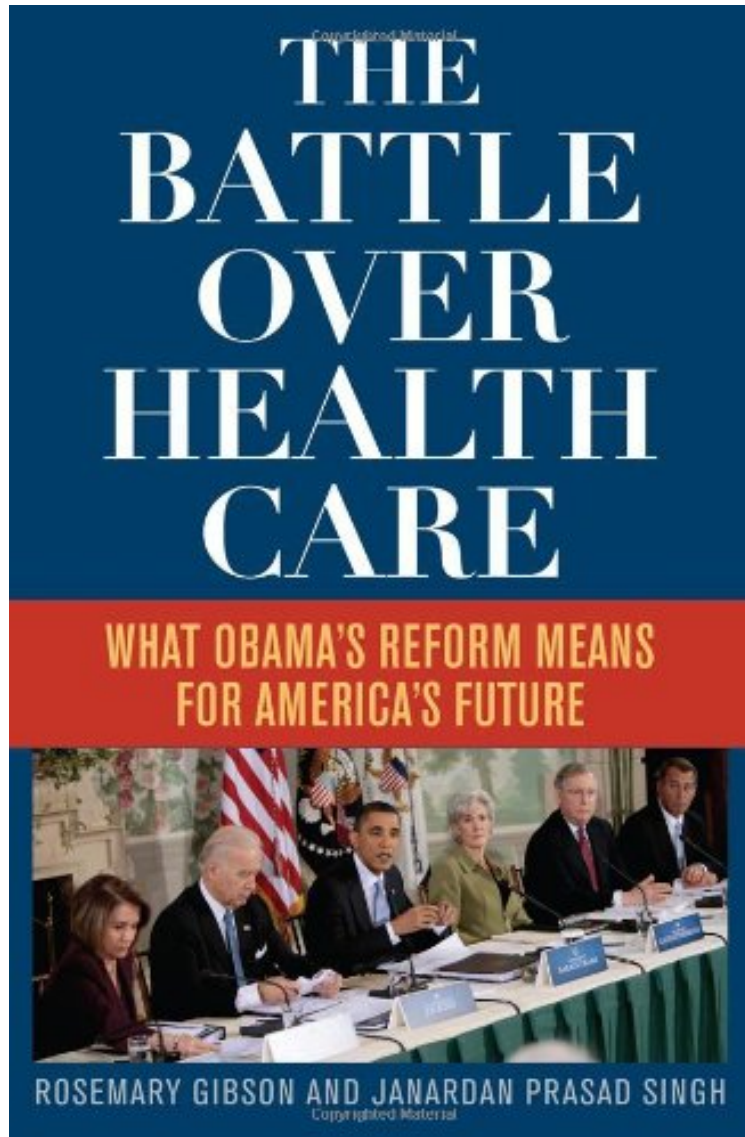


# The Battle Over Health Care: What Obama's Reform Means for America's Future

*Rosemary Gibson, Janardan Prasad Singh*  
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**Rosemary Gibson, Janardan Prasad Singh : The Battle Over Health Care: What Obama's Reform Means for America's Future** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Battle Over Health Care: What Obama's Reform Means for America's Future:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Generalized Journalistic Nostrums and Biased Economics, Lacking

in Depth and Detail. By Paul A. Ballard Given the high pedigree of the co-authors I purchased this work eagerly anticipating a very meaty satisfying read. Sadly, I was very much disappointed. The book is an uneasy combination of the thoughts of two authors coming from very different backgrounds and political vantage points. Dr. Gibson is a medical professional with little business or economics background. Her focus - as with many other medical professionals - is upon detailed technical aspects of medicine rather than broad policy issues. Dr. Prasad is a general economist with very little medical or health economics background. As a Wall Street Journal/American Enterprise institute style economist, his approach to health care aims to reduce entitlement spending first, and address other aspects afterwards. The book therefore alternates between very micro-level specifics on technical medical aspects of health care in America - such as why hospitals keep giving sub-par care to patients - and broad economic generalities, some of them inaccurate and misplaced to explain why the USA cannot afford Obamacare because its international competitiveness is slipping. To compete with China in future, the USA must forego improvements in health care because the additional costs will cause US firms to offshore more US jobs to China and other parts of Asia. Dr. Prasad seems evidently to believe that the US economy has suffered a body blow during the Great Recession, and that fiscal stimulus was the wrong approach to addressing the immediate macro-economic challenges it posed. The rationale for such view is not given. While the book was published in 2012, it is to be assumed it was written earlier. As is well known now, the US economy has recovered much more strongly from the Great Recession precisely because - unlike in Europe - fiscal and monetary stimulus combined with quick actions to recapitalize US banks and consolidate their debts prevented the recession from deepening but helped engineer a good recovery. For a book that talks a lot about the private vested interests involved in health care in the USA, it provides remarkably little in-depth analysis of the micro-economics and industrial organization economics of health insurance and health care. Yet both of these are crucial to understanding how US health care got to where it is today. The authors seem to believe that private insurers are the real villains benefitting from large profits and little competition. But they say little at all about the lack of price competition and the rapid rise of health care treatment costs and prices - driven also by lack of price transparency and growing oligopoly and monopoly forces. The book rightly points out how big private vested interests in the health insurance and health care industries have sought to neutralize or roll back the implementation of the Obamacare reforms. But nothing is said about the effort to bring about competition in the health insurance industry through creation of federal and state-level health insurance exchanges. The book attempts to make the case that the individual mandate coupled with the ending of pre-existing conditions exclusion and parents coverage of children up to age 26 are fundamentally unsound because this will simply enable private insurers to have a bigger market from which to extract high profits. Yet, surely the very purpose of the exchanges is to ensure the opposite? The book grossly underestimates the number of uninsured in the USA today. It says there are 35 million, when in fact there are now 50 million. It then says that no more money needs to be spent to meet the health care needs of the uninsured. All that is required is to eliminate fraud and waste - estimated at \$250 billion, or 10% of total US health care spending. These numbers also do not jibe with the actual per capita cost of health care in the USA of \$8000. This yields a total cost for 50 million uninsured of over \$400 billion a year! Of course, the costs could be much higher than that, since uninsured folks often pay two to three times higher prices for the same treatment compared with those lucky enough to be insured - a fact not mentioned in this book! Oddly, having made a big case for abuse of private market power - by private insurers and drug companies - as a major cause of high costs and prices in US healthcare, the book's recommendations make not a single concrete market-based proposal to address this issue. Instead, the book makes ten almost entirely bureaucratic recommendations all of which only address secondary and smaller aspects of the Obamacare reforms and follow-up measures required. So the book recommends as the most important ten things to be done : (1) keeping the Independent Payments Advisory Board - without explaining how this will tackle the endemic problem of abuse of market power and lack of price transparency by making market work more effectively; (2) diminishing the AMA's role in determining the balance between primary care doctors numbers and specialists - probably a good idea, but is this crucial ?; (3) instead of spending any more money to widen health insurance and health care coverage, just attack fraud and abuse - sounds like the old political chestnut, not clear how this is up to the task, when Medicaid and Medicare rolls are expected to double in ten years ? (4) "privatize the gains, privatize the losses" - don't make the taxpayer responsible for bailing out private manufacturers of defective medical devices. Again, not clear this is a top priority issue?; (5) open up Medicare data to reveal high volume providers - along the Massachusetts model lines. Again, good idea. But will this be enough to bring about market price transparency - doubtful ? (6) create a Harvard School of Regulation - to strengthen healthcare regulation to hold health care providers accountable for safer patient care - Again : is this really a major issue? Will it really turn around the economics of health care? And why more bureaucracy and regulation? (7) create a Health Care Corps of Engineers to advise hospitals on how to become more efficient! This assumes the main efficiency problems of hospitals are clinical and engineering ones, and not managerial, financial and economic ones. Many of us would say it's the other way around! Also, after Hurricane Katrina, it's not clear the CoE is a good model? (8) State governments should follow contracts between insurers and hospitals to check for excessive "clout" driving up prices. This is a good idea. But why only get state governments to do it? Why not require publication of such prices as a way of informing and empowering

consumers? Why not anti-trust proceedings to root out market power abuses ? (9) start a "Consumer Reports" for medical devices - Again not clear why this is such a big deal. And anyway, aren't much broader-based market transparency measures needed? Why not an .com for medical devices complete with Marketplace? And get Walmart involved too? (10) Have the Federal government become a "prudent buyer" of all drugs - negotiating with drug companies, as is done in many other advanced countries today. This implies price controls by the Federal Government - a very odd recommendation coming from the AEI ? And anyway, would it really be politically feasible or effective? What about competition - from imports and by banning exclusivity deals with doctors? In short, this is a very frustrating book that appears to promise much, but really delivers little overall light on the big policy issues in US healthcare reform today. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Excellent discussion of health care financing issues By John A. Leraas The Battle Over Health Care is an clear, well written, insightful discussion of the issues at stake in the health care reform arena. It is well documented and arguments presented are clear and easily understood. If this discussion is frightening that is due to the situation which is entirely out of control and the consequences of inaction which are severe. It is refreshing to find such a discussion of the issues. Even a physician can understand it. Thank you, John A. Leraas, MD 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Timely and hot issue re: Health Care Dangers By B. Clarke The surgeon from Johns Hopkins who wrote this book has taken on critical issues regarding controversial aspects of our national health care situation. He discusses dangerous care, lack of transparency, over treatment, and a new movement for change. I think that is gutsy and commendable, especially from a practicing physician. It is time that the public gets this "inside" look at the issues and hold accountable those in whom we have placed trust.

As the most substantial health care reform in almost half a century, President Obama's health care overhaul was as historic as it was divisive. In its aftermath, the debate continues. Drawing on decades of experience in health care policy, health care delivery reform, and economics, Rosemary Gibson and Janardan Prasad Singh provide a non-partisan analysis of the reform and what it means for America and its future. The authors shine a light on truths that have been hidden behind a raucous debate marred by political correctness on both sides of the aisle. They show how health care reform was enacted only with the consent of health insurance companies, drug firms, device manufacturers, hospitals, and other special interests that comprise the medical-industrial complex, which gained millions of new customers with the stroke of a pen. Health care businesses in a market-oriented system are designed to generate revenue, which runs counter to affordable health care. Gibson and Singh take a broader perspective on health care reform not as a single issue but as part of the economic life of the nation. The national debate unfolded while the banking and financial system teetered on the brink of collapse. The authors trace uncanny similarities between the health care industry and the unfettered banking and financial sector. They argue that a fast-changing global economy will have profound implications for the country's economic security and the jobs and health care benefits that come with it, and they predict that global competition will shape the future of employer-provided insurance more than the health care reform law.

Rosemary Gibson and Janardan Prasad Singh, the authors of *The Battle Over Health Care*, have spent more than 30 years working in the health care policy field, so they are extremely well-qualified to unravel the health care onion, which has many layers and many tearful moments, and to recommend solutions on reform.... [The authors] raise a lot of important issues, and the book is worthy of a read. (The Washington Times) Health care expert Gibson and World Bank economist Singh (coauthors of *Wall of Silence*) present a well-argued view that the heralded Obama health care reforms may be adverse to the public interest, since by plowing even more funding into health care, the reform law cements inefficiency in the system. The reforms increase insurers' market share, giving them access to 16 million new customers beginning in 2014, but proposed subsidies for individual insurance policies simply foster greater demand, enabling continuing cost increases. By 2030, the authors estimate that health care will consume 25 percent of the country's income, and comprehensive insurance will be unaffordable, even with subsidies. In passionate language, they prescribe possible remedies, but many are the usual suspects, for example, tackling fraud in health care spending. Meanwhile, the prognosis that the baby boomers will overwhelm Medicare might induce the despairing reader to take two aspirins. But don't call the doctor in the morning; a conservative estimate is that 225,000 people die every year from preventable harm in the health care system. As one observer says: "They harm you and they bill you for it." (Publishers Weekly) Health-care expert Gibson and World Bank economist Singh (coauthors, *Wall of Silence: The Untold Story of the Medical Mistakes That Kill and Injure Millions of Americans*) have produced a timely, cogent analysis of the high-stakes debate over health-care reform legislation. Veterans of conservative think tank the American Enterprise Institute, the authors parse critical policy concerns in this well-reasoned five-part book. Part 1 addresses the expedient political deals made by the Obama administration and the health-care industry that resulted in a significantly compromised version of the legislation. Part 2 cautions that the current health-care system cannot accommodate the increase in newly insured patients. In Part 3, the authors analogize the collapse of the banking industry and the imminent collapse of the health-care industry, both

fueled by dangerous bubbles. Part 4 ties economic security to health-care security, while Part 5 asserts that, like its finance counterpart, the health-care industry privatizes gains and socializes losses. Finally, the authors advocate "careful pruning of the enormous inefficiency and waste in health care." VERDICT A provocative, informative book directed toward a general audience, but especially policymakers and health-care professionals. (Library Journal) Critics of President Obama's health care reform will find much to love in this book by two alumni of the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative think tank. The duo give depressing accounts of backstage deals that Democrats made with insurers and pharmaceutical companies to get the legislation through Congress. A typical line is "the White House was willing to give lucrative favors to the health care industry in return for support of the president's gamble to reform health care." (Obama signed the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act on March 23, 2010.) They do note a few immediate benefits, such as no lifetime limits on benefits for sick people. But mainly, they point out flaws in health care reform and in the U.S. medical system, such as that Medicare's payments favor expensive specialists over primary care doctors, which leads to spiraling health care costs. The book is full of interesting statistics (e.g., about \$8,000 is spent per person per year on health care). Though biased, this treatise will make even hard-core liberals pause and say, "Goodness!" (Booklist) Any well informed person who is absolutely convinced that neither they nor any member of their family, nor anyone close to them, will ever have need of a doctor, hospital, or prescription drugs during the next one hundred years can ignore this book. The same goes for anyone who has no interest whatsoever in how or whether the American system of self-government works. Otherwise, *The Battle Over Health Care: What Obama's Reform Means for America's Future* should top everyone's reading list. It is a thoroughly researched and well-written discussion of the most serious issues currently facing this country. Rosemary Gibson is a recognized leader in health care reform. She is the author of several books on the subject, including the noted *The Wall of Silence*, also co-authored by Janardan Prasad Singh, an economist at the World Bank who has been a member of an advisory council to several prime ministers of India. The authors say, "We wrote this book for the American people. They are the only special interest we represent." Gibson and Singh go on to demonstrate that their audience is the only group that was not part of the debate over health-care reform resulting in the passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, also known derisively as "Obamacare." *The Battle Over Health Care* is divided into five parts. Initially, the authors describe the process by which the dominant players in the health-care industry wrangled favorable concessions from congress and the White House. The next part explains how the current health-care system is deficient in providing quality, affordable health care to Americans and how it will be overwhelmed by the demands of the newly insured. Section three compares the health-care system to Wall Street, wherein Gibson and Singh indict the pharmaceutical companies, hospitals, doctors, and health insurance companies for being more interested in profits than in delivering better health care to patients. "For all the money spent on health care in the United States, life expectancy is no better than that of Cuba." Gibson and Singh take on conventional wisdom in part four, dealing with the relationship of the national debt to health-care costs. They assert: "Progress to reduce the ominous burden of the federal debt can be made only if health-care spending is reduced." In the final part the case is made for real reform in the health-care system. Gibson and Singh propose ten steps toward that end, including authorizing the federal government to negotiate drug prices and more regulation of the health-care industry patterned after that used for aviation and highway safety. "The solution," they believe, "is to reduce the health care industry's dependency on the blind generosity of the public." The battle over health-care reform will rage on. It likely will be a major issue in the 2012 elections. Every citizen should be informed on these complicated, crucial issues. Gibson and Singh's contribution is a wonderful place to start that education. (Foreword s) Bravo to Gibson and Singh who have managed to discuss complexity and keep it simple enough to remain engaging. Who should read this book -- everyone. Read it to find out how American taxpayers, insurance premium payers, and patients are literally getting mistreated....No one is spared from this clean analysis of the U.S. health care morass and that makes it a fair nonpartisan review of an important national resource. (New York Journal of Books) This book is excellent reading and gives anyone pause who thinks that monopolies will allow industry to improve quality and lower costs for the consumers. (Courierdash;Journal) Gibson and Singh have offered an incisive diagnosis of the problems surrounding health care in America, the urgency of dealing with them, and an outline of steps that could get us on a better footing. (Health Affairs) "The News that Eastern Maine Medical Center plans to sell its three outpatient dialysis clinics to one of the country's largest for-profit dialysis companies raises issue that will affect the health and well being of Mainers" "Health care is personal and all the more reason that Mainers should know the facts" (Bangor Daily News) "It would be well for those truly interested in the health-care debate to read the nonpartisan and highly informative book *The battle Over Health Care: What Obama's Reform Means for America's Future* by Rosemary Gibson and Janadan Singh" "This book will be an eye-opener for anyone who reads it" (The Columbus Dispatch) About the Author Rosemary Gibson is a distinguished leader in U.S. health care. At the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, she designed and led national initiatives to improve health care. She was vice president of the Economic and Social Research Institute and served as senior associate at the American Enterprise Institute. She is principal author of *Wall of Silence* and *The Treatment Trap*. She serves as an

editor for the Archives of Internal Medicine series, Less is More. Janardan Prasad Singh is an economist at the World Bank. He has been a member of the International Advisory Council for several prime ministers of India. He worked on economic policy at the American Enterprise Institute and on foreign policy at the United Nations. He has written extensively on health care, social policy, and economic development. He was a member of the Board of Contributors of the Wall Street Journal. He is co-author of Wall of Silence and The Treatment Trap.