



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on December 4, 2009

Healthcare Amendments Voted on by Senate

Ending a week of rancorous debate, hollow threats, and showdowns that seemed all but blocked and scripted, the Senate voted Thursday on the first four of nearly a score of amendments to the healthcare bill. Partisan shadow boxing over topics as polarizing as abortion and Medicare culminated in a series of roll calls that had few surprises, and more than anything testified to the antipodean antipathy permeating both houses of Congress.



Just before noon on Thursday, the first of four amendments came up for a vote in the Senate Chamber. On a nearly party line vote of 61 to 39 (Republican Olympia Snowe of Maine joined Democrats in voting “yea”) the Senate approved an amendment proposed by Barbara Mikulski (D-Md.) that would eliminate co-pays and deductibles for mammograms, pap smears, and other preventative diagnostic tests for women. The “free” and unfettered access to such procedures would be available to all women who either purchase a policy from the government-funded exchange or receive federal subsidies for their “private” insurance coverage. After the result was announced, Mikulski exulted in her victory, “This amendment makes sure that the insurance companies must cover the basic preventative care that women need at no cost,” she told reporters.

Such sentiments are confusing in light of promises made by congressional promoters of healthcare legislation that the government would never insinuate itself into the dispensing of care or in the determination of who should receive or not receive treatment. Also, when Mikulski says that these tests will be provided “at no cost” is she forgetting the lengthy roster of new taxes being considered to fund this fiscal fiasco? It’s a guarantee that hard-working middle-class Americans won’t forget who’s picking up the check when they look at their first paystub after this bill becomes law.

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Next up on the Senate schedule was Senate Amendment 2836, a proposal sponsored by Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) that would have required insurance companies to seek advice and consent from doctors or



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other healthcare providers without interference from in-house bean counters or federal healthcare bureaucrats. Murkowski's offering failed, with the vote again cleaving nearly cleanly along party lines, with only frequent fly-in-the-Democratic-ointment Ben Nelson (D-Neb.) crossing the aisle to vote with Republicans. Even Murkowski held out little hope for passage of her amendment as it contained the fatal flaw of explicitly excepting abortion from the list of authorized "preventive services."

Of all the thorny issues that promise to snag and tear the fragile healthcare fabric, abortion is indisputably the thorniest. Much to the chagrin of Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.), the point of this big briar is being sharpened by one of his own, the aforementioned foil, Ben Nelson of Nebraska. Nelson and his staff are working feverishly to finalize the text of an amendment he plans to offer mirroring the anti-abortion Stupak Amendment to the House version. The Stupak Amendment is the pro-life provision that guaranteed no health insurance policy even partially funded by federal dollars would authorize abortions. In very definite terms, Senator Nelson told reporters, "If it [the final Senate healthcare bill] doesn't have Stupak language on abortion in it, I won't vote to move it off the floor. That's not negotiable. No wiggle room." Despite his profession, pro-life advocates hope that the Senator will be true to his word and fight fearlessly to keep pro-choice legislation from becoming the law of the land.

While the Senate awaits delivery of the Nelson Amendment, the roll called rolled on Thursday, and about three hours after the day's voting began, the Senate unanimously approved a resolution authored by Michael Bennett (D-Colo.) that, while not altering the larger legislation, made clear that all of the money saved by alterations to Medicare would be funneled right back into the program and "would extend the solvency of the Medicare trust funds, reduce Medicare premiums and other cost-sharing for beneficiaries, and improve or expand guaranteed Medicare benefits and protect access to Medicare providers."

Proving the old saw that the last mile is the hardest mile, the final vote was the most divisive. Self-styled "straight talker" John McCain (R-Ariz.) introduced a motion to send the whole package back to the Finance Committee for the reconsideration of over \$400 billion in cuts to the Medicare program mandated by the current version of the bill. McCain, showing himself to be more mannequin than maverick, argued that the cuts made by the Democratic measure would deprive seniors of crucial care and services. Democrats, of course, rejected this assertion and argued that the money carved out of Medicare would not affect the scope or quality of coverage, rather it would come from eliminating wasteful spending.

When the votes were cast, Democratic senators Webb and Nelson crossed party lines and voted in favor of the McCain motion. If any of these elected representatives of the people were sincere in their affirmation to uphold the Constitution, then they would vote to dismantle all unauthorized federal departments, entitlements, and social programs, instead of spending hours of pointless and pantomime quibbling over how to ameliorate the damage done by reductions to the budgets that keep these unconstitutional schemes solvent.



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