

LANNY DAVIS'S RENT-A-WISDOM

Lanny Davis has wasted no time trying to spin MA voters' rejection of Obama's focus on corporations rather than people into an attack on progressives. He starts by ignoring that aspect of the liberal complaint and (as the Administration is doing) blaming all of this on Coakley.

Liberal Democrats might attempt to spin the shocking victory of Republican Scott Brown in Massachusetts by claiming that the loss was a result of a poor campaign by Martha Coakley. Would that it were so.

Then, incredibly, Lanny says something I agree with:

This was a defeat not of the messenger, but of the message—and the sooner progressive Democrats face up to that fact, the better. It's the substance, stupid!

But from there, Lanny makes several mistakes of analysis you'd expect from someone with a history of selling out real Democratic values.

Lanny says backroom deals sunk Coakley; but then says this is the fault of progressives (Ben Nelson? Hello!!!)

Lanny turns on the insurance industry's second-biggest champion after President Lieberman, President Nelson, and disowns his smarmy deals.

Then there were the two "deals" that put congressional Democrats in a worse light than the infamous "Bridge to Nowhere"—as impossible as that might have seemed—as an emblem of the special interest politics Barack Obama ran against. We Democrats had to explain to

Massachusetts voters and other Americans why non-Nebraskans and nonunion members have to pay more taxes, while Nebraskans and union members get to pay less. Those two deals seem to have alienated most people across the political spectrum.

It is true that voters soured significantly on Coakley after Ben Nelson got his deal. Of course, one big reason for that is that, after MA primary voters picked Coakley partly for her very strong stance defending choice, her election would simply have empowered people like Nelson to gut choice. But somehow Lanny ignores both the demands Nelson made on choice as well as Nelson's and Lieberman's insistence that insurance companies not face any competition from Medicare or a public option.

Lanny says a deal that had not yet happened—the excise tax deal—and actually explicitly benefited more than unions was the cause of Coakley's loss because it painted unions as exceptionalists?

And then there's Lanny's attempt to throw the unions—who have been negotiating a deal on the excise tax—in with Ben Nelson. Thing is, that deal, unlike Nelson's deal, hasn't happened yet! Not to mention the fact that the deal proposed between the unions and the Administration would have helped all middle class families by exempting dental and vision coverage, making sure older and sicker workers weren't unfairly punished, and raising the amount at which the excise tax kicked in.

Lanny celebrates getting everyone health insurance—but not care

Then, Lanny makes the mistake that many supporters of the insurance friendly bill make: confusing health insurance with health care.

The Democrats have a simple message on health care that has still not really gotten through: If our bill passes, you

never have to worry about getting, or losing, health insurance for the rest of your life.

Thing is, people from Massachusetts know better, because they've already got precisely the kind of system that ensures everyone has health insurance even if 21% of those paying lots of money to insurance companies can't actually afford to use that insurance. MA voters know better than many that having health insurance doesn't necessarily mean you can get health care.

Lanny mysteriously talks about an Obama plan that didn't include EITHER a public option OR a mandate—yet there was no time when that was true (and polling still says the PO was the only thing that made this palatable)

Finally, Lanny invents a mythical Barack Obama who at one point supported neither a mandate nor a public option.

The purists on the left of the Democratic Party who demanded the “public option” or no bill at all apparently forgot that candidate Obama's health-care proposal did not include a public option; nor did it include a government mandate for everyone to either purchase insurance or pay a significant tax approximating the cost of that insurance—the “pay or play provision” in both the Senate and House bills.

Candidate Obama supported a public option with no mandate. President Obama supported a mandate and paid lip service to a public option. But at no point did “his plan” lack both a public option and a mandate. Though I guess Lanny is distinguishing here between the mandate in Obama's bill (up to 2% of income) and the mandate—like the one in MA's program!—that is tied to the cost of insurance premiums. I'm not

sure why that distinction would be relevant to MA residents though.

And of course, polling still shows that having a mandate is more popular when people can choose not to give their money (20% of which can go to profit and marketing) to private insurance companies.

Now, I don't blame Lanny for staying up all night to try to spin Coakley's loss as a call to move to the center. The more logical lesson to draw from it is that Americans are sick of corporatists like Lanny Davis (he rather amusingly adopted the label "liberal" for himself in this piece, though I suspect WSJ may have just stripped the "Neo-" that came before it). Which is precisely what Lanny's extensive parsing tries to deny.