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President Obama's Health Care Summit and GOP Momentum: A Closer Look

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GRETA VAN SUSTEREN, FOX NEWS HOST: Former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich joins us live from, yes, Miami. And on the table, the president's televised bipartisan health care summit on February 25th. Good evening Mr. Speaker. And lucky you, you're missing the snow here in Washington.

NEWT GINGRICH, FORMER SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE: Good evening. Well, you know...

VAN SUSTEREN: Let me ask you about...

GINGRICH: ... you're (INAUDIBLE) nationwide weather. It's going to be 35 degrees here tonight in Miami.

VAN SUSTEREN: Yes, and lots of crocodile tears from us here in Washington for you that you're in 35-degree weather there. Anyway, all right, health care -- the president's got this February 25th call to the Republicans for a bipartisan meeting. It's going to be televised. First of all, why now? And do you see this as a good gesture? And how about the fact that he's televising it, which we, of course, hammered him to do?

GINGRICH: Well, I'm glad he's televising it. I think it's a good thing to do. Whether or not he's sincere and serious, we don't know yet. I think that Congressmen John Boehner and Eric Cantor sent a very good letter outlining some key steps to test whether or not he's serious.

The first step is simple. Are they prepared to give up the 4,500 pages of legislation that the House and Senate Democrats rammed through without a single Republican vote and have an honest discussion, or is this just paper dressing before they ram through a bill? If it's the latter, then this would be a really cynical step by the president and I think it would further undermine popular belief in whether or not his words mean anything.

So the president's put a lot of his prestige on the line here, and he had better mean that this is a real bipartisan meeting because if this is just window dressing, the average

American is going to be very disgusted with that kind of manipulation.

VAN SUSTEREN: Well, hasn't he made it plain that he does not intend to give up the 45-page (SIC) legislation? I assume that you're combining the House and the Senate bills.

GINGRICH: Right.

VAN SUSTEREN: He's made it plain that he's not going to scrap them, that he sees that as sort of a starting point, a baseline. I mean, that's plain, in his view.

GINGRICH: Well, it's not. I mean, but if that -- but if that's what he's doing, then the Republicans ought to go pleasantly (ph) -- they ought to take their -- they ought to insist on an equal amount of time with the Democrats. And they ought to say, in their time -- and let's say it's a two-hour meeting, so an hour goes to the Republicans and an hour goes to the Democrats. They ought to outline what they would do so the country gets to see that there is, in fact, a positive Republican approach.

We -- I had a column this morning from the Center for Health Transformation that John Goodman and I wrote outlining 10 specific good ideas. The Republicans in both the House and Senate have many good ideas. Republican governors have many good ideas. And I think that the Republicans ought to be very cheerful (ph) about outlining what they think would work, most of which, by the way, the American people prefers to a giant-government, high-tax, big-bureaucracy model.

VAN SUSTEREN: All right, let's go to your op-ed piece today. Let's just seize -- let's just take one topic, take one and explain it carefully and slowly, what it is and why it's a good idea because one of the things the president has said has been -- in addition to the fact he doesn't intend to scrap the bill -- is that he wants good, constructive ideas. So take it away. Give us one simple one and explain why it's so much better.

GINGRICH: Look, the first one and the easiest one is litigation reform. Virtually every doctor in the country will tell you that there are billions of dollars wasted on defensive medicine because of fear of trial lawyers. Virtually everybody in the -- and the American people believe that we ought to have a more practical approach than massive lawsuits. The Congressional Budget Office said that the Republican House proposal on litigation reform would save $10 billion over the next five years for Medicare at a time when we don't have the money. So litigation reform would be an easy starting point.

The second example, which we wrote a book about it, the Center for Health Transformation, called "Stop Paying the Crooks," which Jim Frogue edited, is very simple. There's somewhere between $70 billion and $120 billion a year in fraud and theft in Medicare and Medicaid. Why don't we focus on a simple, practical system to cut out most of the crooks and save probably somewhere between $50 billion and $90 billion a year? We need the money. It would help Medicare survive.

Those two steps alone would be better than most of what's in the left- wing bills that are currently sitting at the White House.

VAN SUSTEREN: All right, now, you and I have spoken many times off camera about my ideas on litigation reform, but let me -- and -- and you know, sometime, we ought to talk even longer about it.

But let me ask you this. Congressman Murtha -- it looks like his death may have

been malpractice. Assuming that he's a 35-year-old man, goes in for gall bladders, his intestines gets nicked -- he's got a wife and two children at home. Under your thought on litigation reform, would his family be unable to recover for that? Is that -- is that what you see as litigation reform or not?

GINGRICH: No. No. No, there -- look, there are no litigation reforms which block people from recovery. There are no litigation reform proposals which would protect bad doctors. But the fact is today, we have a system which is wildly different state by state and in which you can get the kind of attacks -- many of them are, frankly, phony. They're filed by lawyers for the purpose of blackmail, in order to seek a negotiated settlement.

In Texas, when they provided caps on pain and suffering and they had - - they -- and they put it in the Texas constitution with the vote of the people of Texas, 4,000 additional doctors a year have been moving into Texas. Parts of the Rio Grande Valley that had no doctors now have doctors serving the people. It saved an enormous amount of money for a Catholic hospital system in Galveston, Texas, for example. And it allows people to focus on good medicine.

You don't want a system which allows bad doctors to go unpunished, but you don't want a system which threatens every good doctor with the constant need to practice defensive medicine just because somebody might file a nuisance lawsuit.

VAN SUSTEREN: And one of the things that you and I have talked (INAUDIBLE) about the need -- at least, I think the need to put a cap on the defense bar in terms of legal fees because that's the engine that runs these things, lawyers who are getting paid by the hour by the insurance companies to litigate these cases from now until eternity and thus dragging them out and bringing to court when maybe the case should be resolved. But you and I have -- we've talked about that many times. So a lot of good ideas.

But that's one of the ideas you'd have discussed at the White House. So you recommend the Republicans, even if the president doesn't scrap his 4,500 pages, they should go and talk anyway, even if that's what -- there's no starting point going back to zero?

GINGRICH: I think -- well, I think the minimum demand they should make is that the time be equally divided, half goes to the Democrats, the president, Speaker Pelosi and Majority Leader Reid, half to Republicans led by Leader John Boehner and by Leader Mitch McConnell. If they're going to get a fair hearing, then the president has done them the advantage of drawing the entire country to watch the fact that, in fact, Republicans do have serious proposals. And they should come.

I also like the proposal that I think Congressman Boehner and Senator Mitchell -- Senator McConnell sent in that they also invite some governors. You look at somebody like a Governor Pawlenty, Governor Jindal, former governor Jeb Bush, Governor Haley Barbour, Governor Mitch Daniels. There are a lot of governors who have very good ideas.

On the Democratic side, Governor Bredesen of Tennessee is one of the leading experts on health reform in America and a person who deeply opposed the unfunded mandates that were in the House and Senate bills. I'd love to see a Governor Bredesen invited by the Democrats and one of the governors I just mentioned invited by the Republicans. It'd be good for the country to see that there are ideas outside of Washington and a great deal of the health reform that we need could

happen at the state level without some kind of massive Washington bureaucracy.

VAN SUSTEREN: I think it's a great idea since they're the ones who have to implement so many of the policies, as well.

Speaker Gingrich, if you will stand by? And here's a tease! Speaker Gingrich's political opponents just got some bad news. We're going to ask Speaker Gingrich about that next.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

VAN SUSTEREN: If you are a Republican, you will like this one! According to a new Washington Post poll, Republicans have narrowed the gap on Democrats about who is more trusted to deal with our country's problems.

Speaker Gingrich -- he's back with us. Mr. Speaker, these numbers are on an upward trend in favor of the Republican Party over the Democratic Party. For instance, the question is, "Who do you trust to do a better job handling the economy?" In the last year, President Obama's points -- percentage points have gone down 14, and the GOP has gone up 16. It's still with 47 to 42, but that trend must make the Republicans quite satisfied tonight.

GINGRICH: Well, you know, Michael Barone made the point that in -- since 1981, there have only been eight polls in the whole time done by The Washington Post, only eight polls in a 19-year period in which the Republicans were as strong as they were in the poll they released this morning.

So I do think if you're -- you know, if you're Leader Boehner or if you're Leader McConnell, you suddenly look at that and think you have a lot better chance of being a majority at the end of this cycle then you would have guessed a year ago.

But it's also a commentary for the country, and I think the American people know this, that the team currently in charge, the -- the President Obama, Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader Reid -- that that team isn't doing a very good job as measured by most Americans, and that's actually bad news for the country. I mean, Republicans don't want to see high unemployment levels. We don't want to see terrorists getting into our country. We don't want to see the government throwing away billions and running up gigantic deficits. All those are bad for America's future. It's not a partisan question.

And I think what you're seeing is a lot of Americans are rendering judgment that the Obama administration is not keeping its word, not getting the job done, and is trying to do things that the country, such as the health bill -- that the country deeply distrusts. This country does not want to see 4,500 pages negotiated in secret at the White House without the American people knowing what's going on.

VAN SUSTEREN: Which brings me to the second poll. In the last six months, on the issue of "Who do you trust to do a better job handling health care reform," the GOP has gained 14 points to 41 percent and President Obama has lost 9 points to 46 percent, which may be a reason why this February 25th, meeting was called or is so important to the president because, you know, he is losing the American support on this.

GINGRICH: Well, I think there are two things going on there. Of course, Scott Brown's great victory in Massachusetts coming on top of the elections of Governor McDonnell and Governor Cristie in Virginia and New Jersey all sent a signal that the

country's drifting from the left and drifting away from the Obama administration.

But you know, historically, individuals do better than parties. So for the president to have slid down to within 4 or 5 points of a generic Republican -- you know, that's a huge drop for a president. Presidents have an enormous advantage. They're in your living room every day. You get to know them as people. You want them to succeed because they're the leader of the country. When a party can match a president, the president is in deep trouble.

And I think that what I'm surprised by is that the president had an opportunity at the State of the Union and since then to give up on this 4,500-page monstrosity and say, Why don't we sit down and work together in a serious way? And instead, I think he's setting himself up for one more defeat by clinging to this giant bill and pretending he's being bipartisan. He's either got to be seriously bipartisan or he's going to lose even more ground as people conclude it's all cynical, manipulative ploy.

VAN SUSTEREN: You know, though, it's said that it was the election of those governors, and then the point was finally driven home with Senator Scott Brown that the American people might feel a particular way or that there was growing discontent, which is sort of stunning because there were tea parties and town halls in the eight or nine months leading up to that, and it was almost as though no one was paying attention until these sort of landmark elections, and then the one with Scott Brown. I mean, but if you were listening to the people earlier, you would have known the disconnect was brewing. It was going on for eight or nine months.

GINGRICH: Well, look, one of the reasons Fox News has gained so much ground over its competitors is that at a time when the old-fashioned elite media were refusing to take the tea party seriously, they were refusing to take the town hall meetings seriously, people who were, in fact, concerned about the administration, and that's now over half the country, found that the one place that was actually taking it seriously was Fox.

Your point's well made. But as you well know, the elite media in this country and the other elites who are so far to the left had rigorously rejected it. And now, all of a sudden, when you see Massachusetts and symbolically Senator Teddy Kennedy's seat have a 31-point swing from the 26 percent victory by Obama last year to the 5 percent victory by Brown this year, as Michael Barone has pointed out, that would mean up to 150 Democratic House seats could be in jeopardy, if you had the same size swing. That sends a real-world message to every practicing politician that even the elite media can't hide from.

VAN SUSTEREN: Well, I'm going to take the last word on this. And if it took Scott Brown's election to let you know what's going on, you just were not -- and I don't mean you, but one was just not paying attention because there was certainly a lot of grumbling leading up to that. Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I'm taking the last word on that. Enjoy Miami. We've got lots of snow here. You'll see it, I'm sure, when you get back. Thank you, sir.

GINGRICH: We'll be back tomorrow night.

VAN SUSTEREN: That's what you think! Try getting into the airport!