



Obama's Deal **Classroom Activities**

VIDEO OVERVIEW

Three months into his administration, President Barack Obama set out to tackle one of the nation's toughest issues: health care reform. In this video clip from *Obama's Deal*, students will learn of President Obama's negotiations with powerful lobbyists and members of Congress—and the importance of political compromise in shaping major legislation.

GETTING STARTED

For classrooms studying social studies, civics and government, this FRONTLINE classroom activity includes a set of related themes and discussion questions to help students analyze and understand key current events. Watch the video chapter and start a discussion to explore the role of negotiations and compromise in passing major reform legislation. Go further into this topic with the *Obama's Deal Lesson Plan* that asks students to review and evaluate key health care reform deals.

VIDEO THEMES

- Initially, the White House strategy for passing health care reform was to be transparent and give all interested parties a voice in the process.
- Publicly, the health insurance industry was to be a willing partner in health care reform, but privately, it pushed for reforms that were beneficial to its business interests.
- To get the health industry's support, President Obama agreed to include provisions in the health care reform bill that went against his 2008 campaign promises.
- By default, the writing of the health care reform bill went to a Democratic senator, Max Baucus (D-Mont.), who was strongly supported by the health industry. The White House staff did not consider the senator to be an advantage in passing the Obama administration's plan.
- As the health care reform bill began to take shape, it was apparent to many that deals were being made with the health insurance industry that excluded alternative proposals from others groups, like Dr. Margaret Flowers' Physicians for a National Health Program, which advocates for a single-payer health care option.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Describe the Obama administration's strategy for holding the May 2009 health care reform meeting with the president and all interested parties. What was the administration trying to accomplish, and what was it trying to avoid, based on lessons learned in the past?
- Karen Ignagni and the health insurance lobby wanted the final health care reform bill to require everyone to buy health insurance and not include a public option. What does Karen Ignagni's role indicate about powerful lobbyists? Do you think these powerful lobbyists help or hurt the legislative process, and why?
- In what ways were the demands of the health insurance lobby in opposition to the health care reforms candidate Obama proposed during the 2008 campaign? Why do you think President Obama eventually agreed to the demands from the lobbying groups? Do you see any other options the president might have explored? Do you think this type of political compromise is in the best interest of American citizens? Explain your answer.
- Name some of the reasons many in the Obama administration felt Montana Sen. Max Baucus was the least likely person to deliver real comprehensive health care reform.
- Why were health care reform activists like Dr. Margaret Flowers angry with Sen. Baucus during the committee hearings? Do you feel their protests were justified? What could Sen. Baucus have done differently? What might have been the outcome?

GO FURTHER

Web-exclusive Resources: Timeline of the Push to Reform Health Care
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/obamasdeal/etc/cron.html>

OBAMA'S DEAL

FEATURED LESSON PLAN: Deal or No Deal?

Overview:

In this lesson, students will examine the key compromises made by the Obama administration, health industry lobbyists and members of Congress. Students will analyze these compromises and evaluate whether the Obama administration should have accepted them. For more background information on this topic and a glossary of health care reform terminology, see the **Related Resources** section.

Subject Areas:

Civics, Economics, Government, U.S. History, Language Arts and Humanities

Grade Level:

Grades 9-12

Objectives:

The student will:

- Understand the political negotiation process involved with passing a bill through Congress
- Identify key steps in the legislative process where interested parties can have influence on the shape or intent of a bill
- Understand how and why health care lobbyists influenced the health care reform bill
- Analyze the costs and benefits of the lobbyist-influenced provisions in light of President Obama's goals for health care reform
- Evaluate whether these provisions should have been accepted by the Obama administration

Estimated Time Needed:

One 50-minute class period

Materials Needed:

- Internet access and equipment to show the class an online video clip
- Chapter Two of *Obama's Deal: The Deal Making Begins*
- Handout 1: [Passing a Bill Through Congress](#)
- Handout 2: [Deal or No Deal?](#)

Procedure:

Opening Activity:

Briefly review with students how a bill becomes a law using the **Handout 1: Passing a Bill Through Congress** chart included with this lesson. Review the basic steps of how a bill is conceived, assigned to a committee, and moves through both houses of Congress. Ask:

- Where in the process are lobbyists most involved? (*Most often during the hearings and mark-up sessions.*)
- Where does the American public have a voice in the process? (*Primarily through their representatives.*)
- What can citizens do to make sure their voice is heard? (*Answers will vary, but mainly by communicating with their representatives.*)

Main Activity: Deal or No Deal?

Students will review key proposals from two powerful health industry lobbyist groups. The goal is to show students the discussions between constituent groups and government leaders to create legislation that appeals to some, appeases others and minimizes opposition. In the end, the process doesn't always go as planned.

1. Watch the video clip Chapter 2: *Obama's Deal: The Deal Making Begins*.
2. Explain that political negotiations are an important part of getting a bill passed through Congress. The class is going to explore this process by examining and discussing two of the deals that were presented to the Obama administration during health care reform talks.
3. Divide the class into small groups of students. Distribute Handout 2: Deal or No Deal? Review the directions with the students, and answer any questions they may have.
4. Assign half the student groups to work on Deal #1: Health Insurance Industry Proposal and the other half to work on Deal #2: Pharmaceutical Industry Proposal.
5. Have students review their assigned deals and discuss the accompanying questions. Then have them make recommendations about how the administration should respond to the proposed deal.
6. Ask each group to select a spokesperson to present the group's consensus and/or disagreement to the class. Encourage students to ask questions or make appropriate comments during the presentations.

Credits:

This teacher's guide was developed by Cari Ladd. It was written by Greg Timmons. Advisers were Molly Lynde of Mills E. Godwin High School in Richmond, Va., and Megan Palevich of Montgomery School in Chester Springs, Pa.

LESSON EXTENSIONS

- Have students research their congressional representatives' or senators' position on health care reform. They should then write one of them a letter expressing their views on the deal-making process that took place during the negotiations for health care reform. Use **Write Your Representative** <https://writerep.house.gov/writerep/welcome.shtml> or **Senators of the U.S. Senate** http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm to facilitate the letter-writing process. Or have students write a letter to the editor of the local newspaper about their views on the negotiations process during health care reform.
- Ask students to select a bill of interest and track its progress through Congress. Students can check sites such as **Govtrack.us** <http://www.govtrack.us> or **Congress.org** <http://www.congress.org/> for information or access proposed legislation at **Thomas.gov**. Have students set up a blog or another discussion tool to explore issues surrounding the bill.
- Conduct a media analysis activity by having the class review how a variety of news organizations covered health care reform or other legislation. Students should use media examples to document the similarities and differences in reports and evaluate if coverage is favorable or unfavorable toward specific newsmakers. Ask students to comment on how such reporting colors Americans' perception of the legislative process.
- Have students simulate health care negotiations with all constituents at the table. Small student groups can role-play lobbyists for the pharmaceutical companies and the health insurance industry, health care activists, Republican and Democratic legislators and the Obama administration.

RELATED RESOURCES

Students should be aware that Web sites often present only one view of an issue. Encourage students to think about and question Web sites as they are reviewing them. Some guiding questions: What did you learn from this site? What didn't you learn from this site? Who sponsors this site? What bias might the sponsor have? How current is the site?

Analysis:

FRONTLINE: *Obama's Deal*

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/obamasdeal>

View the entire program and read excerpts from interviews that provide insight into the negotiations among the Obama administration, members of Congress and lobbyists from the health care and health insurance industries.

Background:

FRONTLINE: *Sick Around the World*

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/sickaroundtheworld/>

A look at five other capitalist democracies' health care systems and what the U.S. could learn from their successes and failures

Kaiser Family Foundation

<http://www.kff.org/healthreform/7909.cfm>

A detailed glossary of terms for understanding the concepts included in health care proposals

NPR: Health Care

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1027>

National Public Radio (NPR) posts continuously updated stories on health care in America.

Online NewsHour: "Rx for Reform"

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/indepth_coverage/health/healthreform/

The *Online NewsHour* provides a complete and updated rundown on health care reform.

Health Care Industry:

America's Health Insurance Plans

<http://www.ahip.org/>

The official Web site of the health insurance industry's lobbying organization

Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA)

<http://www.phrma.org/>

The official Web site of the pharmaceutical industry's lobbying organization

Physicians for a National Health Program

<http://www.pnhp.org/>

This organization of 17,000 health professionals supports single-payer national health insurance.

Purchasing the Film:

Obama's Deal can be purchased from **PBS Educational Media**
<http://teacher.shop.pbs.org/product/index.jsp?productId=4068761>

RELATED STANDARDS

These standards are drawn from "Content Knowledge," a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McRel (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning) at
<http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/>

Civics, Standard 14: Understands issues concerning the disparities between ideals and reality in American political and social life

Civics, Standard 20: Understands the formation and implementation of public policy

Economics, Standard 2: Understands characteristics of different economic systems, economic institutions and economic incentives

Language Arts, Standard 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process

Language Arts, Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media

U.S. History, Standard 31: Understands economic, social and cultural developments in the contemporary United States