

ARE REPUBLICANS TRULY OPEN TO BIPARTISAN APPROACH ON REFORM?

GOP Calls for Bipartisanship: Empty Rhetoric or a True Shift in Tone?

“[T]he time for bickering is over. The time for games has passed. Now is the season for action. Now is when we must bring the best ideas of both parties together, and show the American people that we can still do what we were sent here to do. Now is the time to deliver on health care.” – President Barack Obama, *Address to Joint Session of Congress, 9/9/09*

After the President’s address to Congress and the Nation in which he called for an end to the “bickering” and “games” in the effort to reform health care, Republicans seem to be changing their tune to sing the praises of bipartisanship. In recent days, some Congressional Republicans have pushed the rhetoric even further, stating that they believe agreement currently exists on 80 percent of what has been proposed. The question is, if Republicans are truly committed to bipartisanship as they say, will they come to the table to forge a bipartisan bill or will they continue to undermine efforts to find common ground as they have done throughout this debate?

Past Republican Statements Show Lack of GOP Commitment to Bipartisanship

Despite outreach on the part of the President and Democrats in Congress, Congressional Republicans seem to have made a political calculation to oppose Democratic health reform efforts, calling health reform the President’s “Waterloo” and largely refusing to engage in negotiations to find common ground.

“If we’re able to stop Obama on this it will be his Waterloo. It will break him.” – Sen. Jim DeMint (R-SC), *Politico: Health reform foes plan Obama's ‘Waterloo,’ 7/17/09*

“I take pride with being an obstructionist.” – Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-IA), *Politico: Chuck Grassley Is Rope in Capitol Hill Tug of War, 7/6/09*

“[NRCC Chairman Pete Sessions told] Republicans that they need to get over the idea that they’re participating in legislation and ought to start thinking of themselves as ‘an insurgency’ instead.” – *Politico: House GOP Bullish At Va. Retreat, 2/02/09*

“I’d like to see the Democrats go home and get pounded on.” – Rep. Tom Cole (R-OK), *The Hill: GOP Tries to Steal Initiative on Economy from the Dems, 7/22/09*

President Encourages Republican Ideas on Health Reform

“[This is] a plan that incorporates ideas from many of the people in this room tonight – Democrats and Republicans. And I will continue to seek common ground in the weeks ahead. If you come to me with a serious set of proposals, I will be there to listen. My door is always open.” – President Obama, 9/09/09

“My attitude has always been, let's see if we can get this done with some consensus. I would love to have more Republicans engaged and involved in this process.” – President Obama, 8/20/09

“Six negotiators from the Senate Finance Committee will meet with President Obama Thursday to discuss their fledgling bipartisan health-care bill, White House and Senate sources said. Obama will encourage the three Republicans and three Democrats to come to terms on a consensus approach, aides said.” – *Washington Post: Obama Invites Gang of Six to the White House, 8/05/09*

Leading Democrats Express Desire to Find Common Ground

“I know that Max Baucus continues to work on forging a bipartisan bill. I'm hopeful that he is successful. I would like to forge a bipartisan bill over here.” – House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD), 9/8/09

“Clearly, there are differences [on health reform]. Clearly, there are concerns. But I also believe that there is an opportunity for us to try to work together and come to agreement on issues.” – House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD), 4/22/09

“Everyone recognizes that we are going to do, if there's any way humanly possible, a bipartisan bill. We don't want to do a partisan bill, and we hope our Republican colleagues acknowledge that. We'll continue to work with them as long as we have to.” – Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, 8/4/09

“We're working with Republicans to make this a bipartisan effort. Everyone won't be satisfied—and no one will get everything they want. But we need to come together, just as we've done in other great struggles...” – Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, 7/18/09

“[We] remain committed to continuing our path toward a bipartisan health care reform bill.” – Sen. Max Baucus (D-MT), 8/21/09

American Public Sees GOP as Main Impediment to Bipartisanship

“Half [of Americans] credit the Democrats with making a good-faith effort to [work in a bipartisan way] already, while most, 62 percent, say the GOP is not returning the favor.” – Washington Post-ABC News poll, 9/14/09

Media Challenge Republicans on Bipartisanship

“From the GOP perspective, most lawmakers have long since calculated that their most ardent supporters so dislike Obama and an expanded government role in health care that they would rather see the president fail – or have health care legislation pass with all Democratic votes – than to have Republican legislators engage with the White House to affect the bill.” – Politico, 9/14/09

“So it's as if the Republicans have decided, OK, they made their point, they obstructed, you know, or whatever you want to call it, over, over August, now they have to shift gears a little bit and look like they're--they want to work with them. The question is...is there really a middle ground? Is that a real thing, or is this a political tactic because Republicans themselves realize you can't just be against something, you got to show some give here.” – Chuck Todd, Meet the Press, 9/13/09

“The fact is, on...health care legislation, only the Democrats are really playing. With a few notable exceptions, the Republican Party is standing, arms folded and saying ‘no.’ Many of them just want President Obama to fail. Such a waste.” – Thomas L. Friedman, New York Times, 9/9/09

“The entire Republican Party has decided that it is in favor of absolutely nothing. The president's stimulus package? No way. Health care reform? Forget about it. There is not a thing you can come up with that the G.O.P. is for.” – Bob Herbert, New York Times, 9/8/09