

Meet the 24 most powerful people advising Trump on healthcare as the president vies for a second term

Kimberly Leonard | Aug 27, 2020, 11:11 AM



- **President Donald Trump has released a seven-point agenda on healthcare for his second term, and a four-point list of goals for ending the coronavirus pandemic by 2021.**
- **During his presidency he has leaned on several players to craft the details of healthcare policy, whether it be in Congress, within his administration, or outside of it.**
- **Democrats think they have the edge on healthcare, and are running against Trump's record on handling the coronavirus pandemic — and his attacks on the Affordable Care Act — heading into Election Day.**

President Donald Trump's healthcare agenda for a second term is laid out in just seven bullet points.

It's a contrast to the detailed policy proposals put out by his Democratic rival, Joe Biden. If elected to the White House for another four years, among Trump's promises are to end surprise medical bills, cut prescription drug prices, and lower premiums for health insurance.

Left out of the list is a promise he made in 2016 to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, commonly known as "Obamacare."

Trump hasn't been able to keep that promise, though the ACA looks different than it once did. Trump signed a bill into law that zeroed out a fine for going without insurance, and his administration allowed people to sign up for cheaper plans outside of the ACA's rules.

Still, the threat to the healthcare law isn't gone. The Trump administration is siding with GOP states in a lawsuit that threatens to unravel the healthcare law — a lawsuit that will head before the Supreme Court only one week after Election Day. Democrats, including Biden, frequently raise the president's attacks on the ACA when trying to make their own case to voters.

But perhaps the biggest threat to the president's reelection is the coronavirus pandemic. More than 170,000 Americans have died from COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus, and 5.5 million people have been infected. The latest Kaiser Family Foundation Tracking Poll finds that 61% of voters disapprove of Trump's handling of the pandemic and 35% approve.

In his public remarks, the president has shifted the blame for the outbreak to China, where the virus started. He has pressured agencies to quickly create and authorize treatments and a vaccine. In his agenda document, he says he wants to bring the US back to normal by 2021.

As Trump strives toward that goal, there are people in and outside his administration who are shaping his thinking and actions. It's been widely reported that the president is influenced by whoever he talks to last, but there are also close allies he has allowed to take the lead on certain healthcare policies, including his vice president, Mike Pence.

Influential Trump administration officials, such as Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar, frequently urge the public to pay attention to the president's initiatives outside of the ACA: those to combat the spread of HIV, to reduce opioid overdose, and to help people on dialysis.

During his presidency, Trump has leaned on Republicans in Congress to craft policies on ACA replacements and on prescription drugs, and many members of his administration have close ties to conservative think tanks like the Heritage Foundation and the Galen Institute.

Business Insider has assembled a list of people who've helped to shape the president's policies during his time in office and who are likely to continue having influence if he wins a second term. We did a look back at the policies he has passed during the last few years and also spoke with people close to the White House and the Trump campaign.

The list is in alphabetical order.

Doug Badger

Doug Badger is a trusted healthcare policy source on Capitol Hill.

Doug Badger is a well-respected voice in conservative healthcare policy circles who has written pieces that defend Trump's healthcare agenda and bash Democratic proposals.

He's a trusted source for conservative healthcare policy among Republicans on Capitol Hill. Having sway with members of Congress is key to influencing Trump, who frequently leans on lawmakers to craft the details of his healthcare policy proposals.

Badger works closely at the Galen Institute with Brian Blase, who used to coordinate healthcare policy for Trump's White House. He's also a visiting fellow at the Heritage Foundation.

Previously, Badger worked on healthcare policy in the White House under former President George W. Bush, particularly on health savings accounts and on Medicare's drug program.



Doug Badger previously worked on healthcare policy in the White House under former President George W. Bush. Courtesy Heritage Foundation.

Brian Blase

Brian Blase was a key architect of Trump's healthcare policy agenda and has continued to champion the president's actions.

Brian Blase coordinated Trump's healthcare policy agenda and has continued to be influential since leaving the White House.

While he was in the administration, Blase oversaw the implementation of three executive orders and scrutinized healthcare industry consolidation.

Blase told Business Insider that he was frustrated when outside critics said the administration didn't have a healthcare plan, as he worked on a 120-page report on healthcare reform while at the White House. It made numerous recommendations for the administration and Congress.

"It's not legislative text, but it's a pretty thorough reform agenda," he said.

He pushed for a provision that makes it easier for employers to use health reimbursement arrangements so workers can buy their own health insurance. The provision appeals to conservatives because it allows workers to have more choice about which insurer they want and gets closer to the goal of disentangling health insurance from employment.

Blase also oversaw the details of plans the Trump administration put in place that let people buy insurance outside of Obamacare's rules, including giving people the option to buy short-term health insurance and association health plans.

Since leaving the White House, he has continued to make recommendations about how the Trump administration can trumpet its health agenda and how the president could go further to change the ACA.

Blase is now a senior fellow at the Galen Institute, where he focuses on healthcare policy, and is president of Blase Policy Strategies LLC.



Brian Blase was a healthcare policy analyst with the Senate Republican Policy Committee and before that worked as senior professional staffer for the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. Courtesy Galen Institute

Grace-Marie Turner

Grace-Marie Turner founded an influential conservative health-care policy group.

Grace-Marie Turner founded and leads the Health Policy Consensus Group, an organization that brings together conservative ideas on healthcare policy.

The consensus group comes up with ideas that they share with key decision makers in the White House, and also helps them think through their own policy ideas. Its members were involved in shaping health reimbursement arrangements, association health plans, and short-term plans when Blase worked at the White House.

Turner, who is president of the conservative Galen Institute, said she works to not only provide policy advice but to connect officials with similar thinkers.

The consensus group, which includes Fishpaw from the Heritage Foundation, published the Health Care Choices Proposal as an alternative to the ACA.

Turner told *Business Insider* that the group planned to release another iteration of its proposal in March but then went back to the drawing board when the pandemic hit.

"There was such a huge change to our economy and the health sector," she said. "We had to put the ideas in context of what we learned from the pandemic."

The group is expected to unveil the paper after Labor Day, Turner said, and it will include recommendations to make permanent a few changes the administration made during the pandemic such as boosting the use of telemedicine and letting doctors practice across more states.

Turner said the paper also will stress that people should be allowed to keep the health insurance they want regardless of what jobs they have. The document will emphasize giving states more power and patients more choice, she said.



Grace-Marie Turner frequently testifies before Congress and advises senior government officials, governors, and state legislators on healthcare policy. Courtesy Galen Institute



Jerome Adams

As the nation's top doctor, Dr. Jerome Adams raised awareness about the opioid crisis. *Photo: Mandel Ngan/AFP via Getty Images*



Alex Azar

Alex Azar, Health and Human Services secretary, has shaped the president's drug pricing executive orders. *Photo: Associated Press*



Doug Badger

Doug Badger is a trusted healthcare policy source on Capitol Hill. *Photo: Galen Institute*



Brian Blase

Brian Blase was a key architect of Trump's healthcare policy agenda and has continued to champion the president's actions. *Photo: Galen Institute*



Deborah Birx

Dr. Deborah Birx oversees the coronavirus response. *Photo: Joshua Roberts/Getty Images*



Bill Cassidy

Sen. Bill Cassidy of Louisiana works with the White House on price transparency and surprise medical bills. *Photo: Toni L. Sandys/The Washington Post/AFP via Getty Images*



Tom Cotton

Sen. Tom Cotton of Arkansas pushed the White House to zero out the ACA's individual mandate, leading to the looming Supreme Court lawsuit. *Photo: Tasos Katapodis/Getty Images*



Greg D'Angelo

Greg D'Angelo is associate director for health programs at the Office of Management and Budget. *Photo: Courtesy Office of Management and Budget*



Marjorie Dannenfelser

Marjorie Dannenfelser, president of Susan B. Anthony List, successfully championed rules to limit abortion access. *Photo: Bill Clark/CQ Roll Call*



Anthony Fauci

Dr. Anthony Fauci is the leading voice educating the public about the coronavirus. *Photo: ANDREW CABALLERO-REYNOLDS/AFP via Getty Images*



Marie Fishpaw

Marie Fishpaw helped write a backup plan for Obamacare. *Photo: courtesy of Marie Fishpaw.*



Brett Giroir

Dr. Brett Giroir leads public health initiatives. *Photo: Associated Press*



Scott Gottlieb

Dr. Scott Gottlieb is a trusted adviser in Trump's inner circle. *Photo: Astrid Riecken via Getty Images*



Lindsey Graham

Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina is one of Trump's closest allies in Congress and speaks with him frequently. *Photo: Associated Press*



Joe Grogan

Joe Grogan pushed for pricing reforms on drugs and hospitals. *Photo: AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster*



Theo Merkel

Theo Merkel coordinates Trump's healthcare policy agenda in the White House. *Photo: Graeme Jennings/Washington Examiner*



Rand Paul

Sen. Rand Paul was a sharp critic of Trump when he ran for the presidency, and wouldn't support the Graham-Cassidy Obamacare replacement plan. *Photo: Tom Williams/CQ-Roll Call via Getty Images*



Mike Pence

Vice President Mike Pence has been behind a range of hires and policy picks for Trump. *Photo: Joshua Roberts/Getty Images*



Robert Redfield

Dr. Robert Redfield pushed the White House to work to end HIV transmission in a decade. *Photo:Reuters*



Brooke Rollins

Brooke Rollins oversees Trump's domestic agenda. *Photo:Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images*



Avik Roy

Avik Roy's drug pricing recommendations influenced Azar's plan. *Photo:Avik Roy*



Grace-Marie Turner

Grace-Marie Turner founded an influential conservative healthcare policy group. *Photo:Galen Institute*



Seema Verma

Seema Verma, administrator at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, was instrumental in allowing virtual visits during the pandemic. *Photo:Associated Press*



Russ Vought

Russ Vought has led the Trump administration's deregulatory push. *Photo:Tom Williams/CQ-Roll Call, Inc via Getty Images*