



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on November 22, 2009

Senate Votes to Move Forward on Healthcare Reform

In front of a standing-room-only spectator gallery, the Senate voted 60-39 Saturday night to invoke cloture and limit floor debate on the “Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2009,” the Senate’s companion measure to similar healthcare reform legislation passed earlier in the month by the House of Representatives. Invoking cloture requires a three-fifths majority (60 votes) of the full Senate. Though not a vote on the legislation itself, the procedural vote is significant since it prevents opponents from trying to filibuster the bill to death.



The outcome of the vote was anti-climactic, however, after the announcements made earlier in the day by Senators Blanche Lincoln (D-Ark.) and Mary Landrieu (D-La.) that despite certain misgivings and disagreements with particular provisions, they would vote in favor of moving the bill forward to floor consideration. It isn’t surprising that Landrieu joined all of her fellow Democrats in supporting the motion to invoke cloture and begin deliberations on the bill, since when the Senate’s version of the bill was revealed earlier in the week, she discovered that she had won the lottery in the form of [\\$100 million worth of tax breaks for her home state](#). It was a concession that many on Capitol Hill cleverly called the “Louisiana Purchase.”

As for Senator Lincoln, she faces a difficult re-election campaign in Arkansas, and in the days leading up to Saturday night’s vote she was the target of a multi-million dollar media blitz by advocacy groups opposed to the bill and urging Arkansans to contact Lincoln and encourage her to oppose the motion before the Senate. While Lincoln maintains that she still opposes the inclusion of a “public option” in a final healthcare package and that she will not vote for any bill that includes such a provision, she was willing to allow the matter to be sent to the floor for deliberation and amendment. “Although I don’t agree with everything in this bill, I believe it is more important that we begin debate on how to improve the health care system for all Americans,” Lincoln explained.

Joining Lincoln and Landrieu were two other senators whose leanings were in question earlier in the week. When the roll was called, however, Senators Ben Nelson (D-Neb.) and Joseph Lieberman (I-Conn.) aligned themselves with the greater Democratic caucus culminating in a unanimous Democratic vote. On the Republican side, the vote was 39 opposed, with one senator, George Voinovich (R-Ohio), being the only senator not to cast a vote.

The Republican’s unified opposition was as predictable as the Democratic unanimity. Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) sat throughout the debate with two two-foot stacks of papers on his desk — two copies of the complete text of the bill intended to demonstrate the size of the bill to the CSPAN cameras covering the proceedings. McConnell countered Democratic assertions that Saturday night’s vote was not a referendum on the final bill, but merely a procedural measure to allow members to add to or subtract from the bill and make it in the process something broadly acceptable. “If we don’t stop this bill tonight,” he said as the vote drew nigh, “the only debate we’ll be having is about higher



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premiums not savings for the American people, higher taxes instead of lower costs, and cuts to Medicare rather than improving seniors' care." His final martial comments summed up his feelings on the matter: "The battle has just begun."

As the smoke cleared on this night, however, Democrats had won the day and their leader in the Oval Office was well pleased by his troops' performance. Passage of this motion "brings us one step closer to ending insurance company abuses, reining in spiraling health care costs, providing stability and security to those with health insurance, and extending quality health coverage to those who lack it," Obama said.

Broadly speaking, the legislation as presently written, would require every American to have health insurance, whether it be purchased from employers or from a government-funded plan, the infamous "public option." Furthermore, it would increase payroll taxes on Medicaid, as well as impose an excise tax on higher-end policies. Additional taxes would be placed on insurance companies, drug manufacturers, makers of medical devices, and elective cosmetic surgery.

Although the bill is touted by supporters as offering greater and more meaningful healthcare "choices" to all Americans, the language of the proposal indicates otherwise. For example, in the 2,074 pages, the word "require" occurs more than 1,000 times; the word "shall" is used more than 3,500 times; and the word tax appears over 500 times. And, as if 2,074 pages aren't enough to flesh out the particulars of the plan, the bill itself refers over 150 times to studies that must be conducted during the duration of the scheme's existence.

Advocates of the act are quick to proclaim that despite the nearly \$1 trillion price tag, the healthcare program established by the legislation actually would lower the federal budget deficit over 10 years. It isn't difficult to lower the deficit, however, when spending is off-set by at least 18 new taxes, which is exactly what this bill would do.

As Thanksgiving approaches, various supermarkets are reducing prices on turkey so that Americans struggling with unemployment, underemployment, foreclosure, and inflation can afford at least a simple holiday dinner. With Saturday night's vote clearing the way for debate to begin on the Senate's plan to nationalize a substantial portion of the healthcare industry, our own Congress is ready to serve up one hefty turkey of a bill (the printed version of the bill actually weighs over 20 pounds!) and force feed it to their countrymen, bones and all. If the legislation is enacted, the additional burden of big government will make turkey dinners even less affordable for everyday Americans, despite what supermarkets do to try to hold down costs.

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