

# Obama refuses to rule out surtax for health care

July 21 2009, By ERICA WERNER , Associated Press Writer

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(AP) -- President Barack Obama is defending his relentless campaign for a health care bill before Congress's August recess, saying "the default in Washington is inaction and inertia." The Republican Party chairman assailed it as an "excessive push."

The fault lines in the debate emerging as Topic A in the capital remained intact Tuesday as Obama defended the deadline, saying the American people want the overhaul done quickly, and GOP Chairman Michael Steele demanded: "Take your time!"

At the same time, Obama remained noncommittal on a surtax to pay for the overhaul, which some experts have said could cost over \$1 trillion in the next several years to reconstitute and incorporate some 46 million uninsured into the system.

The president noted in an interview on NBC's "Today" show that "the House has put forward a surtax." And he repeated his feeling that wealthier Americans, "such as myself," should pitch in and help reinvent the system to spread coverage to those now without it.

Obama has said that people making over \$250,000 a year should have to pay more, and he defended his insistence on getting a bill from lawmakers before they leave next month on their summer recess. Asked why he felt so strongly about the timeline, he replied, "because if you don't set a deadline in this town, nothing happens."

"And the deadline isn't being set by me," he said. "It's being set by the American people."

Whatever the pressure points in the argument, Steele said it's all happening too fast.

"It took a year and a half for us to create the Medicare system. Now we're going to do the entire health care system in two weeks or six weeks," he said Tuesday on CBS's "The Early Show."

"It is urgent and it is indisputable," Steele said. "The problem that I have with it is the rush that is under way here."

Obama acknowledged in the interview that [lawmakers](#) right now are "not where they need to be." He has invited Democrats on the House Energy and Commerce Committee to a meeting at the White House later Tuesday and he has a primetime news conference scheduled for Wednesday night.

Asked about statements some Republicans have made indicating they think health care will damage his standing, Obama replied, "It's typical. ... Somehow people think this is about me. This is all about politics. ... All I can say is, this is absolutely important to me, but this is not as important to me as it is to the people who don't have health care. I've got [health care](#)."

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