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Obama's \$250,000 Tax Pledge Timeline

"Firm pledge" anything but firm based on White House comments

WASHINGTON, D.C.— President Barack Obama's central campaign promise was a "firm pledge" not to raise "any form" of taxes on families making less than \$250,000 per year. Rather than immediately and unequivocally re-affirming the tax pledge during interviews, this timeline of statements by Obama and White House staff and advisors raises questions understandably troubling to taxpayers:

The Promise -- Sept. 12, 2008: Obama makes a "firm pledge" not to raise "any form" of taxes on those making less than \$250,000 per year:

"I can make a firm pledge. Under my plan, no family making less than \$250,000 a year will see any form of tax increase. Not your income tax, not your payroll tax, not your capital gains taxes, not any of your taxes." (Dover, NH) [[Transcript](#)] [[Video clip](#)]

April 1, 2009: After Obama broke his "firm pledge" when he signed into law a steep hike in the federal excise tax on tobacco, White House spokesman Reid H. Cherlin attempts to claim that the Obama pledge only applies to "income or payroll taxes":

"The president's position throughout the campaign was that he would not raise income or payroll taxes on families making less than \$250,000, and that's a promise he has kept." (Associated Press interview) [[Permalink](#)]

April 15, 2009: During a White House press briefing, when challenged as to how Obama's tax pledge squares with his tax hike on tobacco, White House spokesman Robert Gibbs replies:

"People make a decision to smoke." [[Transcript](#)]

April 15, 2009: Moments later, when asked if Obama's tax pledge applies "to the health care bill", Gibbs replies:

"The statement didn't come with caveats." (White House Briefing) [[Transcript](#)]

June 28, 2009: When challenged on ABC's *This Week with George Stephanopoulos* as to whether Obama's tax pledge applies to healthcare reform, White House Advisor David Axelrod refuses three times to affirm the pledge and replies:

"One of the problems we've had in this town is that people draw lines in the sand and they stop talking to each other. And you don't get anything done." [[Transcript](#)]

June 29, 2009: Questioned about David Axelrod's comments made the day before, White House spokesman Robert Gibbs refuses seven opportunities to affirm Obama's tax pledge, saying only:

"We're going to let the process work its way through. All right?" [[Transcript](#)]

August 2, 2009: Appearing on ABC's *This Week with George Stephanopoulos*, Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner refuses to rule out a pledge-breaking tax hike after being given several opportunities to do so:

"I think what the country needs to do is understand we're going to have to do what it takes, we're going to do what's necessary." [[Transcript](#)]

August 2, 2009: On NBC's *Meet the Press*, National Economic Council Director Larry Summers also refuses to rule out a tax hike:

"It is never a good idea to absolutely rule things out, no matter what." [[Permalink](#)]

August 3, 2009: Questioned about the previous day's comments by Geithner and Summers, White House Spokesman Robert Gibbs reiterates Obama's tax pledge:

"I am reiterating the President's clear commitment in the clearest terms possible, that he's not raising taxes on those who make less than \$250,000 a year." [[Transcript](#)]

Sept. 20, 2009: On ABC's *This Week*, hosted by George Stephanopoulos, Obama claims that the Baucus plan's excise tax on the uninsured would not break his tax pledge, denying that it is in fact a tax, even after Stephanopoulos reads him the dictionary definition:

STEPHANOPOULOS: *I -- I don't think I'm making it up. Merriam Webster's Dictionary: Tax -- "a charge, usually of money, imposed by authority on persons or property for public purposes."*

OBAMA: *George, the fact that you looked up Merriam's Dictionary, the definition of tax increase, indicates to me that you're stretching a little bit right now. Otherwise, you wouldn't have gone to the dictionary to check on the definition. I mean what...*

STEPHANOPOULOS: *Well, no, but...*

OBAMA: *...what you're saying is...*

STEPHANOPOULOS: *I wanted to check for myself. But your critics say it is a tax increase.*

OBAMA: *My critics say everything is a tax increase. My critics say that I'm taking over every sector of the economy. You know that.*

Look, we can have a legitimate debate about whether or not we're going to have an individual mandate or not, but...

STEPHANOPOULOS: *But you reject that it's a tax increase?*

OBAMA: *I absolutely reject that notion.* [[Transcript](#)]

Nov. 1, 2009: On ABC's *This Week*, hosted by George Stephanopoulos, White House Senior Counsel Valerie Jarrett [refuses to unequivocally affirm](#) Obama's tax pledge:

STEPHANOPOULOS: *“So are you saying that the president will not sign this proposal if it does indeed raise taxes on the middle class?”*

VALERIE JARRETT: *“What I'm saying to you, George, is, let's let the process go forward...”*

STEPHANOPOULOS: *“So he will not -- bottom line, he will not violate that commitment, is what you're saying?”*

VALERIE JARRETT: *“What I'm saying is that he is confident that a bill that's going to be passed is going to be consistent with his parameters, yes.”* [[Transcript](#)]

Americans for Tax Reform is a non-partisan coalition of taxpayers and taxpayer groups who oppose all tax increases. For more information or to arrange an interview please contact John Kartch at (202) 785-0266 or by email at jkartch@atr.org.

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