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# Obama: 'I screwed up' in Daschle withdrawal

Insists 'there aren't two sets of rules' for elite and for other Americans

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NBC, msnbc.com and news services updated 2/3/2009 10:21:14 PM ET

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WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama on Tuesday abruptly abandoned his nomination fight for Tom Daschle and a second major appointee who failed to pay all their taxes, telling NBC News: "I screwed up."

"I've got to own up to my mistake. Ultimately, it's important for this administration to send a message that

there aren't two sets of rules — you know, one for prominent people and one for ordinary folks who have to pay their taxes," Obama said on NBC's "Nightly News with Brian Williams."

The admission came little more than 24 hours after Obama had said he was "absolutely" committed to Daschle's confirmation as secretary of health and human services, a job in which he would take the lead in the president's ambitious plans for the nation's health care system.

"I'm frustrated with myself, with our team. ... I'm here on television saying I screwed up," Obama said on NBC. He repeated virtually the same words in interviews with other TV anchors.

Hours earlier, the White House had announced that Daschle had asked to be removed from consideration and that Nancy Killefer had made the same request concerning what was to be her groundbreaking appointment as a chief performance officer to make the entire government run better.

### **Worried about 'a distraction'**

Daschle said in a brief letter to Obama that he refused to "be a distraction" from the new president's drive for health care reform. Obama said neither he nor Daschle excused the former Senate Democratic leader's tax errors but that he accepted his friend's decision "with sadness and regret."

Personal tax problems had been piling up for the new administration. Last week, the Senate confirmed Timothy Geithner as treasury secretary, but only after days of controversy over the fact that the man who would oversee the Internal Revenue Service had only belatedly paid \$34,000 in income taxes.

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Bill Richardson bowed out, too, though his difficulties didn't involve personal taxes. The New Mexico governor, who was Obama's first choice for commerce secretary, withdrew amid a grand jury investigation into a state contract awarded to his political donors.

### [Video: 'Daschle had become a distraction'](#)

Questions about Daschle's failure to fully pay his taxes from 2005 through 2007 had been increasing since they came to light last Friday. Daschle overlooked taxes on income for consulting work and personal use of a car and driver, and also deducted more in charitable contributions than he should have. To resolve it, he paid \$128,203 in back taxes and \$11,964 in interest last month.

Daschle, chosen to lead the administration's push for sweeping health care reform, also was facing questions about potential conflicts of interests related to speaking fees he accepted from health care interests and about the advice he provided to health insurers and hospitals through his work at a law firm.

The car and driver were lent by Leo Hindery, head of a firm called InterMedia Advisors and former chief

executive of the Global Crossing telecom company. Hindery is a longtime friend of Daschle and a veteran Democratic Party donor.

### Tax lien on Killefer

Killefer, an executive with consulting giant McKinsey & Co., had been chosen by Obama to serve in two roles: as the first chief performance officer in a White House and as a deputy director at the Office of Management and Budget.

When Obama announced Killefer to much fanfare in early January, The Associated Press reported that the District of Columbia government had filed a \$946.69 tax lien on her home in 2005 for failure to pay unemployment compensation tax on household help. She resolved the tax error five months after the lien was filed. Since then, administration officials had refused to say whether her tax problems extended beyond that one issue.

[Video: Daschle 'emotional'](#)

By Tuesday, the tax questions had reached critical mass.

"Today was an embarrassment for us," Obama said on NBC. He said he was "angry," "disappointed" and "frustrated with myself" over the Daschle episode.

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# Tom Daschle Withdrawal Urged By NYT, The Nation

The Huffington Post | Rachel Weiner | February 3, 2009 08:25 AM



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Both the *New York Times* and *The Nation* have called for President Obama's Health and Human Services nominee to withdraw from contention over unpaid taxes as well as money earned working for health care companies.

From the *Times* editorial:

When President Obama nominated former Senator Tom Daschle to be his secretary of health and human services, it seemed to be a good choice. Mr. Daschle, as the co-author of a book on health care reform, knew a lot about one of the president's signature issues. As a former Senate majority leader, he also knew a lot about guiding controversial bills through Congress, where he remains liked and respected by former colleagues.

Unfortunately, new facts have come to light -- involving his failure to pay substantial taxes that were owed and his sizable income from health-related companies while he worked in the private sector -- that call into question his suitability for the job. We believe that Mr. Daschle ought to step aside and let the president choose a less-blemished successor.

The *Times* says Daschle's failure to pay taxes is "particularly troubling." But *The Nation* focuses on the [health care company work](#):

This was a campaign about change. Obama spoke eloquently of ending the way Washington does business and curbing the exploitation of public service for private gain. And he followed through with his early executive order attempting to slow the "revolving door" that has allowed so many former government officials to quickly enter the ranks of registered lobbyists. But slowing that revolving door is only the first step in ending the legalized corruption of the town's lobbying culture.

Daschle's tax problems have, so far, attracted the lion's share of scrutiny. And he may well make it through the Senate---though one leading Democratic Senator told me Sunday that he may not vote for his former colleague's confirmation. But Daschle's potential conflicts of interest should persuade Obama to make this a "teachable moment" and find another public servant to tackle the critical task of healthcare reform.

*Nation* editor Katrina Vanden Heuvel suggests Howard Dean to replace Daschle.



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**nana4g** 11:18 PM on 2/03/2009

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I do not remember Senator Daeschle making health care reform or health care in any respect his signature issue while he was serving in Congress, as a Rep then as a Senator. It seems he became interested in it after leaving the Senate and being courted by healthcare corporations, even writing a book. Suddenly, he is an expert.

I was never comfortable with his expertise and his views on healthcare reform, the little that is known. I did know, however, that he is singularly responsible for moving the members of the Senate and the Super Delegates to early endorsement of then candidate Obama. And I understand that this was his major job, 24/7, which now explains why they, ie, the Senators and the Super Delegates, were so stalwart and so entrenched.

This position for Daeschle was probably negotiated long ago, at least 2 years ago. He should have been paying up his taxes and getting his personal house in order while manipulating the electoral process.

Although I am "ok" with the end result, I surely did not like the makings of it. Those responsible have come upon some "hard times" in their personal ambitions, haven't they?

He is a huge Disappointment. After all his work in the campaign, he is the one who ends up bringing the most embarrassment and disappointment to the President's agenda.

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**abby4ever** 04:44 PM on 2/03/2009

409 Fans



I never realized until now that tr0lls are such Pharisees. How high and mighty they are! So shocked about Tom Daschle!

What a joke.

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**goodog** 04:17 PM on 2/03/2009  
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Paging Dr. Howard Dean, you're wanted in emergency.

Dr. Howard Dean, emergency.

Besides signing healthcare reform in Vermont, Governor Dean transformed the DNC, state by state, against the druthers of powerful forces like Hillary and Raum, paving the way for the election of Obama.

The doctor knows how to fix the system from the inside out.

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**goodog** 04:09 PM on 2/03/2009  
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"Daschle, who told her, 'I read the New York Times this morning and I realized that I can't pass health care if I am too much of a distraction ... I called the president this morning.' Mitchell described the call as emotional, and said Daschle was near tears.

This is a serious strike at the throbbing sclerotic heart of the Iron Triangle. Transparency at work.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iron\\_triangle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iron_triangle)

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**myke3000** 01:26 PM on 2/03/2009

65 Fans

Howard Dean.

Has the credentials, has the vetting, needs the job, we need him!  
Done deal. Next.

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER

**ron ray** 01:21 PM on 2/03/2009  
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if Daschle had any integrity, he would not have taken the nomination given his tax cheating.

good to see him go. Now, if Obama can only retroactively can Geithler.

we democrats have to do better.

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HUFFPOST COMMUNITY MODERATOR

**zoozey** 01:04 PM on 2/03/2009  
36 Fans



Wow! Is it true? He just withdrew??? Maybe the O administration really does listen to the people!

Thank you, NATION magazine, if you helped this along.

I like Tom Daschle, but we need someone who HAS PAID THEIR TAXES, in order to be a leader in getting any sort of health care reform!

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**christianmama4change** 01:00 PM on 2/03/2009

46 Fans

I agree - Daschle should step down. As a former Senate Majority leader he knows better than to ignore paying such a huge amount in taxes. Obama is capable of finding another qualified

nominee and maybe Daschle can be an informal healthcare advisor. Enough with the tax drama - I like the no drama Obama better.

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**welliecat** 01:00 PM on 2/03/2009

0 Fans

DASCHLE WITHDRAWS!!!

As an Obama supporter, I thank you Mr Daschle! To show that your still have some integrity speaks volume. You can still support Obama on turning over health care in many ways. Please do that!

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**HUFFPOST COMMUNITY MODERATOR**  
**evekendall** 12:54 PM on 2/03/2009  
390 Fans



I hate to say it, and I hate the word "brand" because it's over-used business jargon, but in this case I think it applies:

By sticking with people like Daschle, Mr. Obama is ruining his "brand" in the eyes of a lot of people, whether it's justified or not. People are holding him to a higher standard exactly BECAUSE of the kind of campaign he ran and the promises he made.

No one is indispensable. Obama could even keep Daschle on as an advisor, if his advice is so important, without making him Secretary of DHHS. I'm afraid now that even if Daschle were confirmed, he's already so damaged in the mind of a lot of people he would have to work with that he's already lost his effectiveness. He looked awful on television yesterday when he was apologizing.

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**iblog** 12:59 PM on 2/03/2009

98 Fans



yeah...

They started using that word "brand " through the neocon media.They use brnd because again it goes back to the stigma of Obama as a product, marketed like Britney and Paris. Manchurian.

We get it.

You're right. It's an overused shtick from a fractured party.

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**bujeeboo** 12:53 PM on 2/03/2009

6 Fans

Daschle just withdrew.

Former Governor Kitzhaber of Oregon was on the short list before Daschle was picked. Can we get him now?

<http://www.wecandobetter.org/>

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**JMorgan** 12:44 PM on 2/03/2009

6 Fans

Obama has been in a bubble for some time.

His health care proposals are not popular and aren't what the American people want. He got plenty of feedback on that during the campaign, if you recall, and promised to consider universal coverage plans as proposed by Elizabeth Edwards and Hillary Clinton. Daschle is not

likely to promote the changes that we need or want.

Between his own and his wife's activities, Tom Daschle has major conflicts of interest. He's a nice enough guy, but he's what happens when you stay in the D.C. echo chamber for any length of time: "Everybody does it" is not an acceptable excuse from a government leader.

If Obama uses his capital on an offensive to get Daschle this post, it raises very serious questions about Obama's own integrity. Just who is he being loyal to? The corporations that Daschle has been bought by?

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**marthlois** 12:50 PM on 2/03/2009

18 Fans

Daschle just dropped out.  
Re: your remarks about Obama's integrity - S&cr\*ew you!!

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**HUFFPOST SUPER USER**  
**Solja** 12:53 PM on 2/03/2009  
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Oh please. Obama won both the primaries and the election, which should tell you that people DID like his healthcare proposals (or they would have gone over to Clinton).

Also, Daschle just withdrew his name. Obama should appoint him as a special assistant and he won't have to go through this B.S. to get him confirmed. He can work on the healthcare stuff from the White House, without having to be confirmed by all of the hypocrits in Washington.

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**Amerigucci** 01:26 PM on 2/03/2009

19 Fans

I don't agree with you at all. Just about everybody I know who voted for him did so because of him personally and not for love of his healthcare reform. He told people everywhere that if they wanted change, they could and would have to make him do it because powerful interests would be pushing him not to.

Everyone who knows and/or works in the medical industry says that everyone has to be covered in order to get the costs down. Unless everyone is covered, it's going to be another insurance industry scheme where they're really in the business of denying claims.

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**iblog** 12:55 PM on 2/03/2009

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Who implied "Everybody does it"?

Daschle explained yesterday.

Obama got elected by the American people. You must have forgot.

McCain promised you war for 100 years.

Funny how you Republican T.r0//s have been hanging out on this site big time in the last few days pretending to be Democrats or Independents.

I betcha everybody is confused on the conservative sites.

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**HUFFPOST COMMUNITY MODERATOR**  
**zoozey** 12:43 PM on 2/03/2009  
36 Fans



I agree with the NATION and NYT.

This will hurt our chances of ever being able to convince people to sign on to Univ. Healthcare.

Rush, Coulter, Hannity and their ilk are salivating over this.

Please do the right thing, Sen. Daschle: please step down.

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**iblog** 12:46 PM on 2/03/2009

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Who wrote the articles at the Nation and the NYT?

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**BethA** 12:55 PM on 2/03/2009

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He just did. I could have cared less about his tax issue, it was his connections to insurance industries that I disagreed with. Insurance companies add zero value to Health Care. Time to get rid of them and their negative impact on the health care of the American people.

Edwards and Clinton had the right idea. Let's move on to that.

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**HUFFPOST SUPER USER**

**Solja** 12:57 PM on 2/03/2009

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STOP FEEDING INTO THE MEDIA-CREATED HYPE. You are taking the wrong side, against your own interests.

All of this hype against Daschle is coming from the right so that we do NOT have universal healthcare!

Notice the tactics over the past couple of weeks: DIVIDE & CONQUER

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**Amerigucci** 01:35 PM on 2/03/2009

19 Fans

No, it isn't coming from the right. These are mostly Dem voters speaking. We/they bought the campaign hype from Obama that he was different and he was going to bring change to how politics and government worked. This ain't different!

Obama's healthcare proposal isn't universal.

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/04/02/elizabeth-edwards-favors\\_n\\_94654.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/04/02/elizabeth-edwards-favors_n_94654.html)

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**Amerigucci** 01:37 PM on 2/03/2009

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Obama's healthcare plan isn't universal.

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**iblog** 12:41 PM on 2/03/2009



98 Fans

I don't understand why people have this problem with Daschle speaking at healthcare providers about reform.

Isn't that what the Secretary of Health and Human Services be required to do? With the Times and the Nations very very conservative view, they should release the itinerary of the conferences and the transcripts of the speeches/lectures by Daschle. Then we could see content instead of relying on their personal observation as though it is investigative reporting. We already know what they're protesting.

Isn't the Insurance companies the ones that cause the malfunction of care?

People say he "lobbied" the health care industry. Like it was the Pharmaceuticals or the Insurance industry.

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**DaVinci42** 12:40 PM on 2/03/2009

6 Fans

Lets realistically look at what the situation is... He used a car & driver from an associate, forgetting that he was responsible for taxes on them. Note he's only responsible for taxes on how much he used the car. Thus he is overpaying by a HUGE amount since he's paying taxes as if he used the driver 24/7/365. And lets not forget that what most Americans resent is people who CHEAT on their taxes, NOT necessarily people who make MISTAKES on their taxes. All the surveys ask about cheating, so it isn't an accurate representation of how people feel about these particular cases.

Most people don't trust those public officials with tax problems because they assume that the person was cheating on their taxes, & thus has poor character. But these nominees had unintentional tax problems, therefor the previous premise is false, thus destroying the case as to why this is important.

These are silly problems that have been made up to look serious by the opposition & the mainstream media (because its good news). It's an unnecessary distraction pure & simple. The left should be stating the fact that unless we find evidence that these people did this on purpose, we should assume they are innocent (unless proven guilty).

Moral outrage is only good if there is something which you should actually be outraged about. Bush showed us what moral outrage truly is, we should know better.

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**HUFFPOST COMMUNITY MODERATOR**

**zoozey** 12:50 PM on 2/03/2009

36 Fans



Yes, this is probably so. However, most Americans (and esp. neocons) are not willing to listen to an "explanation." They will be listening to soundbites from their heroes like Limbaugh.

Most people will only see it as: Daschle will be promoting a univ. healthcare (i.e. paid by taxes) and he didn't pay his. Period. That is how the other side will portray it.

We are talking about folks who only see things in black and white.

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**drock973** 12:54 PM on 2/03/2009

6 Fans

He also understated his income and overstated his charitable donations.

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**ljinck** 01:45 PM on 2/03/2009

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Naw, not silly.

Say a friend takes you to the grocery store every week. Wouldn't you feel you owe that friend "consideration," at the very least?

Now say the friend sends a cab for you, week after week. Wouldn't it occur to you to ask your tax preparer a question? I get a multi-page questionnaire every year that includes the gift question.

I'm responsible; Tom should be responsible.

Measuring oneself against Bush is no standard at all.

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# Tom Daschle Withdraws as Obama's Health Secretary Nominee

Obama Accepts Daschle's Withdrawal After Daschle Admitted He Failed to Pay Taxes

By **RUSSELL GOLDMAN**

Feb. 3, 2009



522 comments

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In a [stunning setback](#) for President Obama, [Tom Daschle abruptly withdrew his nomination](#) to become secretary of Health and Human Services today, following an admission that he failed to pay about \$140,000 in back taxes.



In this Dec. 11, 2008 file photo, President-elect Barack Obama, right, stands with Health and Human... (Charles Dharapak/AP Photo)

In a joint [Obama-Daschle statement](#), Obama accepted Daschle's withdrawal "with sadness and regret."

"Tom made a mistake, which he has openly acknowledged. He has not excused it, nor do I," Obama said.

Daschle, a former Senate majority leader from South Dakota, who had been one of Obama's closest advisers throughout his presidential campaign, said his tax problems meant he had lost the faith of the American people and was therefore unable to serve.

"This work will require a leader who can operate with the full faith of Congress and the American people, and without distraction," Daschle said in a statement released by the White House.

"Right now, I am not that leader, and [I] will not be a distraction," he said.

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In addition to being nominated to be HHS secretary, Daschle was also slated to lead Obama's healthcare initiative as health czar, a post from which he also withdrew.

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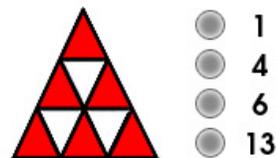
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Daschle's retreat raises questions about whether Obama can keep his promise to make more affordable healthcare one of the cornerstone of his agenda in his first 100 days in office.



Dems Maintain Support for Daschle

Daschle's decision to quit the nominating process was surprising because Democratic senators had rallied around him Monday and Obama said he "absolutely" stood by Daschle.

Obama's backing didn't stop criticism of Daschle's fitness to join the White House cabinet. Sen. Jim DeMint, R-S.C., said Obama was "losing credibility" by continuing to support Daschle. "Part of leadership is recognizing when there has been a mistake made and responding quickly," DeMint said.

Daschle's withdrawal came just hours after Nancy Killefer, Obama's nominee to be chief performance officer, withdrew her nomination following the

revelation that she had a \$946.69 lien on her property in 2005 for failure to pay taxes.

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I agree with the Mitymo. Its just another example of entitlement shared by the weathy private sector and government officials, who are supposedly representing change and the average citizen. Why did he not have an accountant go over his taxes to avoid even the appearance of inpropriety. These people torpedo their careers for a few dollars and in this case, have deeply hurt President Obama just when he needs the most support to past the stimulus package. I am so angry and I think he and the others should apologize to Pres and to the American people. For once the Democrats had the upper hand and the confidence of a majority of Americans...so cavalierly squandered for a few bucks. People are losing everything are hounded by the IRS. Perhaps Dashcle needs to find out what regular people have to endure and cannot get away with. Shame on him.

*exploregreen 2/5/09*

Maybe the answer is simple -- stop picking "prominent" people. 300 million people in the country, many brilliant minds out there I'm sure -- why did Obama have to pick 6 "prominent" people with questionably ehtical issues -- three of whom were pushed through without a word from Obama?

*smhcecil 2/4/09*

It's just too bad that the Crook Geithner got in there. He is a Tax Cheat now running the Treasury. He should be out too. Lobbyists, Crooks and Thieves, that is what you are getting from Obama!!How he he say OK Geithner is a Crook, but he is the Only Man who can do this job. !!Barack raised the bar, but they are all going under it!!!

*patriotclady11 2/4/09*

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