



Obama Claims “Historic Step” on Health Reform

The House Energy and Commerce Committee voted 31-28 on August 31 to approve its version of healthcare reform. “This historic step moves us closer to health insurance reform than we have ever been before,” President Obama claimed.

The Energy and Commerce bill will now move on for reconciliation with bills from the Ways and Means and Education and Labor committees, [AP noted](#) on July 1. That same day, the president made a statement pushing for reform: “We must build upon the historic consensus that has been forged and do the hard work necessary to seize this unprecedented opportunity for the future of our economy and the health of our families.”



All the Republicans and five Democrats on the Energy and Commerce committee voted against the bill. Liberal Democrats only voted for the measure after last-minute changes were made, such as limiting how much insurance providers can raise premiums and allowing the federal government to negotiate with drug companies for lower prices under Medicare. Energy and Commerce Chairman Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) commented after the vote: “We passed a bill out that shows that we can bring together conservative, moderate and progressive Democrats.”

Yet it was difficult for the Energy and Commerce committee members to reach a compromise. Democrats on the committee originally wanted to establish a public insurance plan that would pay healthcare providers at Medicare rates, but fiscally conservative “Blue Dog” Democrats wouldn’t agree unless rates were negotiated with providers like private companies do. Other notable features of the bill include provisions that insurance companies would not be able to refuse coverage based on preexisting conditions, that the federal government would provide subsidies for lower-income families, and that a national exchange would be set up where consumers could shop for health insurance.

AP commented that “combining the measures produced by the three House committees could be tricky since compromises agreed to in the Energy and Commerce Committee produced a bill less reflective of liberal priorities than the legislation passed by the Ways and Means and Education and Labor committees.” A full House vote is expected in September after a month-long recess.

Though President Obama claims that we are “closer to health insurance reform than we have ever been before,” there is still a fight ahead. Republicans were quick to blast the Democrats’ proposals as a “dangerous and costly experiment” that is bound to increase the federal deficit and overburden state budgets. At a time when the federal government should be getting smaller and doing less so that it can bring down the deficit, it is instead doing and spending more. Americans must let their representative and senators know how they feel about this before healthcare reform proposals are brought to a vote in September.



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