it was... it sopped up all the brain cells for a year while other problems festered. And I think, I don't know that we would be farther along with the jobs problem but it is the huge problem and it's going to be the motivator for a lot of voters in 2012. That was one and two I think because the product was partisan, its acceptance, and Vin's right, it's being challenged everywhere has been very tough." (Former Rep. Jane Harman, [Remarks At The Aspen Ideas Festival](#), Aspen, CO, 6/28/11)
- **Rep. Brad Miller (D-NC) Says Obama Should've Focused On Economy And Financial System Before Addressing Healthcare.** "'I think we would all have been better off — President Obama politically, Democrats in Congress politically, and the nation would have been better off — if we had dealt first with the financial system and the other related economic issues and then come back to healthcare,' said Rep. Brad Miller (D-N.C.), who is retiring at the end of this Congress. Miller, who voted for the law, said the administration wasted time and political capital on healthcare reform, resulting in lingering economic problems that will continue to plague Obama's reelection chances in 2012.'" (Julian Pecquet and Sam Baker, "Democrats Expressing Buyers' Remorse On Obama's Healthcare Law," [The Hill](#), 4/19/12)

Senior House Democrat About 2010: "At That Time In General ... There Was A Question Whether Obama Was Making It Totally Clear To The Public That He Was Focused On Jobs And The Economy." "At the White House, Obama's aides believed the president was indeed accommodating congressional Democratic desires. 'The back-versus-forward message was hatched around a table with Nancy Pelosi, her leadership team, and Axe,' recalled a senior White House official. 'It was not a message

we would have chosen. We would have preferred a message closer to our 2008 message of reforming Washington. But this is what the House and Senate felt made sense, and we wanted to do what they wanted.’ Even so, the president’s speech at the St. Regis included little on what he and the Democrats would do in the months ahead to improve the economic fortunes of the millions of Americans still facing or fearing rough circumstances. ‘At that time in general,’ a senior House Democrat later commented, ‘there was a question whether Obama was making it totally clear to the public that he was focused on jobs and the economy.’ One DCCC strategist put it bluntly: ‘We had no economic narrative.’” (David Corn, *Showdown*, 2012, p. 20)

- **Administration Official: “Voters Saw Him Fiddling While Jobs Were Not Being Created.”**
“Obama had contended that his health care overhaul was essential to improving the jobs picture – and he had strong policy arguments for that case. Yet when the legislation was passed, it was not regarded as a jobs initiative. ‘The bill was hard to comprehend,’ a top administration official later said. ‘The process was hard to follow. Voters saw him fiddling while jobs were not being created.’” (David Corn, *Showdown*, 2012, p. 24)