

Democrats and the Health-Reform Albatross

By making so many misleading claims, the president created an army of opposition.

By **KARL ROVE**

"Mitch McConnell, John Boehner, Karl Rove, they're all warning you of the horrendous impact if you support this legislation," President Barack Obama said in March about his health reform, but "I am actually confident . . . that it will end up being the smart thing to do politically . . ."

Unfortunately for the president, it turns out ObamaCare is not the wind filling the sails of Democratic candidates and propelling them to victory. Rather it has become a reef on which many of their electoral hopes will founder.

Pollster.com reports health-care reform is less popular today than it was when it was passed in March. And it wasn't particularly popular back then.

A composite average of the polls show that today 40% of Americans approve the health-care reform legislation while 50% oppose it. Forty-four percent supported it and 47% opposed it when the president signed the measure. And those in many of the polls who indicate they strongly disapprove of the law outnumber strong supporters by 2-to-1.

Americans stubbornly resist this landmark legislation in part because virtually every major claim about its benefits is turning out to be false—and people recoil when misled.

Mr. Obama said health-care reform would not only stop insurance premiums from rising rapidly, but also reduce them \$2,500 a year per family. Yet PriceWaterhouseCoopers has found that with health-care reform, premiums are likely to rise 111% over the next decade, compared to a projected increase of 79% if nothing had been done. This just makes sense: The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act slathers on mandates, requirements and rules that can only drive up insurance costs.

Mr. Obama also said repeatedly that if you like your current coverage, you can keep it. According to an analysis by John Goodman of the National Center for Policy Analysis, that won't be true for between 87 million and 117 million Americans. Either their employer will stop providing insurance, or they'll see benefits go down and co-pays rise as insurers and employers wrestle with the law's mandates.

Seniors are already losing their coverage: Harvard Pilgrim Health announced this week it will stop providing Medicare Advantage to 22,000 customers in New England because of Medicare cuts.

What about Mr. Obama's promise that reform would bend the cost curve, reducing what our nation spends on health care? The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services has since found the U.S. will spend an estimated \$311 billion more on health care over the next decade than if the bill hadn't passed.

Nor will Mr. Obama be able to keep his pledge never to raise taxes on anyone making less than \$250,000 a year. Taxes levied in the new law will fall on people of all income levels who are customers of drug and medical device companies or own an insurance policy.

There's more. The new program is "paid for" with 10 years of Medicare cuts and new taxes, fines and fees that start this year. But the government doesn't actually begin spending money in earnest for four years, and the program isn't fully ramped up for seven years. How sustainable is that?

More and more Americans are (rightly) concluding Mr. Obama's reform is a fiscal disaster of epic proportions. By making so many transparently false claims, Mr. Obama persuaded and energized a large swath of the electorate to oppose health-care reform.

Many opponents are among the 14 million Americans who work in health care and millions more who work for health insurance, drug or medical device companies. Many are not happy with what's coming their way. They are telling friends and family how the bill will negatively impact their jobs and communities. For example, health-insurance brokers are already realizing they are unlikely to have jobs or businesses in the future.

Many business owners are talking to their human resources staff and benefits counselors, making certain employees know what's responsible for the bad news that's coming. The conversations these people are having with neighbors and friends are far more powerful than any presidential speech.

Mr. Obama inadvertently recruited many who now are, as he said during the 2008 campaign, "fired up and ready to go"—this time to defeat his party over his signature domestic achievement. Democrats got the health-care legislation they wanted. Now they're going to get an electoral defeat they won't easily forget.

Mr. Rove, the former senior adviser and deputy chief of staff to President George W. Bush, is the author of "Courage and Consequence" (Threshold Editions, 2010).