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COLLABORATION HEALTH CARE

ALIGNING IDEAS WITH COLLABORATION TO IMPROVE HEALTH CARE TODAY



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Health Care Reform- Managing A Process

If all goes as planned, our country is expected to have a reformed health care system by December 31, 2009. The definition of reform isn't at all clear, but as stated in Obama's budget, the goal is to "put the Nation on a path to health insurance coverage for all Americans". It's an ambitious goal and vision and one many of us have heard before. We need to keep in mind other attempts to revamp our fragmented system have fallen short due to politics, self-interest, mis-management of the process, or lack of support from the public. But, the timing just might be right this time. We all know something needs to change.

Last week President Obama hosted his first major conference in Washington to "kick-off" his health care reform effort. We've heard mixed reviews of the gathering, but at least the various stakeholders got together to start talking about it.

As we all know, having the vision and making it happen are two separate things. This month we're going to look at some of the lessons learned with past attempts to change health care and evaluate where President Obama stands today in the context of the past. We'll do this again in a few months to monitor our progress. Enjoy, and feel free to determine your own scores.

Health Care Reform- The Current Score

Without exception, each President for over 100 years has had to address some aspect of health care reform whether they wanted to be engaged in the process or not. Starting in the early 1900's, our country has struggled to put together the health care system that balances the desire for individual rights and responsibility with the social responsibilities of providing access to affordable health care for our population. The result so far has been to create a health care system that is fragmented, expensive, and leaves a substantial part of our population with limited access to care.

A significant portion of our country now supports the need for some change in our delivery system. Surprisingly, various stakeholders are now more accepting to considering options that were considered off-limits before. So, the timing to make the changes we need to make may be right. But we will continue to struggle with achieving the right balance between individual rights and freedoms, and social responsibility (not welfare- social responsibility) for assuring appropriate health care access to individuals. It's what we've been arguing about for over 100 years.

President Obama has laid-out some pretty aggressive goals. He's started to mobilize the discussion on health care reform and (at least now) has made it a very visible part of his agenda. But, as many presidents before him, he's finding that getting it done is a lot different than just layout out the plan.

A segment of the book *Health Care Politics and Policy* looks at the history of the past presidential efforts to make changes in our health care system. As we've highlighted in past newsletters, no President has been successful in totally reforming the service-based system we have today. Some have tried, it just didn't fly. The successful

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History of Presidential Health Care Initiatives

As we monitor the current health care discussion going on in our country today, it's interesting to look at the past to see if we can determine where we'll be going in the future. It's going to be an interesting year. This is a list of some of the main health care initiatives we've witnessed since FDR. As we've seen, some have been more successful than others:

Franklin Roosevelt 1933-45; The New Deal; Social Security; Struck Health Care Out of Social Security Legislation

Harry Truman; 1945-53; Advocate for universal health care; Set precedent for the continued discussion of today

John F Kennedy; 1961-63; Laid the groundwork for Medicare

Lyndon Johnson; 1963-69; Medicare/Medicaid

Richard Nixon; 1969-74; HMO Legislation

Ronald Reagan; 1981-89; Prospective Payment

Bill Clinton; 1993-2001; Managed Competition

George W. Bush; 2001-09; Medicare Prescription Drugs

Barack Obama; 2009- ; ?????

We'd love to hear from you. Let us know your thoughts, your feedback, and other ideas.

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Scoring Where We Are (con't)

initiatives were more “adjustments” than true reform. But, with each initiative or attempt, whether successful or not, we learned something along the way. The authors of this book put together 6 characteristics that are necessary for making the presidential vision a reality in health care reform. The list follows. Interestingly, they are collective characteristics; they need to all work together. You can achieve 5 and miss on one and kill the whole deal. It’s going to be interesting to watch this unfold over the next 9 months and see where the Obama Administration and our Congress score in the history books. And we’ve included our own scores for Obama with where we think he stands today.

The List and Our Scores for Obama:

1. Move Fast, Act Early- We’ll give this one to Obama so far. It’s hard to believe that he’s only been in office less than two months. But, despite losing his first HHS nominee (Tom Daschle) he has kept the momentum going and placed health care reform as a priority on his domestic agenda. The trick will be to keep the momentum going.
2. Master the Legislative Process- This is the area that killed the Clinton health care reform efforts in the 90s- and most other comprehensive reform attempts in the past. Despite initially having some pretty strong public support, the attempt by Clinton to design the details of the program behind closed doors pretty much killed it (as well as the complexity of the final product).

This one is too soon to tell for Obama. Interest groups, individual stakeholders, and the politics of Congress itself will all come into play. And the debate of the balance between individual freedoms and social responsibility will come to the forefront once again.

Obama’s approach is different from Clinton’s. He has outlined some basic principles, and turned the heavy lifting over to Congress for the details. He is also relying heavily on public comment and support to override some of the insanity that sometimes takes place in Congress.

But, this one is still a wild-card and will likely influence the outcome of the whole deal. We’ll need to wait and see how he does.

3. Master the White House- It’s hard to imagine that when FDR came into office he could meet with his entire staff in the Oval Office. Today, the Executive Office includes a staff of hundreds and requires exceptional management skills just for the day-to-day operations. Some presidents were micromanagers who lost sight of the big picture (Jimmy Carter), and others were “delegators” who, at times, lost control of the details (Bush, Reagan).

Obama is going to have to hit a happy-medium between vision and execution to pull all of this together. He carried-out an exceptional campaign showing that he can put it together. He’s going to have to surround himself with good people to succeed with this huge management challenge to not only communicate the vision, but execute it as well.

This one is also a wild-card, as we’ll need to watch and see how his team delivers

4. What’s The Big Thing? If there is one thing we can learn from our history it’s that Presidents can normally only win

a few big things at a time. Having multiple initiatives going at the same time confuses the public and usually spreads the political capital and resources too thin.

Whether he likes it or not, Obama has multiple issues hitting him from all sides. The economy (banking, credit, housing), the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, national security, and other high profile items all have the potential to push health care reform off to the side, or to force acceptance of an incremental change that really won’t fix the problem.

At this point, Obama has kept health care reform as one of his “big things”- but there are many others. But, we’ll need to watch and see if it remains there; still a wild-card in our book.

5. The Power of Ideas- There’s no getting around it; President Obama is an exceptional communicator. He has clearly laid-out a vision and seems at least open to bi-partisan discussion and compromise to make it happen. He has mastered the use of the internet to generate ideas and receive input and is setting up forums across the country for further public dialogue. Its great marketing. We have to give this one to him.
6. Lessons of History- The Obama Administration has spent considerable time evaluating what went wrong during Clinton’s 1993 initiative to avoid the same missteps. In her memoir, Hillary Rodham Clinton said, “We soon learned that nothing was off limits in this war and that the other side was far better armed with the tools of politics, media, and organization.” That’s likely to be the case again this time if the discussion gets off-balance.

So far, Obama seems to be approaching things different to try to avoid the miscalculations of the past. He seems to be trying to use a more transparent and open approach and capitalize on the public support that is out there today. As of today, we’ll give him this one too.

So, at this point we’re giving Obama items 1, 5, and 6 with wild-cards for 2, 3, and 4 in the Health Politics and Policy scoring. Still doable, but the wild-card items carry a lot of weight. It will require focus, flexibility, and commitment to reform a system drastically in need of change. He’ll need to execute flawlessly with his team to make it happen, and he’ll need to maintain the public support to come up with a plan that balances our individual freedoms with the social responsibility that is expected in our country today.

He needs to nail his wild-card items to make it work.

Source: *Health Politics and Policy*; 4th Edition; Morone, Litman, Robins, Delmar Cengage Learning; 2008

Something To Think About

“When you discover your mission, you will feel its demand. It will fill you with enthusiasm and a burning desire to get to work on it.”

W. Clement Stone

“Nothing happens unless first we dream”
Carl Sandburg