

produced in the House and Senate failed to bring the "fundamental change" needed to bring down health costs in the long run. So the following Monday, he summoned Elmendorf, former CBO director Alice Rivlin, Massachusetts Institute of Technology economist Jonathan Gruber and Harvard University's David Cutler to the Oval Office to go over the bills and find other ways to wring out savings. The next day, Obama met with moderate Blue Dog Democrats who have stymied the health-care progress in the House. Drawing on advice from the economists the day before, the President revisited an idea that committee chairmen on Capitol Hill had previously rejected: take from Congress the power to set Medicare reimbursement rates and give it to an independent board. The backroom session went on for hours; by the time it was over, Obama was on his way to winning on that point.

Will that kind of LBJ-style maneuvering be enough? Skepticism is growing. Before taking a risky vote that could come back to haunt them, Democrats are clamoring for a clearer idea of where the President stands on some of the thornier issues, like who should be taxed—and how much—to cover the uninsured. "They want to make sure what they are voting on will be there in the end," says Connecticut Congressman Joe Courtney. "This is a unique role the White House can play."

Some Obama allies fear that in his eagerness to get a deal—especially one that can attract Republican votes—he is giving away too much. The Senate Finance Committee, for example, is on the verge of a deal that would jettison the public option in favor of nonprofit, consumer-owned health-care co-ops, which would mean far less government involvement than many liberals would like to see. The Finance Committee, whose chairman, Max Baucus of Montana, is working closely with ranking Republican Charles Grassley, appears poised to omit any requirement that employers provide coverage to their workers (though they would have to reimburse the government for what it would pay to help them buy their own coverage) and to give relatively skimpy subsidies to Americans who would now find themselves required to buy insurance.

Those provisions make liberal Democrats uncomfortable, if not suspicious. "The assumption that Democrats will accept anything is a totally false assumption," says Senator Christopher Dodd, who led the drafting of a more generous Senate alternative measure. "It had better be a strong bill, or they won't have a bill."—WITH REPORTING BY SOPHIA YAN/WASHINGTON

## TIME POLL

When TIME asked 1,000 Americans what they thought about the prospects for health-care reform, a majority responded that large adjustments rather than minor reforms are needed in the way that Washington regulates medicine. At the same time, however, voters fear that Congress is likely to enact changes in insurance practices and federal programs that will needlessly complicate health care, increase costs and limit the ability of patients to choose their doctors, hospitals and treatments.

### Health care

# 55%

PERCENTAGE OF THOSE POLLED WHO BELIEVE THE CURRENT HEALTH-CARE SYSTEM NEEDS MAJOR REFORM



Are you currently covered by any form of health insurance or health-care plan?



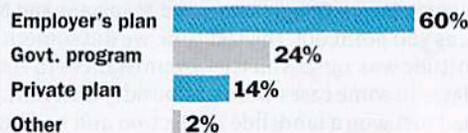
PERCENTAGE OF AMERICANS WHO ARE SATISFIED WITH THEIR CURRENT HEALTH-CARE PLAN

**62%** believe the final health-care legislation is likely to raise their health-care costs in the long run

**56%** believe it will give them less freedom to choose their doctors and coverage

**65%** believe it will make everything more complicated

Are you covered through an employer's plan, a private plan you bought yourself or a government program such as Medicare or Medicaid?



Overall, how would you rate the health-care system in the U.S.?



# 33%

PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE WHO ARE WORRIED THEY COULD LOSE THEIR HEALTH INSURANCE IN THE NEXT 12 MONTHS

### Obama at six months

Overall, do you approve or disapprove of his handling of the job?



Do you approve or disapprove of the job President Obama is doing in each of these areas?



# 69%

PERCENTAGE OF THOSE POLLED WHO BELIEVE IT IS IMPORTANT TO PASS A MAJOR HEALTH-CARE-REFORM BILL IN THE NEXT FEW MONTHS

Whom do you trust more to develop new health-care legislation?

**47%** President Obama  
**32%** Republicans in Congress

# 51%

PERCENTAGE OF THOSE SURVEYED WHO BELIEVE THAT THE COUNTRY IS HEADED IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

The poll, conducted for TIME by Abt SRBI, surveyed 1,002 American adults on July 27 and 28. It has a margin of error of ±3 percentage points