

This Week in Health Reform: August 20

The survival of the public plan as the cornerstone of health care reform became the central focus this week as Democrats debated the importance of its inclusion in the final bill. Media reports this morning indicate that suggestions of dividing the bill into manageable parts instead of passing a large health reform package have begun rumbling.

### **Health Care Reform Activities:**

***Public Option, or Not?:*** White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs went on defense this week, insisting that the [Administration](#) had not taken the [public option](#) off the table following remarks on Sunday from Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius that a public option was “not essential” to reform. White House officials have since been working to calm a swell of [criticism](#) from liberals. A group of House liberals sent a sharply worded [letter](#) to Sebelius on Monday in which they called backing off a public option a “grave error.”

***Cooperatives Pushed as Public Plan Alternative:*** In response to what seemed to be a concession from White House officials on the public option, key senators are taking another look at Sen. [Conrad's](#) (D-ND) proposal for member-owned, nonprofit [cooperatives](#). However, GOP leaders have expressed concern over the option. Sen. Kyl (R-AZ) dismissed cooperatives, calling the proposal a “[Trojan horse](#).”

***Democrats Focus on Insurance Reforms:*** President Obama stepped up his [attacks](#) on the insurance industry in his recent town hall meetings and on his weekly radio address. He promised reforms that would prevent firms from capping coverage or charging “outrageous” fees. President Obama also indicated that [people](#) currently with health insurance coverage would be amongst the biggest beneficiaries of his health care reform.

### **Opinion Polls:**

***Poll Shows Slim Majority Still Favors Health Care Reform:*** The margin between those who support health care reform and those against it has narrowed in recent months given rising concerns about the reform measures. An [August poll](#) shows that 53 percent of the public believes that tackling health reform is more important than ever, compared to 42 percent who say we cannot afford to take on health care reform right now.

### **Looking Ahead:**

White House officials and key lawmakers continue to [negotiate](#) over August recess in an attempt to prepare a final bill for passage this fall.

Lawmakers are slated to return to Washington September 8<sup>th</sup>.