

OPINION

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Re the recent Our View on President Obama's speech on health care, "Speech short on details:"

It's apparent that your editors still seem to see President Obama and his policy making through somewhat rose-tinted glasses. Contrary to your supposition, reform of the magnitude

that he and the Democratic-controlled Congress are proposing require a good chunk of the American people's support. Though he's our duly elected president, he serves us, not the other way around and should remain cognizant of the concerns being expressed by a large percentage of the American public.

Rep. Joe Miller may have exhibited poor judgment in yelling out during the president's address, but at least he apologized. The American people have yet to receive apologies from the likes of Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Rep. Barney Frank and others that have labeled dissenters somehow unpatriotic and in some cases terrorists — all for exercising their right of free speech.

The president's address to Congress only reaffirms this voter's belief that Obama is still all about the sizzle and not about the steak.

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OUR VIEW

Speech short on details

PRESIDENT Obama took an important step Wednesday night in his health care address to a joint session of Congress — and to an even more important audience around the nation — toward righting his personal ship of state, which had been wobbling off course through the late summer.

And he looked all the better in contrast to an even more wayward politician.

Rep. Joe Wilson of South Carolina, the audience yeller during the address, shouted out a “You lie!” so inappropriate you might think Obama had paid him for yet another opportunity to look presidential rather than blustering.

It’s clear that the majority of Americans concerned about health care and its costs want sober leadership, not rants, on the subject.

But it’s true that while there are more important questions among what the president almost laughably called “some significant details to be ironed out,” the problems of providing health care for illegal immigrants have not been addressed in any plan we have seen. They need to be addressed.

And what really needs to be addressed is the issue of how the nation is going to pay for any major health care reform at this time of dangerously large federal deficits.

The president did score on style points and for the most part on substance in the speech, one he desperately needed to give as his health care reform efforts flounder.

He took up former opponent Sen. John McCain’s proposal to create an affordable insurance pool for coverage of high-risk Americans with pre-existing conditions. And yet he didn’t back away from his proper demand that reform must, one way or another, remove the crazy option insurance companies now have of refusing coverage to people with such conditions they and their doctors weren’t even aware they had.

He, and his speechwriters, got off one of the great lines of our time in underscoring the seriousness with which he views his health care quest: “I am not the first president to take up this cause,” he said, “but I am determined to be the last.”

He came up with a hard figure — \$900 billion — for how much the plan would cost over a decade. He tossed Republicans a bone with a reference to tort reform that would reduce physicians’ exposure to frivolous malpractice suits. And he adamantly said that he would never endorse a plan that added to the ballooning federal deficit, which has expanded in recent years and the diminution of which needs to be a high national priority.

Good as the speech was in parts, we’re not so sure that it went far enough in allaying the fears of the 180 million Americans who do have full insurance coverage that they will be paying too much to cover everyone else. We’re not sure the elderly found anything to entirely convince them that they would not be bearing a disproportionate part of the burden in paying for the plan. And it’s easy enough to say, as the president did, that he wouldn’t sign a plan that contributed one cent toward increasing the deficit — but it’s a lot harder to make that happen. He indicated that if spending were heading in that direction, that he would make some (highly unspecified) cuts in other programs to balance the books. At best, it’s all too vague for our tastes.

Most of the rational public fears about health care reform — the ones that aren’t centered on het-up rhetoric from the “socialism”-spouting automatic opponents — properly have to do with our precarious economy, both short-term and in the future.

Americans deserve more concrete plans about how we would pay to ensure better health care for all, and so far, we’re still not getting them.

It’s not time to start all over again in this process. A duly elected president does not have to seek 100 percent approval in the nation or 70 or 80 votes in a Senate that only needs 60 votes to pass legislation. But we’d still like to see more details. And we still need to know that new ways of providing health care to Americans are in the economic best interests of ourselves, our children and our grandchildren.