



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on November 11, 2009

Reid: Obama Will Have Healthcare Bill by Christmas

With a new bag of political capital burning a hole in his pocket, President Obama pressed his nose against the window and wondered if that most wondrous of all gifts, Senate passage of healthcare legislation, could really be his by Christmas.

Senator Harry Reid (D-Nev.) promised President Obama on Tuesday that he will be happy to play Santa Claus and put that treasure under his tree just in time for the holiday. Reid plans to bring the Senate version of a comprehensive health care bill to the floor for debate by next week and have it signed, sealed, tied with a bow, and delivered to the President before the lights are taken down off the White House.



At a rare midnight show on Saturday, the House of Representatives passed its version of a new government-backed healthcare scheme giving President Obama hope for an early Christmas. Senator Reid took the House bill (HR 3962) and put it on the Senate calendar, thus putting on the debate roster.

When it does come up, it will be the text of the House bill that is debated, as the Senate has not finalized its own version as of Monday. Reid hopes that the costs can be kept at a respectable \$900 billion as the White House originally proposed. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) is tasked with doing the math and making sure there are few enough commas in the final figure to satisfy Reid and his fellow Senators.

To make sure that the Santas in the Senate know just how much he wants this particular present this year, President Obama sent a special messenger to Capitol Hill — Bill Clinton. The former President attended a luncheon with Democratic Senators on Tuesday, reminding them of the one thing on President Obama's wish list and how they were the only hope of Christmas being truly merry. In fact, unless they got busy right away dotting the "i"s and crossing the "t"s, then there might not be anything under the tree for President Obama this year. "It's not important to be perfect here. It's important to act, to move, to start the ball rolling, to claim the evident advantages that all these plans agree with, and whatever they can get the votes for I'm going to support," Clinton told reporters after the lunch. It's not an easy thing to tell someone to hurry up and read a bill that runs nearly 2,000 pages and then to digest it, propose alterations, and then write your own version and line up supporters and get it up for a vote and get it passed — all by New Year's.

Despite Senator Reid's promises, the President's hard press, and the atmosphere of urgency being stirred up by the bill's prominent proponents, aides on the Hill and other of Santa's little helpers doubt that there will be anything ready for even debate, much less a vote, by Christmas. In order for the bill to wend its way through the labyrinth procedural obstacles that opponents will no doubt throw in the path to passage, in order to be on the President's desk by Christmas the legislation would have to be brought to the floor by Thanksgiving. No way, say aides.



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The first step along the path for a bill to become a law entails putting together a proposal that 60 Senators will agree to — the number of Senators needed to overcome a filibuster. Sixty Senators would include several who have vowed not to support the bill if offered in its present iteration. There are a couple of huge impediments to implementation, namely the inclusion of the so-called “public option” and the exclusion of federal funding for abortion within that option. There are lawmakers who have explicitly declared that they will not vote for any bill that doesn’t address those two issues in a new way.

For his part, Senator Reid is confident that he can find enough little goodies to stuff in his concerned colleagues’ stockings that will convince them that passing a healthcare bill by Christmas is the right thing to do, even if there are a few clauses and conjunctions that they find to be humbug. The moderates will have to be persuaded not to let their personal qualms with the bill, no matter how seemingly insuperable, turn them into grinch.

Fortunately for President Obama, he has a man in the Senate just as determined and anxious as he is to put a bright red bow on this historic medical care coverage scheme and place it under the tree of millions of Americans by Christmas morning. And besides, Reid has been at this game a long time, and when there is work to be done, especially hard, dirty work, he knows just how juicy to make the carrots and just how long to cut the sticks to make the donkeys go exactly where he wants them to.



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