

This Week in Health Reform: August 6

The debate over health care intensified this week as House members returned to their districts and the Senate prepared to adjourn for the remainder of August. Many House members held town hall meetings with constituents this week which have added additional fuel to the health care debate.

Public Plan:

House Committee on Energy and Commerce Completes Markup: After weeks of negotiation, the House Energy and Commerce Committee was the last of three House committees to complete work on sweeping health care reform legislation. The committee reported out the bill on a [vote](#) of 31-28. All Republicans and five Democrats [voted against](#) the bill. This move clears the way for the legislation to go to the House floor.

Alternative Plans:

Senate Finance Committee Delays Until September: Senate Finance Committee members confirmed that they would not complete a draft bill before the August recess and that negotiations would continue into September. After a meeting with President Obama Tuesday, Senate Finance Committee Chairman Sen. Baucus (D-MT) [has agreed](#) to a mid-September deadline for a bipartisan bill. President Obama pressured Senate Democrats to move forward with health care reform if a bipartisan bill cannot be reached; he vowed [Wednesday](#) to get a reform bill through Congress this year even without Republican support. President Obama will meet with six negotiators from the Committee [Thursday](#) at the White House to discuss the bipartisan effort.

Financing the Plan:

Obama Renews Pledge to Not Raise Middle Class Taxes but Remains Open to Taxing Health Insurance: [White House](#) officials scrambled to retract statements made by top economic advisors last Sunday, indicating that a tax increase on the middle class is an option to pay for health care reform. However, President Obama remains open to a proposal to [tax health insurance](#).

Additional Activities:

Democrats Criticize Insurance Industry: Democrats increased criticism aimed at the insurance industry. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi attacked insurers stating that its profits were "immoral." America's Health Insurance Plans president, Karen Ignagni, quickly [fired back](#) that those in the health insurance industry "do not deserve to be demonized or vilified as part of a campaign to distract attention away from the sinking support for a government-run program."

Debate Moves Outside the Capitol: The health care debate has moved outside the Beltway. With tactics ranging from town hall meetings and other grassroots efforts to advertising. Groups on both sides of the issue are [mobilizing](#) their constituencies to participate in local events and make direct contact with members of Congress in a battle over public opinion.

Administration officials and Democratic members of Congress are in the process of conducting town hall meetings across the country. [In recent days](#) however, the meetings in Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Texas have spurred [protests](#) over details of the reform proposals. [Democrats](#) are accusing Republicans of organizing these "angry mobs," while Republicans indicate that the protests are signs of opposition.

More than \$52 million has been spent this year nationwide on health care reform-related [advertising](#), according to the Campaign Media Analysis Group. But as legislators return home for the August recess, and the target audience for these ads shifts from inside to outside the Beltway, the ads previously running on national cable news will now run on more local markets across the country.

Public Polls Show Rising Concern: As details of a potential health care overhaul take shape, public opinion [polls](#) show increasing apprehension. A New York Times/CBS poll showed 69 percent of Americans are concerned their care would suffer if they were on a government-run plan. Wall Street Journal/NBC News poll showed 42 percent of those surveyed in July thought Obama's health care plan was a bad idea. This figure rose from 32 percent in June.

Looking Ahead:

Senators will adjourn for August recess Friday taking the health care debate back to their home states.

The health care messaging battle will continue to heat up as Democrats work to gain support from the American public and Republicans continue to voice concerns.