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From Nuclear War to Guerrilla War

Democrats have launched the nuclear option. In retaliation, Republicans are staging a guerrilla war. Or what's been labeled "a multilayered, sequenced assault"—sabotage and sneak attacks aimed at destroying Obamacare.

No matter what the subject, Republicans cannot resist bringing up Obamacare. Why won't House Republicans allow the Senate immigration bill to come up for a vote? "We don't want a repeat of what's going on now with Obamacare" House majority leader Eric Cantor (R-VA) said. Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-TN) issued a warning to Democrats about ending the filibuster on executive nominations: "If the Democrats proceed to use this nuclear option in this way, it will be Obamacare II."

That's just what Democrats did. Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-UT) called it "a charade just to try and get off Obamacare." House Speaker John Boehner (R-OH) said, "If I were taking all the incoming fire that [Senate Democratic leader Harry Reid] is taking over Obamacare, I'd tried to change the subject, too."

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) got off the best retort when he made this crack about Sen. Reid: "He might just as well have said, 'If you like the rules of the Senate, you can keep them.'"

Get the point? From now on, everything Democrats try to do—everything President Obama does—becomes "Obamacare."

Is Obamacare really that toxic? At the moment, it is. The public opposes the new health care law by nearly two to one in the latest CBS News poll (61% to 31%). Support for the *Affordable Care Act* is down sharply just in the last month (in October, just 51% opposed it). Support has even declined among Democrats, from 74% to 58%.

Every day seems to bring a new controversy over Obamacare Website problems. Policy cancellations. Medicare cuts and tax hikes. Data security issues. Limitations on choices of doctors and hospitals.

The core of the problem is something that never got much discussion when the *Affordable Care Act* was being debated in 2009 and 2010: it is a wealth redistribution program. It gives subsidized health insurance benefits to the poor and the near-poor and requires healthier and wealthier taxpayers to bear some of the cost.

The law requires that insurance companies cover everybody who applies, including the old and the sick. Most Americans think that's a good idea—and long overdue. In order to keep premiums down, more young and healthy people must be brought into the system. Hence, the individual mandate. But some of those who must now purchase health insurance can't afford it. They have to be subsidized. Those subsidies will be paid for with new taxes and higher premiums on those who can afford it. That's a transfer of wealth.

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It makes Obamacare a social welfare program in which benefits are targeted by need. That's very different from social security and Medicare. Those are entitlement programs. Everybody who reaches retirement age is "entitled" to social security and Medicare benefits, whether they need them or not. That's why entitlements are so expensive. And so popular.

A redistributive policy can be justified by the huge increase in income inequality in the United States in recent years. But programs targeted by need have always been controversial. How can we be sure people don't take advantage of the system? That the benefits only go to the "truly needy"? A lot of better off people don't like the idea of paying subsidies to those who don't think health insurance is important or who don't take care of themselves. A self-employed lawyer who now has to pay a much higher premium told *The Los Angeles Times*, "It doesn't seem right to make the middle class pay so much more in order to give health insurance to everybody else."

About half of those who have lost coverage are seeing their premiums go up. They are the ones who are complaining, especially because President Obama promised them nothing would change. Given all the problems, there's a lot of pressure on the Obama Administration to delay the requirement that everyone purchase insurance for another year. In the ABC News-Washington Post poll, 71% of Americans favor a one-year delay.

That would throw a real monkey wrench into the roll-out of the *Affordable Care Act*. The old and the sick are already struggling to enroll in the system. If the young and the healthy don't bother to enroll because they aren't facing a fine, Obamacare becomes an insurance program for a high-risk pool. That's a recipe for rate shocks.

Can Democrats save Obamacare? Speaking to supporters this month, President Obama complained about "this incredible organized effort to block the notion that everybody should have affordable health care in this country." The President urged Americans to "take a look at what's

already been accomplished because a lot of times, it doesn't make news. Controversies make news."

Republicans already have an aggressive plan in place to collect horror stories of people who are being hurt by the *Affordable Care Act*. Democrats are trying to counter with success stories. The Democratic National Committee has started a website, "This is Obamacare," to collect stories of people who are getting health insurance for the first time, who were facing bankruptcy because of health care bills or who had been excluded from coverage because of pre-existing conditions.

But while congressional Republicans are preparing an onslaught of guerrilla attacks, congressional Democrats are mostly cowering in terror. They see a disaster unfolding that could threaten their survival next year. McConnell warned Senate Democrats after they voted to limit the filibuster, "You'll regret this, and you might regret it even sooner than you might think." Meaning, be prepared to become a powerless minority after next year. We will crush you.

Democrats have no choice. They have to rally a vigorous defense of Obamacare. Which they can only do when the website is finally up and running. To counter a guerrilla war, you need a counterinsurgency strategy. ■



The Great Reversal

We know the public is critical of the Obama Administration's mishandling of the *Affordable Care Act*. What we didn't know is that the backlash has been building for 7 years.

Since 2000, Gallup has asked Americans if they believe it is the federal government's responsibility to make sure all Americans have health care coverage. The trends show a striking reversal.

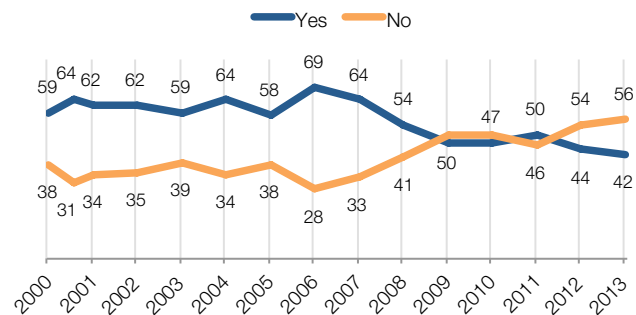
From 2000 through 2006, a solid majority said "yes". Beginning in 2007, while George W. Bush was still President, that view began to shift. By 2009, only 49% agreed that it is the government's responsibility.

From 2009 through 2011, when health care reform dominated the national agenda, the public remained closely divided. However, a solid majority—56%—now believes it is not the federal government's responsibility.

If the trend started before Obama took office, before there was even a health care law, what drove it? Most likely, declining confidence in government. That began during President Bush's second term and has resumed during Obama's.

When Americans reject the idea that the federal government should be responsible for health care, it's not just a reaction to the *Affordable Care Act*. It's a response to many recent failures of government, under both parties.

Is it the Responsibility of the Federal Gov't to Ensure Healthcare?



The Smarty Pants Scale

As if we didn't know, a team of psychologists informs us in the journal *Psychological Science* that Presidents of the United States tend to be narcissists. Not just narcissists, but "grandiose narcissists."

Wouldn't that be sort of a job requirement for someone who spends a lot of time asking people to "vote for me"?

There are, of course, varying degrees of narcissism, so the study ranks past Presidents from the most self-infatuated to the most humble. The top ten?

The study found an association between grandiose narcissism and "superior overall greatness." High self-worth often means greater achievement.

So what is Chester Arthur doing up there? He was never even elected (he became President upon the assassination of President Garfield). When President Arthur died, the *New York World* wrote, "No adventurous project alarmed the nation." There may be some greatness in that.

What happened to Abraham Lincoln, who is usually rated the best President? Lincoln is only #32 on the narcissism list. A great leader and a certified genius, but not a smartass ("The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here..."). George Washington? Number 19. Thomas Jefferson? Number 30. He didn't even put the presidency on his epitaph.

Poor Millard Fillmore. He was the last Whig President. Did President Fillmore achieve anything? Why yes. He dispatched Commodore Perry and his black ships to force the opening of Japan.

Most Self-Inflated

1. Lyndon Johnson 🐎
2. Theodore Roosevelt 🐘
3. Andrew Jackson 🐎
4. Franklin D. Roosevelt 🐎
5. John F. Kennedy 🐎
6. Richard Nixon 🐘
7. Bill Clinton 🐎
8. Chester Arthur 🐘
9. Andrew Johnson 🐎
10. Woodrow Wilson 🐎

Most Humble

38. Calvin Coolidge 🐘
39. Ulysses Grant 🐘
40. Grover Cleveland 🐎
41. James Monroe D-R
42. Millard Fillmore W

BREAKING: It's Still The Economy, Stupid.

Headlines come and go, but 'strength of the economy' is still hottest among the public's top priorities.



From Pew Research Center for People and the Press, *Deficit Reduction Rises on Public's Agenda for Obama's Second Term*. Available at: <http://www.people-press.org/interactives/top-priorities/>. Free for re-use with attribution/link. © 2013 Third Way. For more, please visit www.thirdway.org. Infographic by Bill Rapp with research assistance from Michelle Diggle.



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