



November 30, 2009 - Topic: Health Care Reform

## Senate Set To Open Debate on Health Care Overhaul Legislation

Today, the Senate will begin debate on its health reform bill, with opening statements from Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) and Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) at 2 p.m., the *Wall Street Journal* reports (Bendavid, *Wall Street Journal*, 11/29).

According to *Politico*, the initial debate is expected to begin at 3 p.m. with a member from each party introducing one amendment to the bill (Budoff Brown, *Politico*, 11/29). The debate is set to start "in earnest" on Tuesday as Democrats and Republicans begin offering alternating amendments, the *Journal* reports (*Wall Street Journal*, 11/29).

Although all 60 members of the Democratic caucus voted for the procedural motion to begin the debate, *CQ Weekly* reports that it does not appear that those 60 votes will be there to end the debate for the test and final votes on the bill. As a result, it will be up to Reid and President Obama to devise a way "to break the gridlock" (Wayne/Armstrong, *CQ Weekly*, 11/30).

Some Democrats have indicated that they will withhold their support for the final bill if it includes a government-run health insurance plan, while others have said that they will refrain from supporting the bill if the abortion coverage language is not strengthened.

The *AP/Chicago Tribune* reports that although "no compromise seems possible" on the abortion issue, there is the possibility for a deal on the public plan (Alonso-Zaldivar, *AP/Chicago Tribune*, 11/30).

### Reid's Private Game Plan

A large portion of Reid's work on the legislation will come in the privacy of his office, as he attempts to develop a compromise on the public option that would garner the 60 votes necessary for reform passage, *Politico* reports.

During the private meetings, Reid will seek to reach a compromise with at least four moderate members of his caucus -- Sens. Mary Landrieu (D-La.), Joseph Lieberman (I-Conn.), Blanche Lincoln (Ark.) and Ben Nelson (Neb.).

Lincoln and Lieberman are fully opposed to the public plan while Nelson has indicated that he is open to a public plan with an "opt-in" clause.

Landrieu has shown a preference for a "trigger" that would enact a public plan in states where insurers fail to provide adequate and affordable coverage.

In addition, Reid is expected to reach out to Sen. Olympia Snowe (R-Maine), a longtime advocate for the trigger who could be encouraged to vote with the Democrats if a deal with the four moderate Democrats is reached.

Meanwhile, a new alternative to the public plan that is under development could attract the support of moderates, according to *Politico* (*Politico*, 11/29).

Earlier this month, Reid said that Landrieu had been working with Sens. Tom Carper (D-Del.) and Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) to devise the alternative plan and noted that he is open to considering it (*California*

*Healthline*, 11/23).

### **Reid's Public Game Plan**

Reid also has several other "tactical objectives" for the debate in the Senate, *Politico* reports.

Reid is seeking to give Republicans adequate time to offer their concerns and revisions to the bill, while also making sure that they do not slow down the progress on the measure.

Republicans reportedly have devised several strategies to delay further votes on the bill, such as introducing large and numerous amendments and demanding that they be read word for word.

Reid also will attempt to ensure that certain contentious amendments are not passed by introducing more acceptable alternatives, and discouraging vulnerable members from casting votes that could threaten their seats in future elections, according to *Politico* (*Politico*, 11/29).

### **Cost Could Top Debate Issues**

The cost of reform is likely to emerge as a central topic of debate this week, but the concerns are "unlikely to sink the legislation," *Reuters* reports (Smith, *Reuters*, 11/26). The Congressional Budget Office found that the \$848 billion Senate bill will be fully funded.

However, CBO also found that the legislation would reduce the deficit by less than 2% over the next 10 years, which does not support Democrats' claim that it will dramatically decrease the federal deficit (Montgomery, *Washington Post*, 11/30).

### **Timeline Remains Unclear**

According to the *Journal*, Reid's office has warned senators to be prepared to work late and on weekends through the month of December. Democrats hope to complete work on the bill and pass the measure by Christmas, but hearing dozens of amendments from both parties could delay that goal, the *Journal* reports.

However, Reid at some point would be expected to call for a vote on cloture -- to end further debate on the bill -- that also could determine if the bill will proceed out of the chamber.

If the bill passes, Senate and House leaders then would convene a conference committee to begin merging the measure with the House bill (**HR 3962**), which they hope to deliver to Obama for his signature before his State of the Union speech in late January (*Wall Street Journal*, 11/29).

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