

MEMORANDUM

DRAFT

Date: Thursday, March 18, 2010
From: [REDACTED]
To: Democratic Health and Communications Staff
Re: Messaging the CBO Analysis of Our Bill And Reconciliation Proposal

We are closer than ever before to securing real health reform and ensuring every American has access to health care. The next few hours and days are critical to our success. This memo serves to briefly outline key points health staff and communications staff should make in the next 48 to 72 hours in the media ahead of Sunday's vote.

Key to our efforts is explaining the merits of our bill and reconciliation package to a few select House members. Most of the relevant concerned House members come from districts where insurance companies and Republican operatives have been at work to spread misinformation about our reform proposal.

Key Items to Stress

Our caucus Leadership and the White House have conducted a largely successful campaign informing the American people of how reform will control insurance companies and ensure no American is ever denied health insurance because of a pre-existing condition.

Health reform is deficit reduction. Quote from today's CBO letter: "CBO and JCT estimate that enacting both pieces of legislation—[the Senate-passed bill] and the reconciliation proposal— would produce a net reduction in federal deficits of \$138 billion over the 2010–2019 period as result of changes in direct spending and revenue." With many Americans nervous about the debt and deficit, we cannot stress enough that this bill is the key to getting costs under control. As the President has stressed repeatedly, health reform is deficit reduction.

→ We have increasingly noticed how right-wing fringe media are trying to pick apart the CBO score. We cannot emphasize enough: *do not allow yourself (or your boss) to get into a discussion of the details of CBO scores and textual narrative. Instead, focus only on the deficit reduction and number of Americans covered.* There are two CBO letters Republican operatives have already begun distorting in their pursuit of killing our reform efforts: 1) CBO's March 11, 2010 letter to Leader Reid analyzing the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act as passed by the Senate, and 2) CBO's letter to Leader Reid (November 18, 2009) with the initial score of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. I list these letters only to warn you of coming attacks from right-wing operatives and Republican sympathizers in the media. These anti-reform extremists are making a last-ditch effort to derail reform. Do not give them ground by debating details. (For example, the March 11 letter has estimates of discretionary costs not accounted in the total). Again, instead focus only on the deficit reduction and number of Americans covered. In the critical remaining hours of the debate, we must drive the narrative of "health reform is deficit reduction."

Health reform is good for physicians. Related to the point above, Republicans are increasingly attempting to co-opt the voice of physicians in the last hours of the reform debate. We need to push back on their specific attacks by explaining what reform means to physicians. Here are the main attacks and responses to consider.

First, Republicans talking about incremental changes in reimbursements to providers are attempting to portray systemic changes as draconian cuts. We must push back on that hard. We must stress that reform is not only good for patients who will never be denied because of pre-existing conditions, but that it is very good for physicians:

- We increase reimbursement levels to primary care physicians for Medicaid patients
- We increase funding for health provider workforce development and educational loan provisions
- We take the first the steps toward delivery system reform from which physicians will benefit
- We will regulate insurance companies due to the streamlining of the Exchanges and system efficiencies so physicians can spend more time with patients and less time arguing with insurance bureaucrats.

Second, most health staff are already aware that our health proposal does not contain a "doc fix." Some Republicans have repeated CBO's November 18th letter that says "the sustainable growth rate (SGR) mechanism governing Medicare's payments to physicians has frequently been modified (either through legislation or administrative action) to avoid reductions in those payments, and legislation to do so again is currently under consideration in the Congress." The inclusion of a full SGR repeal would undermine reform's budget neutrality. So, again, *do not allow yourself (or your boss) to get into a discussion of the details of CBO scores and textual narrative. Instead, focus only on the deficit reduction and number of Americans covered.*

Important

As most health staff knows, Leadership and the White House are working with the AMA to rally physicians support for a full SGR repeal later this spring. However, both health and communications staff should understand *we do not want that policy discussion discussed at this time*, lest I complicate the last critical push to pass health reform. When media raise the issue of the SGR, only say that Congressional leaders are working with the physician community on this issue. We do not yet want to discuss specifics about what inflationary measure (linked to growing health costs) would replace the SGR. Congressional leaders and White House Administration officials will hammer out those details in coming months.

Third and finally, Republicans today have been talking the media about half of the uninsured being enrolled in Medicaid. There are several points to make to push back on this.

- Medicaid is a safety-net to ensure low-income Americans never have to go without coverage
- Delivery system reforms will increase outcomes for patients in Medicaid
- We increase reimbursement levels to primary care physicians for Medicaid patients
- The federal government will bear the costs of expanding Medicaid
- Under reform – according to Table 2 of CBO's letter today – cover 95% of Americans (not counting undocumented workers). It is ideal to use "95 percent" instead of letting the media frame the discussion that 23 million Americans are still uninsured. Some Republicans who are against reform have tried to assert the 23 million are inconsistent with the President's Sept. 9, 2009 remarks to a joint session of Congress that there are 30 million Americans without health insurance.

In summary, we are closer than ever before to securing real health reform and ensuring every American has access to health care. The next few hours and days are critical to our success. We must make sure that we are united in our message and counterattacks against the Republicans' smear attacks and disinformation campaign.