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Advice for the White House: Promise less, deliver more

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A few words of advice for the White House: "Promise less, and deliver more."

By now, most people are aware that some of the President's bold claims about the Affordable Care Act, known as Obamacare, turned out to be untrue. That includes his repeated promise that "If you like your health care plan, you can keep it."

Millions of people learned late last year that they were losing their insurance plans due to Obamacare. Compounded by other problems -- such as a poorly-functioning website; missed deadlines; and the White House's continuous, unilateral changes to the law -- anger over the cancelled plans caused public opinion of Obamacare to plummet. Americans had gotten their first taste of nationalized healthcare, and it was a very sour taste.

Space doesn't permit me to share all my feelings on this full-scale federal takeover of health care. But regardless of how one feels about the merits of this legislation, what can't be disputed is that it was passed under false pretenses.

In other words, the American people were sold a bill of goods.

The surprise news of cancelled insurance plans brought to my mind the unfulfilled promises of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, also known as the "Stimulus." In trying to build support for this unprecedented \$850 billion deficit-spending package, the White House declared that it would immediately turn the economy around and keep the country's unemployment rate from rising. But it fell far short of these goals. Unemployment skyrocketed, and it took four years for the national jobless figure to fall to pre-Stimulus levels.

Shortly after that bill passed, I announced plans to track the Stimulus dollars coming into the state and publish the details on the web. I soon emerged as an outspoken critic of the Stimulus, having spent months tracking the money and determining that it amounted to little more than another wasteful federal spending spree.

Because of my efforts, the governor asked me to represent the state at meetings with the White House officials who promoted the spending. I frequently had the chance to express my views, and I often made two points: Washington had blown an opportunity to truly boost the economy, and the Stimulus clearly hadn't worked as advertised.

Certainly, not everyone agreed that the Stimulus represented a blown opportunity. But even its staunchest supporters had to concede that the White House, at the very least, had overstated its stimulating effects.

And therein lies a big problem.

On his two signature pieces of legislation – Obamacare and the Stimulus – the President used lofty rhetoric and rosy projections to persuade Congress and the citizenry to support him. But in doing so, he created expectations that couldn't be met. Reality failed to match his rhetoric. And by the time the truth came out, the ink had dried on the bills and the damage was being done.

It's nothing new for politicians to exaggerate the benefits of initiatives they support. This ailment isn't specific to one party or the other, and President Obama's predecessors have been guilty of the same.

Still, there's no question that the White House – either deliberately or unwittingly – misled the American public. And Americans are now stuck with the consequences.

Obamacare and the Stimulus offer lessons that the President – and elected office-holders of all stripes – should heed: Promise less, and deliver more.

When leaders make promises that can't be kept, they risk paying a high price: a public that feels deceived. And they have only themselves to blame.

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