

YES, WE DID !

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Note
intégrale

On Sunday evening, the United States Congress voted to pass historic health reform legislation - the biggest expansion of federal health care guarantees since Medicare and Medicaid (government provide health care for the elderly) were enacted more than four decades ago. The bill extends health care coverage to some 31 million Americans who cannot currently afford insurance, prevents insurance companies from rejecting coverage to citizens with pre-existing conditions, and allows, among other provisions, parents to keep their children on their own insurance plans longer. President Obama will now go down in history as one of the handful of presidents who found a way to reshape the American nation's social welfare system.

This was, however, the bitterest of debates, and one that at times made some in Washington DC question whether President Obama had the stomach for the fight, whether he really could govern. What became clear, in recent weeks and over the course of Sunday's showdown, is that Health Care was something the President was prepared to fight for. He threw all of his political capital onto the table, hitting the road and delivering impassioned speeches not seen since the election campaign. On Sunday evening, at the eleventh hour, he even agreed an executive order with pro-life Democrats concerned that public funds would be use to pay for abortions.

President Obama has delivered the change he promised to America.

He has, however, failed to change the way partisan Washington works. Peter Beinart, for one, argues that "Obama failed in his effort to be the non-polarizing president, the one who can use rationality and calm debate to bridge our traditional divides". While the President himself described the bill as a "victory for common sense", it is worth noting that this "common sense" was not shared by a single Republican representative. Never in modern memory has a major piece of legislation passed without a single Republican vote. While President Obama continually tried to reach across the political divide, the Republican Party machine decided that their best approach was to become defenders of the status quo, to attempt to block reform by all and any means possible.

Given the profound partisan nature of this fight, and the mid-term elections fast approaching, debate among the political pundits has now shifted to whether the passage of health care reform amounts to political suicide for the Democratic Party.

Senior Presidential Advisor, David Axelrod, is betting that the Republicans will fail in their attempt to present the bill as “government takeover”. Republicans, he argued, wanted to run against “a caricature rather than the real bill”. This, however, would only have worked if the Democrats blinked, and backed away from reform. Now that Americans will actually experience the legislation, they’ll be able to see these scare tactics for what they are, and, moreover, will actually experience the benefit this legislation makes to their day-to-day lives.

Democrats also now have something to run on in November.

So where does this leave the Republicans?

Contrary to much of their bluster, one has to question whether it is not political suicide for them to run against the bill and argue for the repeal of pre-existing conditions and insurance reform in the mid-terms? It will also take years to know whether the Republicans’ worst predictions - of rise in Medicare taxes and insurance premiums, cuts in health services, and soaring deficits - will come to fruition. In the weeks and months ahead, they will be resigned to painting a caricature of legislation that bares little or no resemblance to peoples’ day-to-day lives, and scare-mongering tactics about the “socialization” of the United States. These are, of course, the very same arguments that Republicans made against Social Security and Medicare. Few Republicans today would repeal either. This is a strategy, then, that is likely to drag them further to the Right in the short term, leading to a potentially unholy alliance with the Tea Party Nation.

In the long term, as Health Care Reform becomes central to the fabric of American Life, the Republican’s strident opposition to this bill will isolate them in the same way their opposition to FDR’s New Deal did in the past