



An Unbalanced Town Hall on Healthcare Reform

Despite the town hall format that was supposed to allow an hour of question-and-answer interaction, the president spoke for some 20 minutes before cutting off his monologue, saying, "I'm almost done here, but this is a big, complicated topic, so I hope you forgive me." Obama concluded his speech with a plea for support, declaring that in order for reform to happen, "I'm going to need ordinary Americans to stand up and say, "Now is the time.' "



It is thus very sad that his initial monopoly on the time available cut short the chance for those very same Americans to have their questions answered. The president's need to dominate and frame the discussion rather than focusing on the participants' questions did all concerned Americans a disservice, and it perhaps reveals that his true priority is advancing his agenda rather than addressing the underlying issues.

President Obama did eventually get around to answering questions, but the video questions were chosen by presidential aides and all the audience members who were picked to speak turned out to be associated with groups that support his healthcare goals. One works for Health Care for America NOW (which promotes the idea of a government-run public insurance option), one was from the Service Employees International Union (which recently joined Wal-Mart in backing a government-mandate for employers to cover all employees), and one was with Organizing for America (which also supports the president's reform plans).

This last person from Organizing for America, Debbie Smith, has cancer and is understandably worried about obtaining care for a new tumor. According to the *Boston Globe* [for July 2](#), she had been invited by the White House to attend the event while being advised she would probably not get to ask a question. The fact that she was chosen — and that this provided the president a chance to embrace her and show his concern — does seem unlikely to be a totally random event. This in no way diminishes the legitimacy of her need, but considering that she was chosen along with all the other Obama supporters does point to these town hall meetings being much more staged than they appear.

If these town halls were truly open meetings, one would expect the participants to represent a wider range of views. After all, the *Boston Globe* mentions a CNN/Opinion Research Corp. survey released on July 1 that shows only the slimmest majority of Americans, 51 percent, favor the president's healthcare reform plan, while 45 percent oppose it. Only 17 percent believe Obama's plan would decrease their costs for medical care, with 54 percent believing that their costs would actually go up. Finally, 20 percent of Americans believe Obama's plan would leave them better off than they are now, but 35



Written by [Steven J. DuBord](#) on July 3, 2009

percent believe their situation would be worse.

The president has quite a way to go to convince Americans to trust him on healthcare reform. Perhaps Americans are getting wise to the pattern he is setting. Obama says he doesn't want to run banks, mortgage companies, insurance companies, or automobile companies, yet federal bailouts have effectively put the government in charge of IndyMac Bank, Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, AIG, and General Motors. The only reassurance the American people have been given is that the president says he doesn't want to do these things but circumstances force him to take drastic action. This is strangely reminiscent of that old deflection of responsibility: "The devil made me do it."

Hopefully Americans will continue to get wise to President Obama's tactics. When he says about America's healthcare system, "I don't want to take it over," as he did once again at this town hall meeting, don't forget that he didn't want to take over IndyMac Bank, Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, AIG, or GM either — but he did it anyway.

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