

Obama says closed-door meetings on health care were a mistake

By JOHN DISTASO
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NASHUA – President Barack Obama admitted today that his closed-door meetings on health care with Democratic congressional leaders should have been televised on C-SPAN and he said he would keep his campaign promise for more open negotiations the next time around.

Obama, who came to New Hampshire this afternoon promising to fight for as long as it takes to restore the health of the nation's economy, outlined a proposal to provide \$30 billion in capital to community banks to help them lend more money to small businesses.

The President told a friendly audience of about 1,600 at Nashua High School North, "There's no magic wand that makes economic problems that were years in the making disappear overnight.

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President Barack Obama hugs long time New Hampshire Democratic Party activist Jim Demers at the conclusion of his town hall style event at Nashua High School North on Tuesday. (BOB LAPREE)

"We're making progress," Obama told the town hall-style meeting. "It can't come fast enough. We have to accelerate it."

Obama also vowed not to give up on health care reform, and then admitted he had "made that commitment" while campaigning for President to put all talks with congressional leaders on C-SPAN, even those that ended up behind closed doors.

Asked by a Nashua High School South student to grade his administration on transparency, Obama said that overall, it's been an open administration, but added, regarding the closed-door talks to nail down the details of the plan, "I probably should have put it on C-SPAN."

He called it "legitimate criticism" that he broke a campaign promise he had made repeatedly.

Although many hours of open congressional hearings were televised, he said, "If you say that it's all going to be on C-SPAN, then it's all going to be on C-SPAN."

He promised that when the Republicans and Democrats "put forward" their plans, "it will be on C-SPAN and I want everybody here to watch."

Turning first to the nation's economic problems, Obama said, "I didn't run for President to kick

these challenges down the road. I ran to solve problems for the next generation. So, I don't rest until businesses are hiring and the middle class is thriving again."



Protestors stood outside President Obama's town hall style event at Nashua High School North. (BOB LAPREE)

Before taking questions at the town hall-style meeting, Obama called on Republicans to join with him and congressional Democrats.

"I can't do this alone," he said.

Obama called on Republicans to help him provide money for college tuition and innovative clean energy businesses.

Obama's renewed commitment on health care reform received a lengthy standing ovation.

"I am not going to walk away from these efforts," he said. "I will not walk away from health care and the Republicans shouldn't, either."

Mentioning his call for a freeze in discretionary spending, Obama said, "We all agree we should do something about long-term deficits. Responsible families don't do their budgets the way the federal government does."

Regarding funding for job growth, education, science and technology and the infrastructure, he said, "Those are smart investments. "If the boiler is broken, you've got to buy a new boiler. You've got to fix a leaky roof. But you can put off buying curtains. You can put off remodeling the bathroom."

Last week, the U.S. Senate blocked a bill to set up a bipartisan deficit-cutting commission, co-sponsored by Sen. Judd Gregg, R-N.H., and supported by Obama.

"This bill failed by seven votes when seven Republicans who had co-sponsored the bill suddenly walked away from their own proposal -- after I endorsed it!" he said.

"I turn around," he said. "They're gone! What happened?"

"You can't walk away from your responsibilities to confront the long-term challenges facing the country because you don't think it's good short-term politics," Obama said to applause.

A cancer survivor from Connecticut asked Obama to ensure she can continue to get health insurance when she returns to work.

Obama said the Democrats' health care bill is based on the premise that "nobody should have to go without health care because of pre-existing conditions."

"We're basically on the five-yard line," Obama said, using a football analogy. "We had to go into overtime, but we're in the red zone. We've got to punch it through."

Obama said the House and Senate bills "were 90 percent there. We were just about to clean those up and then the Massachusetts election happened and everybody said, 'It's over.'"

"It's not over," he said. "We just have to make sure we move methodically and that the American people understand what's in the bill. And I've said to Republicans, 'Show me what you've got.'

"You got a better idea?" he asked the Republicans. "Bring it on."

Gary Meyer of Hampton asked if Obama would be willing to meet Gregg to talk about health care, the environment and the budget.

"I'm willing to meet with anybody," Obama said, "including Senator Gregg, who I offered a job to!" He was referring to his nomination of Gregg as Secretary of Commerce a year ago. Gregg first accepted, but later withdrew.

He called Gregg a "serious" senator who co-sponsored the budget-cutting commission, but whose Senate leader, Mitch McConnell, withdrew his support.

On the deficit commission," Obama said Gregg is "absolutely right. I support him on this."

Obama said the nation's public schools "have been slipping." He said "the left" wants more money, while conservatives blame the bureaucracy and teachers' unions.

"It's not an either/or proposition," he said. "It's both things," calling for more funding and reform.

Obama pressed his plan to use \$30 billion that has been repaid by Wall Street banks under the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) to help community banks loan more money to small businesses.

"Jobs will be our number-one focus in 2010," he said.

Accompanied by U.S. Small Business Administrator Karen Mills, Obama, said his jobs initiative will "start where most new jobs do - with small businesses. These are the companies that begin in basements and garages when an entrepreneur takes a chance on his dream, or a worker decides it's time she became her own boss."

Obama said that small businesses have created roughly 65 percent of all new jobs over the past decade and a half."

Reiterating a portion of last week's State of the Union address, Obama said that to "make it easier for them to open their doors, expand their operations, and hire more workers," he is proposing a new tax credit for more than 1 million small businesses that hire new workers or raise wages "and a tax incentive for all businesses to invest in new plants and equipment." He also proposes eliminating the capital gains tax on small business investment."

Prior to the town hall, Obama visited ARC Energy, headed by Dr. Kedar Gupta, who pioneered a new manufacturing process for ultra-efficient LED lights at an affordable price.

Obama said his plan to use \$30 billion in TARP funds and use it to create a new Small Business



Audience member Judy Loftus, a teacher at Nashua High School South, asks President Barack Obama a question about the "No Child Left Behind" mandate during Tuesday's event. (BOB LAPREE)

Lending Fund "will provide capital for community banks on Main Street. These are the small, local banks that work most closely with our small businesses - that provide them their first loan, and watch them grow through good times and bad. The more loans these banks provide to creditworthy small businesses, the better a deal we'll give them on capital from this fund."

That \$30 billion would be used to create the Small Business Lending Fund, separate from TARP.

The fund would be open to banks with assets of \$10 billion or less. About 8,000 such small and community banks would be eligible.

In addition to using the TARP funds for community bank lending to small businesses, Obama wants to coax small businesses to hire more workers by giving employers a credit of up to \$5,000 against their payroll taxes for every net new employee they hire in 2010 and by giving businesses a bonus 6.2 percent tax credit on aggregate wage growth in excess of inflation.

His plans are subject to congressional approval.

According to a White House official, Reps. Paul Hodes and Carol Shea-Porter were to join Obama aboard Air Force One for the trip back to Washington.

Gov. John Lynch, Mayor Donnalee Lozeau, State Treasurer Catherine Provencher, Attorney General Michael Delaney, House speaker Terrie Norelli, Senate President Sylvia Larsen and state Sen. Peggy Gilmour, D-Nashua, attended the town hall.

Lynch said after the event that he hopes for a bipartisan effort in Washington to address the economy. He also backed the President's lending program, saying that while community banks in the state "are doing a good job" of lending, many business owners tell him they still need more working capital.

George Devon of Concord, a member of the Sheet Metal Workers Local No. 17, said he liked what he heard from Obama on creating jobs that also help the environment.

Devon said he is currently working on the project to install scrubbers at the Merrimack generating plant in Bow.

Tim Dining of Greenerd Press & Machine Co. of Nashua introduced the President.

YOUR COMMENTS

Gee where are all the Obama apologists on this one?

- **Jim L, Manchester**

Oh, how thoughtful of him to drop by and tell us he lied and he's sorry now that it's too late to do anything about it.

- **Jack, Concord**

The awe schucks arrogance of this Presidency has to go. I'd rather any president, yes any president of the last 30 years over this one.

- **Derek, Concord, NH**

At least he has the intestinal fortitude to admit a mistake. And he admits doing so on a

strategy and tactic for trying to draft and pass a law. Not a minor issue, but certainly not of the magnitude of say, starting a war.

I wish our previous president was able to admit his much bigger mistake - invading a foreign country that posed no real threat to the US.

So far, I'll take Obama's mistakes over Bush's.

- **Dan, Auburn**

Like I said days ago...a colossal waste of time.

- **Jack, Milford**

NH Voter, Mont Vernon, it's really quite simple, cut taxes, cut regulations, cut the size and intrusion of government, eliminate all municipal unions. Actually it can be made even simpler, have the government follow the Constitution and do the things they are permitted to do according to the Constitution. End of problem. Now get out there and do your part to make this come true, I know you will.

- **Allan, Rochester**

I am always amazed that I can watch something and come to a different conclusion than many of the people commenting here. No one is focusing on solutions to the problems of job loss and job creation or health insurance reform or getting the legislature to work together. Oh, that's right, only most of Obama's opening remarks and answers were focused on issues. But the comments here seem to overlook that part of today's event. I would love to see some ideas from all you educated folks. How can we create millions of jobs? How can we stop the few remaining jobs from being shipped overseas? Its times like this we need government.

- **NH Voter, Mont Vernon**

Hey Tom/ Candia,

There are two campaign promises broken:

- * transparency
- * bipartisan bills

Tom, how about his admitted lie on the supreme court law but it is OK for his bud Spiros to donate millions. How about the MSNBC hosts, Chris Mathers and Keith Obermann and their blatant racists/religious remarks without any recourse, OH THAT'S OK, Obama os on that network as a regular. I wonder ifhe is pulling down a salary there yet?

He lied about the 2011 budget. FACT. He won't take the AG to task for several serious national security screw ups. FACT and Now Gates the Sec of Defense, a political appointee I may add, has clammed up. FACT

Boy what a prez you have eh Tom, Jake, Robert form Deerfield, NSR, LJC and Tom from wherever.

No lame brains here, just Americans who see the emperor has no clothes! And he proves it every time he opens his mouth. Do any of you have a comment about Hilary stating she won't be on his staff again? hmmm I wonder why?

- **Paul, Candia**

Just one note. I was there. I don't agree with Obama on much. But I spoke with quite a few other people in the audience who were not fans either. So based on actually being there

(was anyone else?) I wouldn't say the audience was some hand-picked group of Obama lovers. I'd be interested to know the basis upon which comments to that effect are being written because, again, that was not my impression from actually being in the room.

- **Steve, Manchester**

Closed door meetings a mistake??

I believe the very first mistake was Mr Obama being elected to the office of the president!

Very disappointing!

- **len, laconia**

I am glad to see the UL post some pictures of the "free speech zones" outside the event.

- **Chris, Merrimack**

All his talk of "bipartisanship" and "bringing the country together" and never once did he try to restrain Reid or Pelosi or tell them to grant even just a small concession to the Republicans as a display of good will. "Bipartisanship" to the democratic leadership means "we have the power so we don't need to listen to the opposition, we'll just do whatever we want regardless of their opinions or input".

- **Tom, Ladson**

Liars--all of them . Obama , Hodes ,and Shea-Pelosi. Since Brown's win they are all looking for a redo. Fool me once , shame on me. Never fool me twice. Serial liars, cheats and phonies - all of them. November can't get here soon enough.

- **Len, Atkinson**

Wondering if I was confused I looked up the definition of "town hall meeting" and the first response was from the left wing non information blog known as wikipedia. I didn't want to use it because their information is rarely correct but then I thought, what the heck maybe a liberal progressive will believe it when it comes from other idiots, well here is the definition, and it is the right one(no pun intended) "A town hall meeting is an informal public meeting. Everybody in a community is invited to attend, voice their opinions, and hear the responses from public figures and elected officials, although attendees rarely vote on an issue." Here is a definition of the gang at Nashua north by the mud stained media " a friendly audience of about 1,600 at Nashua High School North". Transparency, you gotta love it. Mostly young, indoctrinated minds full of mush!

- **Allan, Rochester**

Chalk up another mistake for the democrat party. I was under the impression the closed door meetings were by design by those in charge of them myself. We can trust them now I guess.

I'm also trying to figure something out and maybe some of you can help me?

If having banks and business's that are too big to fail are bad, then why is having the same thing in a federal government good?

Question - What happens when the largest government ever known besides the Soviet Empire fails?

Answer - It borrows money, prints money, and taxes the population it needs to survive and when that fails we all go down with it and the only ones left surviving will be those in it.

Am I missing something or is big government not bound by the same rules we are being told about big banks and big business?

Sounds a lot like North Korea in a way Remember all the food and oil we gave them to not build nukes and help feed their people? Well guess who the only ones were who got food? If you guessed those loyal to those in power you're correct. Just a bit of information kept out of the Clinton library and certain media outlets. And on top of that they developed the nukes any ways because Clinton gave them everything up front. Did either Bush or Obama learn from that? Nope! Next Iran with nukes and is that another mistake anyone can afford?

- **Deb, Derry**

Fool me once shame on you -fool me twice shame on me-Don't let this 'community organizer' fool you again !

- **dave, littleton**

Yeah...um...I know I lied this time...but um...next time...I will be telling the truth...so don't worry.

- **Sammy, Nashua**

How are we going to ever pay back the National Debt? There is no plan. 14 trillion dollars in debt and it is only a matter of time before the lenders realize we have no plan, no intention and no capability to pay it all back. Then what!?

- **Mike, Goffstown**

i believe he has now broken every promise. out of iraq, close gitmo, transparency, no lobbyists, no no-bid contracts, going to washington to work for the voters not the special interest groups, continuing the war on terror, not one he has kept. now he and this administration is trying to whip up a new batch of cool-aid for Americans. by now i hope those that drank it the first time have had their fill and hold him accountable.

- **rn, ashland**

Mr. President... Mr. President...

Ah..DUH!!!!

And you PROGRESSIVES call Sarah Palin "dumb."

- **KCT, Milford**

President Obama would have had some credibility had he raised the issue regarding close door health care meetings and criticized it prior to the Massachusetts election. Now it seems he is going concentrate on damage control by re-inventing himself and focus on jobs. Why wasn't this a priority before? Because he was too busy trying to shove Obama Health care down our throats. Too many broken promises, too much finger pointing, and now he is going to take the 30 billion of the bail out money that was paid out to fund community bank for more small business loans? What a vicious cycle?

- **Rob, Manchester**

"Obama says closed-door meetings on health care were a mistake"

Translation: "The American people are not as stupid as my party leaders were hoping. They are paying attention. Due to my numerous broken promises, foolish economic decisions, and total lack of leadership, I - along with the other socialists in my party - have caused my party great harm. I must now say something for the cameras before returning to business as usual as my poll numbers are now in the tank."

- **Mike, Temple**

Yes, raising taxes always helps small businesses. Raising taxes always creates jobs. NOT!

The liberal Democrats still never get it, ever. Give the money back to the people. Lower taxes!! The Government doesn't create jobs; private enterprise does. It is amazing how easy this basic economic reality is and people simply don't understand it. 50% of Americans now pay for the other 50%. Only 50% now pay federal income taxes. The rest don't pay it or get it all back at tax time. This is unsustainable.

- **Rick, Hollis**

Exactly, Tom. I don't think he has any credibility at this point with anyone who has the slightest of common sense regarding politics. November can't come soon enough. Obama double talks and the only change that exists is in his own mind. Absurd.

- **Mark, Lee, NH**

But.. But.. It was an HONEST mistake by Dear Leader- so it is OK! Don not judge him by what he has done (which is nothing but make speeches), but rather by his future POTENTIAL.

Besides, he made so many other campaign promises. Surely, his performance on those is stellar. OH, wait a minute...

- **sally, candia, nh**

obama said back door deals were wrong. i'll bet if that health care bill went to his desk he would of signed it. his tax relief for small business is okay for people just starting out, but for those who have been in business for a while and are struggling to keep there dedicated employees it will not help. how about "stop spending"

- **glen, wentworth**

If Scott Brown had not been elected to the Senate, Obama would still be cramming his left wing agenda down the people's throat.

Now he and the rest of the Democrats are trying to appear centrist and bipartisan. If re-elected to a second term with nothing to lose, you can bet he will show his true colors as the former most Liberal Senator in the Senate and revert "Spreading the wealth."

Here's hoping for more change.

- **Billy, Derry**

So now Obama figures it out! Closed door meetings, which breaks his campaign promises, were a mistake! Will he figure out that he broke so many more campaign promises? Never mind the one pest that you can see, worry about the thousands of pests inside the house walls that you can't see.

- **Nick, Manchester**

Obama lies!

At the exact moment that he is trying to convince citizens of Republican Senator Gregg's hometown that the "health care reform" should have been open to public scrutiny, Pelosi, Reid, and the Democrats are trying to subvert the process with slick, Chicago-style, backroom politics.

Shame on Democratic Senator Jeanne Shaheen for allowing the location of the meeting; shame on President Obama for continuing to try to force his "health care" agenda-when America has shown that it violently opposes it; shame on Obama for sneaking into this town for his publicity stunt...when Senator Gregg was back in Washington - facing down Obama's finance thug who is trying to steal repaid TARP monies.

Nashua, America knows that you are cerebral people who don't automatically default to either party, but whose political views follow what is in the common good of the American people.

We will continue to vote in those whose character and values line up with protecting American families, regardless of their political affiliation. Sometimes we make mistakes. President Obama is a mistake that we have admitted...and we are trying our best not to allow this ill-prepared mental midget bring us to our knees.

Health care - we cannot afford this, especially in light of Obama's recent budget proposal. He can blame the deficit on Bush...but this ONE YEAR budget almost doubles the national deficit. ONE YEAR BUDGET.

Contact Senator Shaheen and tell her that the "health care" reform must not be forced through.

- **Laura, Grand Prairie, TX**

Wow, Obama admitting a mistake! That takes courage.

Never saw Bush do that and he had many more opportunities to do it. He couldn't get past his ego. The only courage Bush ever showed was defending Texas from the invading Vietcong.

- **Bob V, Manchester**

Why can he not see this with ACTA as well. Making rules secretly and only opening the doors to those who benefit monetarily will benefit nobody in the end.

- **Another AC, Londonderry**

Big emergency health care pass it right away or else, and we will implement it in 3 years. How about a terrorism plan we can use by oh let's seelast Christmas

- **Mike, Auburn**

Oh ... NOW they're a mistake Mr President???

I ask you America ...

What can (Sen.-elect Scott) Brown do for you?

- **RG, Manchester**

So, \$45,000 per hour to fly the limo up in a C-17 and heaven only knows what cost to bring in Airforce 1, security, etc. and all for a photo-op. That's guarding our money.

And by the way, the \$30B for small business? See Judd Gregg's comments. Using it for anything other than paying down the dept is against the law Congress wrote for how the TARP funds could be used.

This is becoming a circus and not in a good way.

- **Sam, Derry**

He is truthful only in those times when he is not.

- **Bob, Salem**

Hey what's one more failure in a long line of mistakes and broken promises?

- **Joan, Concord**

Jeez Obama, ya think?

I mean, you only campaigned on it with a constant drumbeat. Then your spokesman Bobby Gibbs said you actually kept that promise when you had all those doctors in the rose garden and it was covered on C-SPAN. Not quite what your voters were lead to believe.

But truly the best part was when congress refused to apply the same healthcare plan to themselves. So, it's good enough for the public BUT the people who put it in place didn't want anything to do with it in their own lives.

That's like a cook who refuses to eat at their own restaurant.

- **Jim D, Hillsboro**

"...he promised to keep his campaign promise the next time around..."

He's already a proven liar, so what good is his word?

Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice...

- **Tom, Campton**

So you lied about being transparent and now you feel bad about it? Does BO think we are all stupid?

- **Andy, Milford**

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