

## **The Spirits of Reform Past:**

How the Ghosts of Clinton Era Public Opinion Haunt Obama Health Reform

Richard Himelfarb

Hofstra University

March 11, 2010

### **Abstract**

Why has the current attempt to pass health care reform proven no more successful than the one mounted by President Clinton in 1993 and 1994? This paper argues that the effort of President Obama and congressional Democrats has been felled by the same defect that undermined the Clinton plan, namely the failure to understand a number of fundamental beliefs held by the American people regarding health care. An examination of public opinion before, during and after the introduction of each plan reveals extraordinary consistency. Described are the similarities between Americans' perceptions of virtually every aspect of health care, from personal health insurance to the proposed reforms themselves during the periods of the Clinton and Obama initiatives. The failure of health reform advocates to understand, much less surmount, these public perceptions provides an important part of the explanation for their failure to enact comprehensive legislation.