



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on November 19, 2009

The Senate's Healthcare Reform Bill Appears

Senator Harry Reid (D-Nev.) announced Wednesday night that he and his upper chamber cohorts are ready to bring their own version of comprehensive healthcare reform legislation to the Senate floor for consideration.

At the pinnacle of paradox, the Senate Majority Leader informed party members and later members of the press corps that the bill he's offering will increase medical care coverage to 31 million Americans currently uninsured at a cost of \$849 billion over 10 years, while simultaneously decreasing the overall federal budget.



How, the economically eviscerated middle class may ask, can one spend nearly \$900 billion and still come out in the black? Simple, you siphon funds from the hardest working sector of the economy via higher payroll taxes and taxes on the insurance premiums they presently pay for their families' coverage. Now you see it, now you don't. Problem solved.

Despite the fanfare that greeted its debut, the measure as currently drafted is going to have a hard row to hoe. Senate Republicans have stood firm against backing any proposal that includes a government-funded insurance package, the so-called "public option." Notwithstanding the partisan opposition aligned against them, however, Reid and other key Democrats are confident that when the buzzer sounds they will narrowly squeeze past all the barriers and score just enough votes to deliver the legislation as promised to President Obama in time for Christmas.

The first reliable bellwether of the plan's ultimate success or failure will come later this week (probably Saturday) as the first of many procedural hurdles will confront the bill and must be cleared before it can be brought to the floor for debate.

Incredibly, the Senate bill outstrips the 1,900-page House version by over 100 pages, weighing in at a briefcase-busting 2,074 pages. The bill's official title, "The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2009," is coated with the now-familiar patina of "We're looking out for you and yours, Average Joe." Proudly, Senator Reid takes credit for the name of the bill, as well as the overall structure and content. He does admit modestly, however, that most of the work was simply cutting and pasting parts of two other similar proposals passed previously by various Senate committees.

For his part, President Barack Obama is giddy with anticipation of opening the one present he had put on his Christmas list. His Chief of Staff, Rahm Emanuel, proclaimed the President's delight upon learning details of the Senate bill's provisions, "This legislation meets the President's objectives, provides protection from insurance companies, contains true cost controls and extends coverage to working families." Reid echoed Emanuel's assessment and exulted that his act "saves lives, it saves money."

While very similar to the "Affordable Health Care for America Act" passed by the House of



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Representatives on November 7, in the broad strokes there are signal distinctions in the details of the two pieces. First, unlike the House plan, the Senate version allows states to opt out of competing in the marketplace of insurance with the government-funded “public option.” Second, and most likely to draw fire from foes, the Senate plan permits those who receive federal funds to subsidize their health insurance to choose a policy that covers abortion, whereas the House bill throws a blanket proscription on abortion. The third difference between the two bills is that the plan soon to be before the Senate does not allow illegal aliens to purchase a “public option” policy, while the House’s measure permits illegals to buy a government-backed policy as long as they pay 100 percent of the premiums out of their own pockets.

The final difference between the newly unveiled Senate healthcare reform package and its sister bill passed by the House is the provision known as the “Cadillac Tax.” This is an excise tax the bill imposes on high-end (“Cadillac”) policies chosen by employees from among the various lower-cost plans also offered by their employers.

As of right now, this project and its ostensibly lofty intent is just sound and fury signifying nothing, as Republicans have declared their firm and fixed resolve to sabotage the measure at every turn. “It’s going to be a holy war,” said Senator Orrin Hatch, the Senate GOP’s point of contact on all matters related to healthcare legislation. We’ll see. Given the usual course of dealing between these two parties, the deliberations promise to be less a waging of holy war and more the forming of unholy alliances.



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