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## **Barack Obama and the Revitalization of Public Reason**

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### Abstract

President Barack Obama focused his campaign for health care reform on more than merely winning support; he also aimed to revitalize the very idea of public reason. It is for this reason that in the face of strident opposition from the Right and calls from the Left for him to renounce reasoned discourse that he redoubled his efforts to educate the people. Obama's efforts not only to sell his proposal but also to revitalize the idea of public reason at the heart of Madisonian democracy were not fully successful, but he demonstrated that reasoned argument remains a powerful force in American life.

# BARACK OBAMA AND THE REVITALIZATION OF PUBLIC REASON

ROBERT C. ROWLAND

*President Barack Obama focused his campaign for health care reform on more than merely winning support; he also aimed to revitalize the very idea of public reason. It is for this reason that in the face of strident opposition from the Right and calls from the Left for him to renounce reasoned discourse that he redoubled his efforts to educate the people. Obama's efforts not only to sell his proposal but also to revitalize the idea of public reason at the heart of Madisonian democracy were not fully successful, but he demonstrated that reasoned argument remains a powerful force in American life.*

On Thursday March 25, 2010, Congress passed President Barack Obama's most important domestic priority, a health care reform bill that was "the most sweeping piece of federal legislation since Medicare."<sup>1</sup> Obama, who had been advised by many on the Left and Right to focus on other priorities, had struggled for almost 15 months on health care reform, in the process overcoming a number of political crises, because he believed that problems in the health care system were an underlying cause of many of the nation's other ills and because he had come "to view this debate as a proxy for the deepest, most systemic crises facing the country. It was a test, really: Could the country still solve its most vexing problems? If he abandoned comprehensive reform, he would be conceding that the United States was, on some level, ungovernable."<sup>2</sup> On the night of final passage in the House of Representatives, he said, "This is what change looks like."<sup>3</sup>

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