

## LEADING THE NEWS



### Ex-AMA leader: Obama needs healthcare specifics

By Sam Youngman

Posted: 06/14/09 10:56 PM [ET]

As President Obama prepares to take his much maligned health care plan into the lion's den -- the American Medical Association -- at least one doctor is waiting with potentially fatal questions.

Dr. Donald Palmisano, a former AMA president, said Sunday that most of the scuttlebutt surrounding the conference that the president will address Monday in Chicago is full of vagueness and skepticism. Palmisano, who has been in Chicago over the weekend participating in meetings at the conference ahead of the main event, said most of the doctors are looking for specifics, but they are wary of Obama's talk of a public insurance plan.

"Our policy is clear: We're opposed to government involvement in medicine," Palmisano said in an interview with The Hill.

The former AMA president said in a phone interview that Obama has been talking in "generalities" as he has been pushing his health care plan. What the AMA wants to hear on Monday, he said, are some specifics.

"If he says again: 'We want to level the playing field,' everybody's going to say: 'So what does that mean?'" Palmisano said, making it clear that he was speaking for himself and not the organization.

Palmisano, a registered Republican, remembered his time as AMA president through 2003-2004, and he remembers before then when then first lady -- now Secretary of State -- Hillary Clinton addressed his crowd with her health care plan that famously failed in a spectacular burst of flames, that became the guidebook for how not to

try to pass health care reform.

"She didn't use any notes, she didn't use a teleprompter and she was very eloquent," he said.

But while the Clinton plan failed for its obsessive attention to detail, Palmisano said the question now is Obama's plan to give Congress control with only a broad set of outlines.

After fighting for patients' rights and other healthcare reforms since 1976, Palmisano seems skeptical that anyone can step in and make any real difference. He insists, although, that who he fights for is the patient. It's the politicians that he doesn't appear to trust.

"They promise you Utopia, but frequently they give you Distopia," he said.

Palmisano insists that the president will be received "politely," but he warned that the talk so far -- much like it is on Capitol Hill -- is a skeptical tone.



[Close Window](#)