



The Abortion Smokescreen

Like "death panels," the right-wing's insistence that Obamacare would bankroll abortions is just a means to an end—derailing health-care reform.

by [Gloria Feldt](#) | September 5, 2009 1:53 PM EDT



Scott Olson / Getty Images

It's September. Congress will soon return to tackle health-care reform, and I can't help but notice a familiar political two-step. If you want to see whether a politician—Democrat or Republican—can cut a rug, just ask him or her about abortion. They'll swing around faster than Tom DeLay on *Dancing With the Stars*.

Contrary to apocalyptic headlines, a national poll released in July confirms voters overwhelmingly support requiring coverage of reproductive-health services for women.

Partisans on the right mobbed town halls during the August recess to exploit abortion and women's health, whipping up controversy around President Obama's health-reform plan. Twisted logic and deliberate misinformation abound in a [YouTube ad campaign](#) by the Family Research Council, which, along with other anti-choice groups, also launched a [paid media blitz](#) claiming Obama's health reform plan would pull Granny's plug while covering abortion—ignoring that most of us grannies want to make advance directives and would be quite grateful if our health plans covered the service.

Meanwhile, Democrats were doing a dance of their own and, without Senator Ted Kennedy to lead them toward their higher principles, tried unsuccessfully to waltz away from the hot-button issue with the Blue Dogs to whom they owe their souls and their majority. No wonder voters are increasingly [questioning](#) Obama's plan.

The media has taken the bait. Time magazine asked, “[Could Abortion Coverage Sink Health-Care Reform?](#)” then answered its own question: “[How Abortion Could Imperil Health-Care Reform.](#)”

The million-dollar question is: why?

I'll give you an answer and won't charge you a dime. This isn't about abortion at all. It's about derailing health-care reform by any means necessary. And if the health and lives of women are collateral damage, well, that's two for the price of one.

That's why it's essential to **uncover** abortion—specifically the truth behind its place in the health-care debate.

Start by **uncovering** the numbers. Despite claims that covering abortion causes or encourages it, facts show the opposite. Countries like France, Germany, and The Netherlands routinely cover abortion in their national health plans, and have some of the lowest abortion rates in the world. Conversely, countries such as [Brazil](#), where abortion isn't covered because it's illegal and birth control is hard to get, have the highest rates of abortion, and the highest maternal death rates.

Next let's **uncover** how Americans really feel about reproductive services and their health care coverage. Contrary to those apocalyptic headlines, the Washington-based Mellman Group's national poll released in July confirms voters overwhelmingly (71% yes, 21% no) support requiring coverage of reproductive-health services for women. If reform eliminated current insurance coverage of birth control or abortion, nearly two-thirds would oppose the plan. Even when presented with opposition arguments, two-thirds still supported requiring coverage of abortions, agreeing that health care, not politics, should drive coverage decisions. Americans tend to be fair-minded, after all.

Uncover the myth that abortion is outside mainstream medicine. It's one of the most common surgical procedures in America. Almost half of all women will have an unintended pregnancy during their lifetimes and one-third of women—60% of them mothers of one or more children already--will have abortions, the Guttmacher institute [reports](#). Three-fourths cite their sense of responsibility to others when they choose abortion. That's a far cry from anti-choice images of wanton hussies who terminate pregnancies for “convenience,” or the opposite, of women as gullible victims of ghoulish doctors. Yet when abortion is covered, women who choose abortion do so earlier in their pregnancy, and with less risk to their health. No wonder 87% of private plans currently cover it.

Uncover the truth about those who don't just wish to prevent abortions but want to control women's bodies, period. If they were genuinely concerned about preventing abortions, they'd join the president's quest to find “[common ground](#)” on birth control and sex education—proven abortion antidotes. Instead, many of the same politicians who, like [Senator Charles Grassley](#) (R-IA), threaten to derail reform under the guise of opposing abortion, also [oppose](#) family planning programs, and are least likely to vote to help children after they are born. They even made sure family planning services were [tossed](#) from the first stimulus bill (unfortunately President Obama danced along.) Call me crazy, but I thought helping families plan how many children they can

support was the fiscally conservative position. And isn't there something wrong with a party recently caught in one sex scandal after another, preaching the immorality of providing safe and affordable reproductive health care for women?

Don't get me wrong. I like to dance. I just don't like seeing our leaders pirouette over our rights, our health, and our freedoms. Any valid health reform plan should respect women enough to provide the full range of reproductive care, including abortion, without shame or blame.

Opponents of health reform will keep throwing abortion up as cynical roadblock—but voters are smarter than that. They know the real issue is ensuring that every American has access to quality, affordable healthcare, including reproductive healthcare that's fair to women. We must keep pressing to get it this time, no matter how fast some politicians dance to the tune of special interests striving to keep the current high-cost, low-coverage system.

Gloria Feldt is a women's advocate who blogs at [Heartfeldt Politics](#). She is the author of [The War on Choice](#) and the former president of Planned Parenthood Federation of America. She is currently writing a book about women's relationship with power to be published by Seal/Perseus next year.

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