

Senate Committee Approves Health Care Bill – NYT
Senate Committee Approves Health-Care Bill – WAPO
Sen. Kennedy's committee passes health care bill - AP
Senate health committee clears insurance overhaul - AP
First US Senate panel passes healthcare bill - Reuters
Millionaire tax seen unlikely in Senate health bill - Reuters
Obama says Senate healthcare plan will lower costs - Reuters
Republican Senator says wealthy healthcare tax "dead" - Reuters
Senate health panel passes overhaul bill – Boston Globe
HELP Passes Health Care Overhaul - Roll Call
Committee: Health care overhaul a yes - Politico
Praising HELP - Politico
Senate Panel Approves Health Care Overhaul – CQ
DNC targeting centrist Dems in healthcare ads - The Hill
Coalition Members Weigh Options On Employer Mandate - Congress Daily

Senate Committee Approves Health Care Bill

NYT

July 15, 2009, 11:00 am

By David M. Herszenhorn

Voting on strict party lines, the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee approved a bill on Wednesday to revamp the nation's health care system, as Democrats said that the legislation held the promise of more universal health coverage and more effective and affordable medical care while Republicans argued that the measure was unaffordable and would lead not to better care but to the denial of it.

The committee vote was 13 to 10.

The acting committee chairman, Senator Christopher J. Dodd, Democrat of Connecticut, had made clear from the start that his panel would bend little when it came to the top priorities of Senate Democrats and the Obama administration, including on a provision to create a government-run health insurance plan to compete with private insurers that Republicans insisted was a deal-breaker.

And in the end, Republicans held their ranks. In his closing statement, Senator Michael B. Enzi of Wyoming said that Republicans had been forced to offer more than 100 amendments to the bill because Democrats had largely shut them out of the drafting process. And he said that the \$1 trillion, 10-year cost of the measure would simply drive the nation further into debt, while denying many Americans the choices for health care providers that they now enjoy.

Mr. Enzi, with a hint of sarcasm, noted that the bill's title was the "Affordable Health Choices Act."

"With it's trillion-dollar price tag," Mr. Enzi said. "This bill is anything but affordable."

Both sides acknowledged that the health committee bill was just part of what will eventually be a single Senate measure once the Finance Committee completes work on its version of the legislation.

The Finance Committee chairman, Senator Max Baucus, Democrat of Montana, has been making the one real effort to develop a bipartisan bill, and though negotiations with Republicans seem to have stumbled in recent days, committee members say they remain optimistic of a deal.

Even as the health committee was voting, Finance Committee Democrats were gathering in Mr. Baucus's office to continue their talks.

The health committee bill, like the House version of the health care legislation unveiled on Tuesday, requires Americans to obtain health insurance and would provide subsidies to the poor to help them to do so. And it similarly requires most employers to provide health coverage to their employees or to pay a fee to the government instead.

Senate Committee Approves Health-Care Bill

By Ceci Connolly
Washington Post Staff Writer
Wednesday, July 15, 2009 11:20 AM

The Senate's health committee approved legislation today that, if enacted, would vastly expand health insurance coverage in America and tighten restrictions on the way the industry operates.

The 13-10, party-line vote gives President Obama an important victory in what promises to be a lengthy and contentious drive to enact a comprehensive health-care overhaul this year.

The bill, named "Quality, Affordable Health Coverage for All Americans," would create a controversial new government-sponsored health program that would compete with the private sector. It requires that every American carry health insurance and provides generous discounts to people who cannot afford a plan. Millions more Americans would also be eligible for Medicaid, the joint federal-state health program for the poor.

Obama said in a statement that the proposal would "bring down costs, expand coverage, and increase choice." The committee vote, he added, "should . . . provide the urgency for both the House and Senate to finish their critical work on health reform before the August recess."

Under the legislation, most businesses would be required to offer insurance to workers or pay a \$750 annual fee per full-time employee. Companies with fewer than 25 employees would be exempt from the mandate, which faces fierce opposition by the Chamber of Commerce and National Federation of Independent Businesses.

Sen. Mike Enzi, (R-Wyo.), the highest-ranking Republican on the committee, delivered a bitter speech decrying the "partisan bill" as one that increases the deficit, "kills jobs and cuts wages."

More than anything, the vote this morning by the panel, formally named the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, gives Democrats a bit of forward motion in a legislative effort that has sputtered in recent weeks.

"Health care reform is now one step closer to reality," said Senate Majority Leader Harry M. Reid (D-Nev.). He added, "This action is a positive step toward quality and affordable health care that Americans need and deserve."

The Senate Finance Committee, which has jurisdiction over the financing of health reform, has fallen behind its schedule as Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) searches for bipartisan consensus on the politically difficult issue.

Three members of the panel scheduled a news conference for this afternoon to put pressure on the insurance industry to contribute up to \$100 billion over the next decade toward the cost of expanded health coverage. House Democrats have announced a plan that would force the richest 2 million U.S. taxpayers to shoulder much of the cost of an expansion of the nation's health-care system, by imposing a surtax of as much as 5.4 percent on income above \$350,000 a year.

The absent senator, who is battling terminal brain cancer, issued an emotional statement to the committee from his sickbed, recalling that his two slain brothers announced their candidacies for the presidency in the Russell Caucus Room, where today's vote took place.

"As you vote today, know that I am with you in heart and mind and soul, and I wish very much that I could be with you in person," Kennedy said. "The American people are on the march once more, and they will not stop until quality, affordable health care is the birthright of every American. And we are with them every step of the way."

Dodd told his colleagues that Kennedy, a close friend, is "is ecstatic about our efforts here."

Sen. Kennedy's committee passes health care bill

AP

14 minutes ago

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate health committee has passed legislation to revamp health care, becoming the first congressional committee to act on President Barack Obama's goal of overhauling the system this year.

The Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee voted 13-10 along party lines to pass a \$600-billion measure that would expand coverage to nearly all Americans by requiring individuals get insurance and employers to contribute to the cost. The bill would provide federal aid to families and individuals making less than four times the poverty level, or about \$88,000 for a family of four.

Massachusetts Sen. Edward Kennedy, the chairman, wasn't there for the milestone vote. He's being treated for brain cancer.

THIS IS A BREAKING NEWS UPDATE. Check back soon for further information. AP's earlier story is below.

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Democratic leaders, pledging to meet the president's goal of health care legislation before their August break, are offering a \$1.5 trillion plan that for the first time would make health care a right and a responsibility for all Americans. Left to pick up most of the tab were medical providers, employers and the wealthy.

President Barack Obama has made overhauling health care in the United States the prime domestic objective of his first terms and has pushed the House and Senate aggressively to stick to the pre-vacation timetable. That would let him sign comprehensive legislation in October.

The United States is the only developed nation that does not have a health plan for all its citizens. About 50 million of America's 300 million people are without health insurance.

"We cannot allow this issue to be delayed. We cannot put it off again," Rep. Henry Waxman, a Democrat and the chairman of the House Energy and Commerce committee, said Tuesday. "We, quite frankly, cannot go home for a recess unless the House and the Senate both pass bills to reform and restructure our health care system."

In the Senate, Majority Leader Harry Reid said he wanted floor debate to begin a week from Monday. With the Senate Finance Committee still struggling to reach consensus, that timetable could slip. Even so, it underscored a renewed sense of urgency.

Obama himself was driving the action, going off-script to push the issue during a speech in the state of Michigan and scheduling a White House statement for Wednesday to reiterate that a bill will get done and focus on the role of nurses in any overhaul.

"There's going to be a major debate over the next three weeks," Obama said in the state of Michigan, deviating from his prepared text on new spending for community colleges. "And don't be fooled by folks trying to scare you saying we can't change the health care system. We have no choice but to change the health care system because right now it's

organization, which has become part of the national Democratic Party. The group would not disclose the cost.

In a fundraising appeal titled "Hillarycare revisited," the Republican National Committee warned about "Obamacare" and said the government "already runs car companies, banks and mortgage companies. Republicans believe that the last thing the American people want is government telling them when and where — or even whether — they can get medical treatment for their families."

The last time health care legislation came up under former President Bill Clinton in the 1990s, his wife Hillary was put in charge of drafting it.

All involved were mindful of the dwindling days before Congress leaves town. Obama wants legislation through the House and Senate before then to slow rising costs and extend coverage to the uninsured.

Under the House Democrats' plan, the federal government would be responsible for ensuring that every person, regardless of income or the state of their health, has access to an affordable insurance plan. Individuals and employers would have new obligations to get coverage, or face hefty penalties.

Copyright © 2009 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Senate health committee clears insurance overhaul

AP

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR – 16 minutes ago

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate health committee cast a milestone vote Wednesday to approve legislation expanding insurance coverage to nearly all Americans, becoming the first congressional panel to act on President Barack Obama's top domestic priority.

The 13-10 party line vote advanced a \$600 billion measure that would require individuals to get health insurance and employers to contribute to the cost. The government would provide financial assistance with premiums for individuals and families making up to four times the federal poverty level, or about \$88,000 for a family of four. The health committee legislation is but one piece of broader Senate legislation that's still under development.

"This time we've produced legislation that by and large I think the American people want," said Sen. Chris Dodd, D-Conn., who stood in for committee chairman Sen. Edward M. Kennedy of Massachusetts. Kennedy, who's made health care legislation a lifelong priority, is being treated for brain cancer.

But ranking Republican Sen. Mike Enzi of Wyoming argued that the bill would break Obama's promises by adding to the deficit.

Obama himself was driving the action, scheduling a Rose Garden statement to reiterate that a bill will get done and focus on the role of nurses in any overhaul. It marked the third straight day the president has kept up a full-court press on health care. The drive included a television ad blitz by Obama's political operation, targeting moderate lawmakers of both parties.

On Tuesday, House Democratic leaders pledged to meet the president's goal of health care legislation before their August break, offering a \$1.5 trillion plan that for the first time would make health care a right and a responsibility for all Americans. Left to pick up most of the tab were medical providers, employers and the wealthy.

"We cannot allow this issue to be delayed. We cannot put it off again," Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Calif., the chairman of the House Energy and Commerce committee, said Tuesday. "We, quite frankly, cannot go home for a recess unless the House and the Senate both pass bills to reform and restructure our health care system."

In the Senate, Majority Leader Harry Reid said he wanted floor debate to begin a week from Monday. With the Senate Finance Committee still struggling to reach consensus, that timetable could slip. Even so, it underscored a renewed sense of urgency.

"There's going to be a major debate over the next three weeks," Obama said Tuesday in Warren, Mich., deviating from his prepared text on new spending for community colleges. "And don't be fooled by folks trying to scare you saying we can't change the health care system. We have no choice but to change the health care system because right now it's broken for too many Americans."

Obama says Senate healthcare plan will lower costs

Reuters

Wed Jul 15, 2009 11:06am EDT

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - President Barack Obama welcomed the U.S. Senate Health committee's passage of a proposal on Wednesday to overhaul healthcare, saying it would ensure fair treatment for patients by insurance companies.

"(The committee) has produced a proposal that will finally lower health care costs, provide better care for patients, and ensure fair treatment of consumers by the insurance industry," Obama said in a statement.

"No longer will insurance companies be able to deny coverage based on a pre-existing medical condition. No longer will Americans have to worry about their health insurance if they lose their job, change their job, or open a new business," he said.

(Reporting by Jeff Mason, Editing by Sandra Maler)

Republican Senator says wealthy healthcare tax "dead"

Reuters

Wed Jul 15, 2009 10:50am EDT

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - A Republican senator closely involved in writing healthcare reform legislation said on Wednesday he believes the House Democratic plan for a tax on the wealthy to pay for healthcare is "a dead issue" in the Senate.

Senator Orrin Hatch also told reporters he doubts the tax-writing Senate Finance Committee will be able to start work on a bill this week or next. The panel is seeking ways to pay for the expected \$1 trillion cost of the bill.

"They tell me they are making progress," said Hatch, who is among a small group of lawmakers working with committee chairman Max Baucus on the effort. But asked if legislation could emerge this week or next he said "I personally doubt it."

(Reporting by Kim Dixon, Writing by Jackie Frank)

First US Senate panel passes healthcare bill

Reuters

Wed Jul 15, 2009 10:21am EDT

WASHINGTON, July 15 (Reuters) - The Senate Health Committee passed on Wednesday its version of legislation to overhaul the U.S. health industry, which is to be combined with a bill yet to be written in the Senate Finance Committee.

The health panel's bill, which passed along a party-line 13-10 vote, would seek to expand coverage to many of the 46 million uninsured Americans, add a government-run healthcare program, require most Americans to obtain health insurance, and mandate most employers to provide it to their workers. The legislation also would seek to reduce costs in the \$2.5 trillion U.S. healthcare industry. (Reporting by Jackie Frank and Kim Dixon, editing by Gerald E. McCormick)

Millionaire tax seen unlikely in Senate health bill

Reuters

Wed Jul 15, 2009 10:35am EDT

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - A U.S. House bill's proposed tax on wealthy Americans to help pay for broader healthcare insurance is unlikely to be in the Senate's version of legislation to overhaul the U.S. healthcare system, a senior Democrat told Reuters on Wednesday.

"I don't think that is going to be part of the Senate Finance Committee's proposal," Kent Conrad, a member of the Senate Finance Committee, said in a brief interview before a meeting of committee Democrats. Conrad is chairman of the Senate Budget Committee.

The Senate Finance Committee has been meeting privately to prepare healthcare reform legislation. On Tuesday, the House unveiled its plan, which would create a public insurance option to compete with private companies, penalize employers that do not offer health insurance and tax the wealthiest Americans to help pay for the changes.

(Reporting by Donna Smith, editing by Matt Daily)

Senate health panel passes overhaul bill

Boston Globe

Posted by Foon Rhee, deputy national political editor

July 15, 2009 10:56 AM

The Senate health committee this morning passed its version of healthcare overhaul on a 13-10 party line vote, the first congressional panel to pass a healthcare bill this session.

The \$600 billion measure would expand health coverage to nearly all Americans by requiring individuals to get insurance and employers to contribute to the cost. Senator Christopher Dodd of Connecticut, who is shepherding the bill in the absence of Senator Edward M. Kennedy, told reporters it is time to pass a comprehensive reform bill. Kennedy, who is battling brain cancer, missed the vote.

"For the past months, Rhode Islanders have told me that we need to fix health care in this country. I've heard from people struggling under skyrocketing costs and fearful that their coverage will disappear; people living with illness or injury because they can't afford to see a doctor; people suffering from needless, preventable medical errors. All they're asking for is health care they can rely on, and afford. As of today, we're one step closer," Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, a Rhode Island Democrat on the committee, said in a statement.

"The reform bill we passed today will let you keep the health insurance you have, if you like it – and if you can't afford your coverage or you're uninsured, you'll have new choices. Its emphasis on quality improvement, disease prevention, and a public insurance option will mean high-quality, efficient health care that invests not only in treating you when you're sick, but in keeping you well. And never again will an insurance company be able to deny you coverage because of a pre-existing condition."

But Senator Judd Gregg, a New Hampshire Republican, told reporters that Democrats on the committee had "struck out" on healthcare by passing a bill that leaves millions of Americans uncovered and that could cost workers their jobs by burdening businesses.

He and other Republicans complained that the Democratic majority ignored their proposals and amendments.

On Tuesday, House leaders unveiled a \$1.5 trillion healthcare bill that would raise taxes on the highest-income Americans and penalize businesses that don't offer coverage and individuals who don't get insurance.

The House bill calls for federal income surtax starting with individuals making more than \$280,000 a year and rising to 5.4 percent on those making more than \$1 million a year. Employers who don't provide coverage would be hit with a penalty equal to 8 percent of workers' wages, though small businesses would be exempt. Individuals who skip coverage would pay 2.5 percent of their incomes as a penalty, up to the average cost of a health insurance plan.

President Obama, who is ramping up his push to get a healthcare overhaul bill on his desk before the August congressional recess, has scheduled another speech on healthcare this afternoon in the Rose Garden.

"Like the legislation produced by the House of Representatives, this proposal would offer Americans quality, affordable health care that is there when they need it. No longer will insurance companies be able to deny coverage based on a pre-existing medical condition. No longer will Americans have to worry about their health insurance if they lose their job, change their job, or open a new business.

"This proposal will bring down costs, expand coverage, and increase choice. Through a health insurance exchange, families and small businesses will be able to compare prices and quality so that they can choose the health care plan that best suits their needs. Among the choices that would be available in the exchange would be a public health insurance option that would make health care affordable by increasing competition, providing more choices, and keeping the insurance companies honest.

"This proposal would also control rising costs by investing in preventive care and wellness programs, rooting out waste and fraud in the system, and changing the incentives that automatically equate the most expensive care with the best care.

"When this proposal is combined with other proposals that the Senate Finance Committee is working on, it's estimated that health reform will cover 97% of all Americans.

"The HELP committee's success should give us hope, but it should not give us pause. It should instead provide the urgency for both the House and Senate to finish their critical work on health reform before the August recess. I want to commend Senator Kennedy, Senator Dodd, as well as Senators Harkin, Mikulski, Bingaman, and Murray on the leadership they've shown and the foundation they've laid to reform our health care system."

HELP Passes Health Care Overhaul

Roll Call

July 15, 2009, 10:37 a.m.

By Emily Pierce

Roll Call Staff

The Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee has passed its massive health care reform bill, 13-10, on a party-line vote.

Committee: Health care overhaul a yes

Politico

By: Alex Isenstadt

July 15, 2009 11:04 AM EST

The Senate health committee approved a massive health care overhaul bill in a party-line 13-10 vote Wednesday morning, a major step in the push to create a government run health insurance plan.

The committee was the first congressional panel to approve a health bill, but there's still much work to do in the Senate Finance Committee, which is struggling with how to pay for the bill. And the House version of the bill is dramatically different, with a surtax on the wealthy that may be a nonstarter in the Senate.

The partisan passage of the \$600 billion health bill in the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee was a landmark moment in the 60-year push by the Democratic Party for national health care. The Senate bill would provide a federal subsidy for health insurance for uninsured people making up to four times the federal poverty level, or nearly \$90,000 for a family of four.

Sen. Chris Dodd (D-Ct.), who is headed up the committee's health care effort in place of absent Chairman Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.), defended the bill prior to the committee's vote – saying that Republicans had plenty of opportunity to provide their input to the package.

Looking at the Republicans gathered around him just prior the vote, Dodd said he could “site chapter and verse” the contributions Republicans had on the bill. He then went around the table, noting the involvement Republican senators Lamar Alexander, John McCain, Mike Enzi, Lisa Murkowski, and Tom Coburn had in the process.

“Every member of this committee has had a contribution,” Dodd said, pointing out that nearly 170 of the 200 GOP amendments were included in the final package.

“Even though this wasn't a bipartisan vote, it was a bipartisan effort,” Dodd told reporters after the vote. “There are numerous contributions – not just technical ones – in the bill.”

But Dodd added: “I regret [Republicans] didn't support our effort.”

President Obama praised the passage of the bill Wednesday, saying that the committee “has produced a proposal that will finally lower health care costs, provide better care for patients, and ensure fair treatment of consumers by the insurance industry.”

The HELP bill now faces its toughest task – being merged with a Finance Committee effort. Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) has been struggling for weeks about how to pay for the \$1 trillion overhaul effort.

Dodd declined to specify which aspects of his package – widely considered to be more liberal than what the Finance Committee would find acceptable – could be merged. But Dodd expressed optimism that the job would get done.

“I'm confident Max Baucus will get a bill,” Dodd said. “I have every confidence Max Baucus will get the job done.”

"It actually will penalize Americans who have insurance today who are happy with their doctors," said Sen. Richard Burr (R-N.C.). "We're headed in the wrong direction, and unfortunately there are only two numbers you need to remember, and that's 13 and 10" the number of Democrats who voted for and Republicans who voted against the bill.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, meanwhile, took to the Senate floor Wednesday morning to accuse Democrats of rushing an expensive bill through the legislative process.

"Americans want health care reform, but they don't want to give a green light to a reform that only ends up costing them more for worse care than they currently have," McConnell said. "The fact that Americans are increasingly concerned about how much health care reform is going to cost shouldn't be a reason to rush. It should be a reason for us to take the time to get it right."

Praising HELP

Politico
Ben Smith
July 15, 2009

A full-throated statement from President Obama as the health care effort gets underway in earnest:

Today, thanks to the unyielding passion and inspiration provided by Senator Edward Kennedy, the HELP committee he chairs has produced a proposal that will finally lower health care costs, provide better care for patients, and ensure fair treatment of consumers by the insurance industry.

Like the legislation produced by the House of Representatives, this proposal would offer Americans quality, affordable health care that is there when they need it. No longer will insurance companies be able to deny coverage based on a pre-existing medical condition. No longer will Americans have to worry about their health insurance if they lose their job, change their job, or open a new business.

This proposal will bring down costs, expand coverage, and increase choice. Through a health insurance exchange, families and small businesses will be able to compare prices and quality so that they can choose the health care plan that best suits their needs. Among the choices that would be available in the exchange would be a public health insurance option that would make health care affordable by increasing competition, providing more choices, and keeping the insurance companies honest.

This proposal would also control rising costs by investing in preventive care and wellness programs, rooting out waste and fraud in the system, and changing the incentives that automatically equate the most expensive care with the best care.

When this proposal is combined with other proposals that the Senate Finance Committee is working on, it's estimated that health reform will cover 97% of all Americans.

The HELP committee's success should give us hope, but it should not give us pause. It should instead provide the urgency for both the House and Senate to finish their critical work on health reform before the August recess. I want to commend Senator Kennedy, Senator Dodd, as well as Senators Harkin, Mikulski, Bingaman, and Murray on the leadership they've shown and the foundation they've laid to reform our health care system.

Senate Panel Approves Health Care Overhaul

By Drew Armstrong, CQ Staff

The Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee sent a health care overhaul to the Senate floor, after a nearly month-long markup featuring hundreds of amendments.

The committee approved the bill on a party-line vote, 13-10. It is eventually intended to be combined with a closely related, but more politically moderate measure being prepared by the Finance Committee

Christopher J. Dodd, D-Conn., the HELP Committee's acting chairman, said that he was disappointed by the party line vote, but that Republicans had still been able to influence the bill with a number of amendments. "This is where we're starting from, but I still believe we can achieve that bipartisanship," Dodd said. "I will not sacrifice a good bill for that; that is not the goal here," he said.

The mark up began on June 17, and carried on for 13 days and 60 hours. Committee members and staff said they believed it was the longest such session in the history of the panel. Members considered almost 500 amendments, according to Dodd, adopting nearly 160 by Republicans.

The draft legislation amounts to a sweeping overhaul of the nation's health care system. It would create a new, government-run insurance option to help cover people and would make major changes to how health care is delivered, including a strong emphasis on preventive care and wellness. And it also would cover many of the nation's uninsured, according to estimates by the Congressional Budget Office.

Just before the vote, a Democratic staff member passed out bright blue rubber bracelets to committee members, with the word "Tedstrong" imprinted on them, a reference to Chairman Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass.

Dodd said that earlier in the morning he spoke with Kennedy, who is being treated for brain cancer and is currently in Massachusetts. "We missed Ted Kennedy," Dodd said. "He was very excited that his committee would be the first committee to mark up a bill and send it to the floor," Dodd continued, describing their phone conversation.

The HELP and Finance committees now must figure out how they can blend their two products, once the Finance Committee reveals legislation and marks it up, perhaps as soon as next week.

Dodd dismissed suggestions of bringing the HELP measure to the floor without the Finance Committee product.

"I'm confident that Max Baucus will get a bill," Dodd said, referring to Finance Chairman Baucus, D-Mont. "He's got a tough job, obviously, in the Finance committee.

"We'll bring our two bills together," Dodd said.

Baucus has made a priority of getting at least a handful of Republican votes, working with Republicans like Olympia J. Snowe of Maine and ranking GOP member Charles E. Grassley of Iowa.

“I did have high hopes that this would be the year that Republicans and Democrats could work together,” said HELP Committee ranking Republican Michael B. Enzi of Wyoming. “If America’s going to believe in what we do, it has to be a bill put together by both sides,” he said.

Enzi criticized the lack of offsets for the HELP proposal, which the panel is counting on the Finance Committee to provide.

“This bill will bend the cost curve the wrong way,” Enzi argued, before voting against the bill.

DNC targeting centrist Dems in healthcare ads

The Hill

By Reid Wilson

Posted: 07/15/09 10:39 AM [ET]

Reflecting the troubles President Obama will have wrangling his own party into line, a wing of the Democratic National Committee is launching a new television advertisement targeting nine of their own senators on healthcare.

The advertisement, funded by Organizing for America, will urge senators to back a major healthcare overhaul by spotlighting five Americans impacted by high costs.

Earlier advertisements from arms of the Democratic Party have pressured centrist Republicans to support Obama's economic stimulus package and cap-and-trade legislation, albeit with mixed success.

But now that Democrats have 60 votes in the Senate, the battlefield over healthcare reform is squarely within the Democratic caucus. The DNC advertisement targets a number of senators who have voiced concern over high costs the new proposals will incur.

The ads will run in Arkansas, Indiana, Florida, Louisiana, Maine, North Dakota, Nebraska and Ohio, states with a total of nine Democratic and seven Republican senators.

Among centrist Democrats targeted by the advertisement, Sens. Blanche Lincoln (D-Ark.), Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.), Kent Conrad (D-N.D.), Mary Landrieu (D-La.) and Ben Nelson (D-Neb.) have voiced concern over the program's cost.

Meanwhile, though Republicans have not embraced Democratic initiatives, the DNC is also aiming ads at three Republican senators. Sens. Susan Collins (R-Maine), Olympia Snowe (R-Maine) and George Voinovich (R-Ohio) are also in Democrats' sights.

The new advertisements are the first significant pokes the Obama administration, through its political wing at the Democratic National Committee, have taken at centrists in their own party. OFA has been organizing around healthcare reform for the past month and a half, kicking off its canvassing program on June 6.

And the administration has no intention of being rolled by members of its own party. OFA could launch a new series of ads as the healthcare debate continues, according to a Democratic source.

Coalition Members Weigh Options On Employer Mandate

Congress Daily

by Carrie Dann

Wednesday, July 15, 2009

A loose coalition of businesses, labor unions and think tanks continues to monitor the development of healthcare legislation despite the rift caused this month when Wal-Mart and two other high-profile members endorsed a proposal that would require most employers to provide health care for their employees.

Some of the Better Health Care Together coalition's diverse members weren't on the same page as Wal-Mart, the Service Employees International Union and the Center for American Progress when the three groups signed a July 1 letter in support for an employer mandate.

"Not everybody was ready to go forth" on an employer mandate, coalition executive director Jody Hoffman said Tuesday. But, she added, "most of our members were delighted" to see the nation's largest employer make its voice heard on the issue.

Wal-Mart's surprising advocacy for the employer mandate rocked the business community, prompting an angry response from the National Retail Federation and grumbling among other business groups, who say that mandating coverage for employees would create devastating new costs.

Better Health Care Together, founded in April 2007, includes General Mills, Intel, AT&T, the Communications Workers of America, the Committee for Economic Development, Qwest Corp. and Manpower Inc.

Several coalition members declined to discuss their views on the mandate proposal last week, saying it was premature to comment on pieces of healthcare legislation while the bills are being debated in committee.

Jim McIntire, a lobbyist for large temporary staffing company and coalition member Kelly Services, said that his company is willing to keep the proposal on the table, provided that an overhaul includes plenty of provisions -- like health information technology requirements, malpractice reform and comparative effectiveness research -- that would slash healthcare costs for employers.

"We can accept [an employer mandate] as the price of reform," McIntyre said. "But the caveat there for us would be that we would need to see some fairly robust cost controls."

Hoffman emphasized the coalition as a whole will not weigh in on specific healthcare reform proposals before Congress finalizes its plans to finance the overhauled system.

But, she said, the coalition remains active and "true to its principles" of advocating for affordable, efficient health care for all Americans.