

December 30, 2010

In the NYTimes, [Sharon LaFraniere](#) describes bleak living conditions in North Korea.

*... A six-day visit to Pyongyang, [North Korea's](#) capital, that ended last Tuesday offered carefully monitored glimpses of a land where reality and fantasy are routinely conflated. While there were no obvious signs of impending collapse or political intrigue swirling around the fate of North Korea's ailing leader, the visit offered hints of why the North might be particularly eager now to resume international aid and trade.*

*For nearly four years, an unrelenting barrage of government propaganda has promised that North Korea will be strong and prosperous by 2012, the centennial of the birth of Kim Il-sung, the nation's founder and the father of the current leader, [Kim Jong-il](#).*

*That is now 18 months away. And prosperous is the last word one would use to describe North Korea's shuttered factories, skimpy harvests and stunted children.*

*Perhaps with that deadline in mind, North Korea's leaders last week made what might be a bid to reduce their isolation. They offered concessions that could help open up and limit the country's increasingly sophisticated nuclear program.*

*And after promising to retaliate militarily should South Korea renew artillery drills near disputed waters, they have reacted — so far — only with words. But North Korea has made conciliatory gestures before, to extract aid at times of economic need or political transition, only to turn hostile later.*

*Of the nation's 24 million citizens, the three million in Pyongyang are the most privileged. North Koreans need a special permit to live or come here. Still, signs of hardship are evident. ...*

*...Economists say coal production is, at best, half that of two decades ago, and Pyongyang has regular power shortages. At the elite Foreign Language Revolution School, students warmed themselves around stoves fed by coal or wood. In much of the city, residents report only a few hours of electricity daily.*

*...Elsewhere, especially in northern provinces, residents report that child beggars haunt street markets, families scavenge hillsides for sprouts and mushrooms and workers at state enterprises receive nominal salaries, at best. Workers in Pyongyang are said to be much better compensated. ...*

[Jennifer Rubin](#) blogs that liberals still don't understand why America doesn't want socialized medicine.

*Jill Lawrence writing in Politics Daily personifies liberal cluelessness on the subject of ObamaCare:*

*The biggest mystery of 2010 may be Democrats' failure to explain and sell their landmark health law, and the public's sustained resistance to it despite the popularity of many of its components. ...*

*A mystery? Well, yes, the left can't fathom why people would be disenchanted with a bill that requires them to buy insurance whether they like it or not, that constitutes another weighty entitlement program, that is now acknowledged not to [bend](#) the cost curve [downward](#) and that is already causing employers to dump or change their employees' health-care coverage. But for those of us remotely in touch with the public zeitgeist, it's no mystery at all.*

Moreover, the contention that the Democrats' problem is a communication one is a persistent fable that underscores just how sheltered the ObamaCare spinners remain from public antipathy toward a program that, among other things, is going to slash Medicare Advantage and impose a raft of mandates on new business. Obama graced us with hundreds of speeches and press conferences, and even a health-care forum. The more the voters heard the less they liked. ...

[Rubin](#) also comments on Obamacare poll numbers.

...If there is a silver lining for the White House in the CNN poll, it is that although 54 percent oppose ObamaCare, that is down five points from a high in March, while support is up to 43 percent. Yes, those are still rather dismal figures for such an "historic" piece of legislation.

...The House will hold an up or down vote on repeal. Then Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid will have a problem: does he allow a vote, thereby exposing his members to the wrath of voters? And if so and a number of those moderate Democrats bolt, where does that leave Obama's argument that there is broad-based support for his legacy legislation?

Last time around, the White House and the Democratic leadership convinced their members to ignore the polls and vote for ObamaCare. But in the wake of a midterm election wipeout, will Democrats again defy the will of the voters? Stay tuned.

In [Commentary](#), [Tevi Troy](#) reviews how Democrats forced Obamacare on an unwilling nation.

...The stronger case to be made, however, is that health care did in fact drive the election results. According to GOP pollster Bill McInturff, "This election was a clear signal that voters do not want President Obama's health-care plan." McInturff looked mainly at the battleground elections rather than including the heavily Democratic safe districts and found that in the 100 most closely contested House districts, 51 percent of voters described their votes as a message to the president on health care. In addition, more than half of independent voters told McInturff that they were voting against the health-care law. Independents supported Republicans over Democrats by a margin of 18 percent.

Another analysis, by Jeffrey Anderson, found that in "comparable districts, anti-Obamacare Democrats won reelection at twice the rate of pro-Obamacare Democrats." According to Anderson, this meant that Democratic House members in swing districts who voted for the health-care bill "cut their chances of gaining reelection approximately in half."

...Republicans are taking over the House of Representatives with a justified belief that the American people have given them a mandate to "repeal and replace" the health-care bill. They can't succeed at it. Even if a repeal vote passes the House—and it is likely that such a vote will take place early in the year—Republicans will not be able to get that bill through the Democratic-controlled Senate, and President Obama would veto it in any event. As a result, House Republicans will have to spend the next two years making the case for repeal, using the tools of the majority—gavels, more staff, and subpoena power—to highlight the case.

There are, however, two possible means of repeal. There is actual legislative repeal, passed by both Houses and signed by the president, which cannot happen until 2013 at the earliest. And there is effective repeal, in which the body politic rejects the substance of the bill, seeks waivers and exemptions, supports defunding important provisions, and challenges it in court, all of which would have the effect of making the whole scheme unworkable. This could be the ultimate fate of Obama's signature legislation. ...

[James Delingpole](#), in the [Telegraph Blogs](#), UK, blogs about some global warming conspirators who had predicted no more snow for the UK.

...Here, for example, is a quote from [a book published as recently as 2004](#): (H/T Ishmael2009)

*...It was the traditional British winter, everyone's dream of a white Christmas. And what no one knows – or likes to admit – is that it's probably gone for good.*

*I haven't seen snow like this for over seven years in Oxford, which isn't too far from where I grew up. ... In fact snow has become so rare that when it does fall – often just for a few hours – everything grinds to a halt. In early 2003 a 'mighty' five-centimetre snowfall in southeast England caused such severe traffic jams that many motorists had to stay in their cars overnight. Today's kids are missing out: I haven't seen a snowball fight in years, and I can't even remember the last time I saw a snowman.*

*Like the Christmas snow, the holly and the ivy may soon be distant memories.*

*The book was called [High Tide: The Truth About Our Climate Crisis](#). And it's by Mark Lynas. This would be the same Mark Lynas who has done very nicely thank you out of advising the Maldives Government on its 'climate change' strategy...*

---

---

---

## NY Times

### [Visitors See North Korea Still Stunted by Its Isolation](#)

by Sharon LaFraniere

PYONGYANG, North Korea — Girls' soccer teams waged a fierce battle outside a huge gymnasium. Two young brides, one resplendent in a white gown and the other in deep pink, married sweethearts in a snowy square. Parents pulled toddlers on plastic sleds. Pedestrians lined up at kiosks to buy baked sweet potatoes and pancakes.



*A wedding party in a snowy park in Pyongyang, whose residents are the nation's privileged.*

A six-day visit to Pyongyang, [North Korea's](#) capital, that ended last Tuesday offered carefully monitored glimpses of a land where reality and fantasy are routinely conflated. While there were no obvious signs of impending collapse or political intrigue swirling around the fate of North Korea's ailing leader, the visit offered hints of why the North might be particularly eager now to resume international aid and trade.

For nearly four years, an unrelenting barrage of government propaganda has promised that North Korea will be strong and prosperous by 2012, the centennial of the birth of Kim Il-sung, the nation's founder and the father of the current leader, [Kim Jong-il](#).

That is now 18 months away. And prosperous is the last word one would use to describe North Korea's shuttered factories, skimpy harvests and stunted children.

Perhaps with that deadline in mind, North Korea's leaders last week made what might be a bid to reduce their isolation. They offered concessions that could help open up and limit the country's increasingly sophisticated nuclear program.

And after promising to retaliate militarily should South Korea renew artillery drills near disputed waters, they have reacted — so far — only with words. But North Korea has made conciliatory gestures before, to extract aid at times of economic need or political transition, only to turn hostile later.

Of the nation's 24 million citizens, the three million in Pyongyang are the most privileged. North Koreans need a special permit to live or come here. Still, signs of hardship are evident.

Commuters crammed into decrepit electric buses, packed as tightly as boxes of toothpicks. Pedestrians bowed beneath huge bundles strapped to their backs, apparently stuffed with goods for trade in private markets that have eclipsed the ill-supplied state stores. Most were women; one collapsed on the sidewalk under the weight of her load.



Economists say coal production is, at best, half that of two decades ago, and Pyongyang has regular power shortages. At the elite Foreign Language Revolution School, students warmed themselves around stoves fed by coal or wood. In much of the city, residents report only a few hours of electricity daily.

New apartment buildings — apparently for officials — grace the city center. But the pyramid-shaped, 105-story Ryugyong Hotel remains a shell nearly 25 years after construction began. While it was recently sheathed in glass, other abandoned construction projects scar roads outside the city.

Elsewhere, especially in northern provinces, residents report that child beggars haunt street markets, families scavenge hillsides for sprouts and mushrooms and workers at state enterprises receive nominal salaries, at best. Workers in Pyongyang are said to be much better compensated.

Signs of that relative good fortune were evident on Pyongyang's streets. Some pedestrians chatted on cellphones, something unknown just two years ago. Koryolink, a cellphone network controlled by an Egyptian firm, has 310,000 North Korean subscribers. North Koreans can call only one another, but the network is expanding fast. Residents report more cars and traffic lights than three years ago, although traffic remains sparse.

Most pedestrians appeared well fed. Although malnutrition has improved in the past decade, one in three North Korean children is stunted, and nearly one in five is underweight, according to the [World Food Program](#). Residents of the Pyongyang area are the nation's best nourished.

North Korea's isolation is striking from the moment of arrival at Pyongyang's utilitarian airport. With a 40-plane, primarily Russian-made fleet, Air Koryo schedules just two daily outbound flights, to Beijing and to Vladivostok in far eastern Russia. Although visitors were allowed to bring laptops, inspectors immediately confiscated cellphones.

Journalists are rarely granted visas to North Korea, one of the world's most secretive and militaristic societies. The government allowed two journalists to accompany Gov. [Bill Richardson](#) of New Mexico, a former ambassador to the [United Nations](#), on a private mission to meet senior officials in Pyongyang.

Mr. Richardson sought to reduce the threat of conflict between North and South Korea and to persuade the North to abandon its aggressive behavior if it wants outside assistance.

Visiting Pyongyang as an outsider is a bit like entering a parallel reality. Official escorts stuck to visitors like Velcro. The rules were clear: No interviews without permission. No exploring beyond the hotel parking lot.

Everyone was closely watched, with tactics reminiscent of a bad cold war spy movie. Opposite a journalist's spacious room at the mostly empty Potonggang Hotel, men with briefcases left keys dangling in doors and appeared to rotate shifts. Other guests warned that dining room tables were bugged and that a dark, out-of-place wall panel was in fact a two-way mirror. Calls from the United States were blocked. Outgoing overseas calls cost \$8.27 a minute.

Some events seemed obviously staged. On a dazzlingly sunny Saturday, a crowd packed the auditorium of Pyongyang's ornate central library for a lecture on the life of Kim Jong-il's mother. Nearly every seat in the reading room was also taken. When one reader nodded off, a watchful monitor quickly poked him.

But the Foreign Ministry also showed surprising flexibility at times, allowing visits to the foreign language school, a crowded subway station and a silk-thread factory. Long-time visitors say they see a growing openness to journalists.

State stores were off limits, either because barren shelves hinted at economic difficulties or because only lucky government-coupon holders could take advantage of their artificially low prices. Window-shopping only, journalists were warned.

Better-stocked but costlier private markets were also out of bounds. Hundreds have sprung up nationwide, but officials play down their importance because they flout the socialist credo.

One, the huge, arch-roofed Unification Market in Pyongyang, sports row after row of stalls. Merchants say three-fourths of the wares come from China.

With paltry harvests, inflation of [food prices](#) is a chronic problem. Last month, the World Food Program reported that at that market a kilogram of rice, or 2.2 pounds, cost \$10, about 10 times the price in Beijing. By the agency's rough estimates, a typical household's income would allow one person to eat two and a half cups of rice a day, assuming he had no other expenses.

North Koreans pride themselves on *juche*, or self-reliance, and government officials greeted Mr. Richardson with declarations of a thriving society.

"Everything is going well," Vice President Kim Yong-dae assured the governor before reporters were shooed out of a meeting. "Thanks to our powerful military deterrence," he said, "we can now concentrate on development" and achieve prosperity by 2012.

But privately, Mr. Richardson said, officials acknowledge that the country is desperate for fuel, food and an easing of economic sanctions imposed after North Korea's missile and nuclear tests, beginning roughly five years ago. Some North Korea analysts warn that unless aid and trade resume, the North may raise cash by selling nuclear technology and materials to Iran, Syria or others — if it has not already.

Interviews in the past six months with nearly 20 North Koreans who recently left for China, including several Communist Party members, suggest that faith in the leadership's economic policies is shaken, if not lost. North Koreans know well that South Koreans live much better, while their own government demands constant sacrifice.

A few criticize the military's pre-eminence, and hope that [Kim Jong-un](#), Kim Jong-il's son and chosen successor, will shift policy. "I heard a rumor that he said we have more bullets than food. So maybe he will be a good leader and feed the people," one 59-year-old North Korean trader said, hopefully, in an interview last month in China.

But most seemed to support Kim Jong-il's 15-year-old "military-first" policies. They regard the United States as an implacable enemy and South Korea as an American tool, barred by Washington from uniting with the North. They insist that Japan's 35-year occupation of the peninsula, followed by the Korean War, proves the need for an invincible defense.

Billboards, patriotic songs, newspapers and movies continually reinforce that message. Every North Korean man spends up to 10 years in the military. Soldiers were spotted helping out at a Pyongyang construction site and heading through a nearby village toting shovels as a loudspeaker mounted on a tree blared patriotic messages.

“Even if we don’t eat, we give the military everything we can,” said a former humanities professor from the northern city of Chongjin, who now works as a maid in China but plans to return home. “Nuclear weapons mean we cannot be invaded. I really want to say that. We cannot be touched.”

At one Pyongyang subway stop, called Prosperity Station, commuters read news on the threat of military conflict with South Korea from newspaper pages posted on a stand-up carousel. “We want peace,” one man declared passionately. “But we are not afraid of war. We are ready for anything.”

Such statements aside, he and other residents were surprisingly friendly to journalists. So were government escorts. The six-day visit ended with a cognac-fueled celebration in the hotel’s karaoke bar in which the North Koreans belted out “You Are My Destiny” and Korean love songs.

The days were marked by odes to Kim Jong-il. Choi Hyok, 43, the rail-thin chief engineer at the Kim Jong-suk Silk Factory, which is named after the chairman’s mother, recalled Kim Jong-il’s visit in January 2009. “I felt like I had come out of the darkness and into the light,” he said.

Nam Dae-yong, 20, a geology student at Kim Il-sung University, marveled at 2,000 new desktop computers installed in April. “This is a very good present from Chairman Kim Jong-il,” she said.

The university is a showpiece. So is the silk factory, with its well-oiled machinery and 2,000 women at work in blue, pink and green scarves. Economists estimate that three of four North Korean factories are idle, lacking power and materials.

“Everyone knows the environment,” the former humanities professor said of her university in Chongjin. “No electricity, no light, no heat. The government doesn’t give anything, so we have to ask the parents for money.”

“People talk a lot about 2012, how we will become a strong and prosperous country,” one 45-year-old trader from Hwanghae Province told the advocacy group [Human Rights Watch](#) last month. “If we find a gold mine, yes, I guess it would happen.”

“Nobody really believes it,” he said. “We just get by.”

## Right Turn at WaPo

### [Liberal obtuseness on ObamaCare](#)

by Jennifer Rubin

Jill Lawrence writing in Politics Daily personifies liberal cluelessness on the subject of ObamaCare:

The biggest mystery of 2010 may be Democrats' failure to explain and sell their landmark health law, and the public's sustained resistance to it despite the popularity of many of its components. Polls show strong support, for instance, for requirements that insurance companies sell policies to people with existing medical conditions and let parents keep children on their policies until they turn 26. Republicans are determined to repeal the whole law or at least block funding for various parts of it. The battles ahead give Democrats another chance to explain what they did and why, this time in their outside voices.

A mystery? Well, yes, the left can't fathom why people would be disenchanted with a bill that requires them to buy insurance whether they like it or not, that constitutes another weighty entitlement

program, that is now acknowledged *not* to [bend](#) the cost curve [downward](#) and that is already causing employers to dump or change their employees' health-care coverage. But for those of us remotely in touch with the public zeitgeist, it's no mystery at all.

Moreover, the contention that the Democrats' problem is a communication one is a persistent fable that underscores just how sheltered the ObamaCare spinners remain from public antipathy toward a program that, among other things, is going to slash Medicare Advantage and impose a raft of mandates on new business. Obama graced us with hundreds of speeches and press conferences, and even a health-care forum. The more the voters heard the less they liked.

If ObamaCare's defenders are right, Democrats should welcome a series of probing and informative hearings by the new Congress. Let's find out, as soon-to-be former Speaker (ooh, that was fun typing "former") Nancy Pelosi put it, what's in there. If Lawrence is right, the voters will love what they hear. But somehow I'm thinking that won't be the case.

## Right Turn

### [Voters really don't like ObamaCare -- still](#)

by Jennifer Rubin

Yesterday, I noted with some bemusement liberals' stubborn lack of appreciation for the depth of opposition to ObamaCare. Two polls bear out just how widespread and persistent that opposition is.

Rasmussen [reports](#):

For the second time this month, 60% of Likely Voters at least somewhat favor repeal of the national health care law, while the number who expect health care costs to increase is at its highest level since August.

The latest Rasmussen Reports national telephone survey shows that 49% Strongly Favor repeal of the plan. Thirty-eight percent (38%) oppose the law's repeal, including 29% who Strongly Oppose repeal. . . . But last week also marked the first time a majority of voters believe the measure is likely to be repealed.

Likewise, [a CNN poll](#) tells us:

According to the poll, six in ten oppose the requirement that all Americans get health insurance, with 38 percent saying they favor the provision. . . .

"Among Democrats, 54 percent favor the insurance requirement, but more than six in ten Independents and Republicans oppose it," says CNN Polling Director Keating Holland. "Women are more likely than men to support that provision, but even among women, 53 percent oppose it."

If there is a silver lining for the White House in the CNN poll, it is that although 54 percent oppose ObamaCare, that is down five points from a high in March, while support is up to 43 percent. Yes, those are still rather dismal figures for such an "historic" piece of legislation.

Now, recall that Obama even in his more accommodating moments, has signaled he's not interested in significant (or frankly, any) revisions in his signature legislative accomplishment. But we're going to



test just how attached to ObamaCare the rest of his party is, especially red state senators up for re-election in 2012.

The House will hold an up or down vote on repeal. Then Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid will have a problem: does he allow a vote, thereby exposing his members to the wrath of voters? And if so and a number of those moderate Democrats bolt, where does that leave Obama's argument that there is broad-based support for his legacy legislation?

Last time around, the White House and the Democratic leadership convinced their members to ignore the polls and vote for ObamaCare. But in the wake of a midterm election wipeout, will Democrats again defy the will of the voters? Stay tuned.

## Commentary

### The Democrats and Health Care

by Tevi Troy

The passage of Barack Obama's health-care legislation in the spring of 2010 proved profoundly injurious to the president and his party in the November midterm elections. Studies conducted at Stanford University and the University of Minnesota agree that at least one-third of the 63-seat Democratic loss in the House of Representatives can be attributed to the electorate's negative reaction to the health-care bill—which suggests that the legislation was responsible for taking a bad election and turning it into a historic disaster.

Indeed, the determination of Democrats to push for the passage of health-care legislation may have created a new political dynamic in the United States. Since 1991, as I explained in an article published in the March 2010 issue of *Commentary* called "Health Care: A Two-Decade Blunder," Democrats have operated under a misperception—the misperception that health care was a winning issue for them. It has repeatedly led them to mistake voter concern for the economy for support for the Democratic health-care vision. In both 1992 and 2008, Democrats won the presidency in the midst of economic turmoil. And following both elections, Bill Clinton and Barack Obama saw their respective victories as a mandate to make a government-run health-care system—the final desideratum of the New Deal welfare state—a reality. Clinton's failure to get it and Obama's success in getting it led both men to spectacular midterm defeats.

But while the health-care issue has been problematic for the Democrats, it hasn't worked particularly well for Republicans either, 1994 notwithstanding. That may have just changed. The Democratic Party's association with unpopular government-run health care has now become so complete on a political level that the issue now may become a distinct advantage for Republicans going forward. That would be revolutionary.

It is all the more striking that Democrats have allowed this to happen to them when they had all the advance warning anyone could have needed to steer them away from the shoals on which they would founder in November 2010. And the person who wouldn't heed the warnings was the captain of the ship of state.

In June 2009, according to the *New Republic's* Jonathan Cohn, chief Obama adviser David Axelrod briefed the president on polling numbers showing the unpopularity of his health-care plans, telling him that "these numbers are pretty discouraging—there's a political cost to this." Obama responded with a story of a cancer patient who lacked health insurance and told Axelrod, "Let's keep fighting."

In August 2009, Vice President Joe Biden and White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel suggested that they turn away from health care to spare the party a political disaster. Obama refused, telling some of his aides, "I feel lucky." A month later, according to David Paul Kuhn of Real Clear Politics, Virginia Senator James Webb visited President Obama in the White House and "told him this was going to be a disaster." As Webb described it, Obama somewhat blithely "believed it was all going to work out." In retrospect, the preternaturally calm-in-a-crisis Obama celebrated in best-selling books like *Game Change* seemed less calm than bizarrely oblivious.

The behind-the-scenes worries proved prescient at the beginning of 2010, when an insurgent Republican candidate running for Ted Kennedy's Senate seat in Massachusetts secured a stunning victory in a special election. Scott Brown had explicitly run as an opponent of the health-care bill. "One thing is clear," he said, "voters do not want the trillion-dollar health-care bill that is being forced on the American people." Some prominent House liberals, including Barney Frank and Anthony Weiner, assumed that the health-care reform moment was over. Emanuel started pushing once again for an exit strategy. Nevertheless, Obama and outgoing Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi proceeded. "We'll never have a better majority in your presidency in numbers than we've got right now," Pelosi told the president. "We can make this work."

And they did, in a strictly legislative sense. Democrats passed the bill in March 2010. Obama told wavering Democrats as he lobbied them relentlessly that everything would work out—that a proposal that had been greeted with concern in polls, in town-hall meetings, and on the airwaves would suddenly become acceptable or even popular with the American people once it was passed. As *Mother Jones's* Kevin Drum put it in March, "once people get a taste of universal healthcare, they like what they see and they don't stop until the job is finished." The *Washington Post's* Ezra Klein went further, arguing that the zeal of skeptics and critics was already melting away, and that Republicans might well "be running on expanding the bill come November."

Alas for Obama and Drum and Klein, it turned out that the more people tasted it, the less they liked it.

Americans were unhappy with the manner in which the bill was passed—with wavering senators and congressmen getting sweetheart deals for their states in exchange for their votes, which were quickly given nicknames of notoriety like the Cornhusker Kickback. More important, they did not like the substance of the bill itself, and the way in which the grand new system of rules and regulations was greeted in the real world deepened their dislike. Within a week of the bill's passage, Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels announced that he would be reconsidering his innovative "Healthy Indiana Plan" because of certain new restrictions in the bill. AT&T declared a \$1 billion loss as a result of tax changes in the new law. Later in the spring, AT&T's discovery that it could save \$1.8 billion by ending employer-sponsored coverage for its employees and leaving them instead to enter new and complex "exchanges" managed by the government gave Americans a frightening sense of the perverse incentives the bill would create.

It was at this point that the essential dishonesty of President Obama's repeated promise to dubious voters—"if you like your health care, you can keep it"—became inescapable. What Obama had meant, it turned out, was that government would not actively terminate employer-sponsored coverage to force you into a government program. So if employers chose to act rationally in response to the new law's incentive structure, well, then, it would be your employer terminating your coverage and not the government.

It didn't take long for the mood among Democrats to turn from fear of the party to fear of the citizenry. By April 16, less than one month after passage, James C. Capretta wrote in *National Review* that "the Obama administration and Democratic congressional leaders seem to want health-care news stories to fall off of the front page." A few days later, a disastrous report from the Center for Medicare and

Medicaid Services (CMS) Actuary predicted that, contrary to what the Obama administration had been claiming for months about its bill's "bending the health-care cost curve downward," health-care costs would in fact rise inexorably upward over the next decade by \$251 billion. And on May 6, Diana Furchtgott-Roth, the former chief economist at the Department of Labor, reported that the effect of the bill would be to increase unemployment among low-wage workers, presumably the exact same workers the president had been aiming to help.

In the midst of the torrent of bad news and continual evidence that the new law would not do what the Democrats had promised, the Obama administration made a key tactical mistake. On April 19, the president nominated Dr. Donald Berwick to be the head of CMS. Dr. Berwick is a respected physician and health-care expert, but he had a long record of statements supporting the concept of health-care rationing in general and the cost-cutting of the British National Health Service in particular. This made Berwick a convenient target for Republican senators and other opponents of the new bill. It was bad enough that the Obama administration had passed the new law, or so went the argument, but they compounded matters by appointing someone who was an on-the-record proponent of exactly what the bill's critics most feared.

The Berwick move was problematic from a governing perspective as well. The CMS head is the single most important official in the complex implementation of the new law, and it would have behooved the administration to have had someone in place and ready to start implementing the law the day it was signed. In the best-case scenario, an official appointed to a Senate-confirmed job in April could not expect to be sworn in until August at the earliest. As it turned out, this was far from the best-case scenario. The Berwick nomination caused such an uproar that the Obama administration began to fear how bad his confirmation hearing would be from a public-relations standpoint. An odd situation developed: Senate Republicans began pressing for a nomination hearing for a controversial Democratic nominee instead of dragging their feet, which is the ordinary custom. It was Democrats who wanted to avoid one.

In order to avoid having Berwick answer uncomfortable questions about his views and the new law, the Obama administration waited until Congress adjourned for its summer break to install Berwick to the office on July 7 as a "recess appointee." This was an unusual maneuver, so questionable in its mockery of conventional process that even Democrats like Finance Committee chairman Max Baucus criticized it. The unwillingness to allow Berwick to air his views in public indicated the degree to which Democrats had become the party on the defensive in the health-care debate.

Unfortunately for the Democratic Party, its position continued to erode. On August 3, Missouri voters rejected the notion of the individual mandate in a ballot initiative that secured 70 percent of the vote. In September, the Pacific Research Institute's Jeffrey Anderson wrote an analysis in the *Weekly Standard* showing that Democrats who voted against the health-care bill were polling significantly better than Democrats in similar situations who had voted for it. President Obama was compelled to give Democrats the green light to run against health care, saying in a September 13 press conference that "we're in a political season where every candidate out there has their own district, their own makeup, their own plan, their own message.... That's how political races work."

After this, Democrats went forth with ads critical of the health-care bill to counter Republican ads that also opposed the bill. According to one analysis, three times as many ad dollars were spent on health-care commercials opposing the bill than supporting it—*among Democrats*. Wisconsin Senator Russ Feingold was considered bold for daring to run an ad touting his support for the bill in his race against the Republican businessman Ron Johnson. Feingold spokesman John Kraus told the *Washington Post* at the time that "Russ has the backbone to stand by reform while Johnson doesn't have the guts to stand by his plan to repeal reform."

When Election Day came, Republicans gained 63 seats in the House and six seats in the Senate—including Feingold’s—and made extraordinary gains at the state level among governors and state legislatures. Of the 219 Democrats who had voted yes on the health-care bill, 52—almost a quarter—did not return, owing to retirement or defeat.

Nonetheless, some have attempted to advance the view that health care was not particularly harmful to Democrats in the election. Arguments on this score go from the plainly silly to the somewhat plausible. In the ludicrous category, there is the argument that more Democrats who voted for the bill won re-election than those who voted against. This can be seen in an analysis from a website called Irregular Times, which argued that voting for health care was the safer move for the Democrats, since while 60 percent of Democratic health-care opponents won re-election, 85 percent of those who voted for the bill succeeded. But of course, Democrats in safe liberal seats were in no danger of losing the election, and voting for the health-care bill involved no political risk on their part.

A somewhat more substantive analysis came from the Democratic National Committee, which made the case that exit polls showed only 18 percent of voters citing health care as the key issue before Congress, and only two of the 12 Democratic senators who voted for the health-care bill (Feingold and Arkansas’s Blanche Lincoln) lost. Yet this, too, is a facile argument, since at least five of those victorious Democrats—including two from New York State—did not face significant opposition and were never in any political danger. More-honest Democrats, like pollster Fred Yang, had to concede that “it is not correct to say Tuesday’s vote was a referendum on health care, but it did help set the stage for Tuesday.”

The stronger case to be made, however, is that health care did in fact drive the election results. According to GOP pollster Bill McInturff, “This election was a clear signal that voters do not want President Obama’s health-care plan.” McInturff looked mainly at the battleground elections rather than including the heavily Democratic safe districts and found that in the 100 most closely contested House districts, 51 percent of voters described their votes as a message to the president on health care. In addition, more than half of independent voters told McInturff that they were voting against the health-care law. Independents supported Republicans over Democrats by a margin of 18 percent.

Another analysis, by Jeffrey Anderson, found that in “comparable districts, anti-Obamacare Democrats won reelection at twice the rate of pro-Obamacare Democrats.” According to Anderson, this meant that Democratic House members in swing districts who voted for the health-care bill “cut their chances of gaining reelection approximately in half.”

Just as he did in ignoring the counsel of David Axelrod and Rahm Emanuel in 2009, President Obama is refusing to heed the message the American people sent him in November 2010. He has continued to argue that the shellacking was due to the bad economy he inherited and a failure of communication on his part. The problem with that analysis is that it suggests that he should continue to talk about it but in a different way. And that would be the worst possible thing for Democrats. From their perspective, the ideal situation at this point would be that the bill gets implemented over the next four years and we never discuss health care again.

Conservatives and Republicans are determined not to let that happen. As the Cato Institute’s Michael Cannon wrote one day before the president signed the bill into law, on March 23, 2010: “The good part of the bad news is that most of these provisions do not take effect for almost four years. That leaves time to educate the public and, hopefully, time to repeal them.”

Republicans are taking over the House of Representatives with a justified belief that the American people have given them a mandate to “repeal and replace” the health-care bill. They can’t succeed at it. Even if a repeal vote passes the House—and it is likely that such a vote will take place early in the

year—Republicans will not be able to get that bill through the Democratic-controlled Senate, and President Obama would veto it in any event. As a result, House Republicans will have to spend the next two years making the case for repeal, using the tools of the majority—gavels, more staff, and subpoena power—to highlight the case.

There are, however, two possible means of repeal. There is actual legislative repeal, passed by both Houses and signed by the president, which cannot happen until 2013 at the earliest. And there is effective repeal, in which the body politic rejects the substance of the bill, seeks waivers and exemptions, supports defunding important provisions, and challenges it in court, all of which would have the effect of making the whole scheme unworkable. This could be the ultimate fate of Obama's signature legislation.

Many Democrats are sure to keep telling themselves, as President Obama has, that "the outcome was a good one." That conviction should comfort them as they continue to deal with the consequences arising from the intensity of the electorate's rejection. The Pyrrhic victory Democrats secured for themselves in March 2010 may prove not to have been a victory at all but rather an ever-roiling, ongoing, and recurring act of political and ideological self-destruction.

## Telegraph Blogs, UK

### [Christmas myths: the mystery of the 'Vanishing Snow'](#)

by James Delingpole

Until this week, the most-read story in the online edition of the Independent was [Snowfalls are now just a thing of the past](#), the one from March 2000 in which top expert Dr David Viner of the top-rated Climatic Research Unit at the famed University of East Anglia used his superbly honed predictive powers to make this now legendary warning:

"Children just aren't going to know what snow is."

But it would be a shame if [Dr David Viner](#) were to take all the credit for the unutterable stupidity and wrongness of warmists everywhere. Here, for example, is a quote from [a book published as recently as 2004](#): (H/T Ishmael2009)

On sale next to the desk were several Christmas cards, each showing children making a snowman under a heavy winter sky, the pretty white flakes swirling around them as they gathered up the snow in their duffle coats and woolly mittens. It was the traditional British winter, everyone's dream of a white Christmas. And what no one knows – or likes to admit – is that it's probably gone for good.

I haven't seen snow like this for over seven years in Oxford, which isn't too far from where I grew up. Back in 1996 there were a few days of snow (no big deal, less than ten centimetres deep. I remember it principally because I fell off my bicycle on the ice) but since then nothing. In fact snow has become so rare that when it does fall – often just for a few hours – everything grinds to a halt. In early 2003 a 'mighty' five-centimetre snowfall in southeast England caused such severe traffic jams that many motorists had to stay in their cars overnight. Today's kids are missing out: I haven't seen a snowball fight in years, and I can't even remember the last time I saw a snowman.

Like the Christmas snow, the holly and the ivy may soon be distant memories.



The book was called *High Tide: The Truth About Our Climate Crisis*. And it's by Mark Lynas. This would be the same Mark Lynas who has done very nicely thank you out of advising the Maldives Government on its 'climate change' strategy; the same one who once shoved a custard pie in the face of Bjorn Lomborg for having the temerity to suggest that there were more important problems in the world than CO2 emissions; the same one who recently appeared in a Channel 4 documentary [What The Green Movement Got Wrong](#). Funnily enough he didn't even mention his snow prediction. Maybe he should have done, while simultaneously offering a refund for all the well-meaning pillocks who forked out for his stupid book.

RAWRZ INVESTOR'S BUSINESS DAILY  
2010 ©



www.investors.comCarto





