

## Responding to Attacks on Health Reform

Fixing the health care system will save lives and bring changes that will benefit America for years to come. Despite this, a well-organized band of conservatives is determined to kill reform for political gain, and they'll stop at nothing. They're spreading misinformation and even outright lies, and they're deliberately disrupting meetings.

So what should advocates do? We know their fabrications are ridiculous, but some people are starting to believe them—or, at least, to have doubts about reform. And the media are covering their antics as if they prove the public doesn't want reform.

### Respond, then Pivot

If you are confronted with hostile questions about reform—in a meeting or on talk radio—you can handle the attack. Here are some suggestions to help you. The trick, as communications experts will tell you, is to give a very brief response to the question or accusation, then quickly pivot to our positive messages. (It's tempting to argue with them and explain in detail why they're wrong. But doing that just reinforces their argument, so resist the temptation!)

Here are some examples of how you can respond and pivot. You can adapt and use these when addressing a false attack.

Keep these simple guidelines in mind when responding to questions:

1. **Be civil.** Don't fall prey to disruptors' low and rude tactics. You are more credible when you are composed and polite. And you make them look bad.
2. **Be firm.** Health care reform is a very serious issue that affects the lives of millions of Americans.
3. **Be positive.** Do not focus on the right wing's lies, but rather shoot down the attack and quickly pivot to positive messaging about health care reform.



### The Attack

Isn't health reform just a government takeover of our health care system—isn't this just socialized medicine?

#### Why It's Wrong:

The private market will continue to be the backbone of our health care system.

#### Message points:

- No one is proposing to socialize American medicine. No one.
- The private market will continue to provide our coverage.
- The role of the government will be mainly to make the private market play fair.



### The Attack

Health reform is way too expensive. Won't it just add to our national debt and hurt our economy?

#### Why It's Wrong:

Fixing health care will strengthen the economy by keeping more Americans healthy and by making coverage more affordable for families and business.

#### Message Points:

- Healthier workers are more productive.
- American businesses will be more competitive in global markets.
- If we don't do this, health costs will continue to bankrupt American families, businesses, and the government.



## The Attack

Reform is being shoved down our throats. Why are we moving so fast? It doesn't give us enough time to fully consider all our possible options.

### Why It's Wrong:

Republicans and Democrats alike have been trying to reform health care for 90 years now. This is *not* a brand-new idea. And, with more than 44,000 people losing coverage each week, the time to act is **now**.

### Message Points:

- While we wait, *at least* 22,000 Americans die every year due to lack of health insurance.
- Costs are increasing every day, leaving many people with stacks of medical bills they cannot afford. The longer we wait to pass health reform, the higher these costs will climb.



## The Attack

Why are you pushing for a health care system like Canada's? In Canada, people have to wait in lines, or else they come here to get care.

### Why It's Wrong:

Health reform is not based on Canada's system—it's a uniquely American solution.

### Message Points:

- I don't know *anyone* who's proposing a Canadian-style system – not the President, not any of the committees in Congress that are writing the bills.
- What we want is an *American* system that builds on the best of what we have and fixes what's not working right now.



### The Attack

Won't small businesses be hurt by health reform? It's going to drive us out of business.

#### Why It's Wrong:

Health reform will make health care costs *more affordable* for small businesses.

#### Message points:

- Right now, small business is bearing the brunt of the health care crisis—they have to pay higher rates or they just go without insurance.
- Insurance worries like pre-existing conditions and high premiums keep millions of Americans from pursuing their dream of starting their own business.



### The Attack

Is it true that the government will force seniors to decide how they want to die?

#### Why It's Wrong:

Health reform promotes healthier lives, not premature death. There's *nothing* in health reform that will force you to make such decisions.

#### Message points:

- Instead, seniors will be *encouraged* – and helped – to make their own decisions about end-of-life care.
- Reform will *help* seniors set up a “living will” – but it *won't require* anyone to do this.
  - Living wills put you in the driver's seat, letting you make the choices about the care you want if you're deathly ill.
  - Living wills spare your kids the agony of trying to figure out what your wishes would be.



## The Attack

Health reform will be paid for on the backs of seniors. Most of the savings will come from cutting Medicare services.

### Why It's Wrong:

Health reform will not be paid at the expense of seniors. Instead, health reform will make Medicare *more efficient* and *more affordable* for seniors.

### Message Points:

- Medicare is an extremely popular program that provides excellent care to around 45 million Americans.
- Under health reform, no services will be cut from Medicare.
- Health reform will help seniors pay for expensive prescription drugs.
- (Depending on your audience, you might also want to mention the people with disabilities who depend on Medicare for their health coverage.)



## The Attack

Isn't it true that, when health reform passes, seniors on Medicare will be denied treatment?

### Why It's Wrong:

Health care reform will not result in denial of services for seniors. With comprehensive reform, seniors will have more power and flexibility to make their own decisions.

### Message Points:

- The government has never made health care decisions for America's seniors. Nothing in health reform will change this.
- Reform proposals would actually make it easier for seniors to see a doctor, pay for prescriptions, and afford costly long-term care.
- Senior groups like the AARP and the Center for Medicare Advocacy have expressed their support for reform.



### The Attack

Won't health reform ration health care? If everyone is in the system, there won't be enough doctors, so won't I have to wait in line to get care?

### Why It's Wrong:

Health reform will increase the pool of primary care doctors and nurses and will encourage more of them to work in underserved areas.

### Message Points:

- Services will not be denied, but instead, patients and doctors will be armed with the right knowledge and tools to choose the best path of care for them.
- Health reform will promote quality care for everyone, not just those who can afford it.
- Health reform will increase training opportunities for primary care doctors and nurses to ensure that we all have access to care when we need it.



### The Attack

If we cover people who don't have insurance, isn't it going to cost me a lot more—either in my insurance premiums or my taxes?

### Why It's Wrong:

Under health reform, health care premiums will be more affordable for everyone, and there will be no new taxes on the middle class to pay for it.

### Message Points:

- All Americans who *have health insurance* already pay more in premiums to cover care for the uninsured.
- This “hidden health tax” amounts to \$1,017 per year for family coverage.
- As we cover more people, the cost of care delivered to the uninsured will go down, eliminating the “hidden health tax.”



## The Attack

Won't the government stand between me and my doctor to decide what care I get?

### Why It's Wrong:

All of your health care decisions will be made between you and your doctor. The government will not interfere or get in the way.

### Message Points:

- Right now, *insurance companies* often get in the way of patient care. They place limits on the care they'll cover, delaying or denying coverage for the very care that you need when you need it most. Health reform clamps down on these insurance company abuses.
- Health reform will ensure that every plan covers the services necessary to promote good health and will fund research to help doctors and patients make better-informed treatment decisions. Choices about your care will be left to you and your doctor.



## The Attack

People will be penalized if they don't buy insurance—so one way or another, my family budget will be wiped out.

### Why It's Wrong:

People will *not* be required to purchase insurance if they can't afford it.

### Message Points:

- Reform does not force people to spend more than they can afford. If families hit a rough patch, they will get help paying for their health insurance premiums.
- Since 2000, premiums have increased roughly five times faster than wages. This is unsustainable.
- Health reform promotes *shared responsibility* on the part of individuals, businesses, and the government.



### The Attack

Isn't it true that reform will only help the urban poor? Will reform do anything to ease the burden of people living in rural areas?

### Why It's Wrong:

Too often, our current system fails rural America. Health reform makes several changes that are aimed specifically at helping rural areas.

### Message Points:

- Health reform addresses the shortage of primary doctors in rural areas by providing incentives for doctors to practice in rural areas.
- An investment in health reform is an investment in the rural economy. For every dollar spent on expanding coverage and on infrastructure, rural economies will benefit through new jobs and business activity.



### The Attack

Why should I have to pay so illegal immigrants can get free health care?

### Why It's Wrong:

Illegal immigrants will not be covered by health reform: They are not eligible for coverage under *any* of the plans being considered in Congress.



1201 New York Avenue NW, Suite 1100 ■ Washington, DC 20005

Phone: 202-628-3030 ■ E-mail: [info@familiesusa.org](mailto:info@familiesusa.org)

[www.familiesusa.org](http://www.familiesusa.org)