

This Week in Health Reform: October 1, 2009

This week legislators from the Senate Finance Committee continued mark-up of the legislation proposed by Sen. Baucus (D-MT).

### **Senate Negotiations:**

***Senate Finance Committee Negotiates Amendments:*** After days of negotiations, Sen. Baucus (D-MT) indicated on [Wednesday](#) that the Senate Finance Committee now had the necessary votes to pass legislation and that he anticipated finalizing the bill by Friday. Lawmakers from the Committee convened this week to continue voting on the hundreds of proposed amendments to the health care reform legislation offered by Sen. Baucus (D-MT) earlier this month. This week Committee voting included:

- Rejection of [two amendments](#), one from Sen. Rockefeller (D-WV) and one from Sen. Schumer (D-NY), that would have incorporated a [public option](#) in the bill;
- Modification of a financing provision that would make it harder to deduct medical expenses on personal tax returns. Lawmakers voted to exempt people older than 65;
- Rejection of Republican amendments that would have strengthened limits on abortion coverage and medical coverage for illegal immigrants;
- Adoption of an amendment by Sen. Grassley (R-IA) and Sen. Bunning (R-KY) requiring federal employees, lawmakers and their aides to buy health insurance from the health insurance exchanges created by the legislation in 2013;
- Rejection of an [amendment](#) proposed by Republicans to allow individuals to opt out of the bill's requirement for everyone to have health insurance. The Committee upheld the bill's inclusion of an individual mandate;
- Rejection of an [amendment](#) proposed by Sen. Nelson (D-FL) to require drugmakers to provide \$106 billion in rebates over 10 years. The Committee upheld an agreement made last June with drug manufacturers to provide \$80 billion in rebates; and
- Rejection of two Republican amendments that would have blocked cuts in the Medicare Advantage program.

### **Public Opinion:**

***Public Support for Reform Increases:*** After a summer embattled by contentious town hall meetings and characterized by slipping public support, the latest [Kaiser Health Tracking Poll](#) indicates that public support for health care reform is now on the rise. Fifty-seven percent of Americans now believe that tackling health care reform is more important than ever – up from 53 percent in August. However, 47 percent of Americans [favor taking longer](#) to craft a bipartisan approach to health reform, compared to 42 percent who believe Democrats should move faster on their own. In addition, substantial majorities support the individual mandate, employer mandate, and an expansion of programs such as Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance program.

***Small Business Owners Support Health Care Reform:*** A [study](#) released by Small Business Majority on Thursday found that small businesses in 17 states, including Pennsylvania, are struggling to keep up with health care costs and favor health care reform. Eighty-seven percent

of Pennsylvania small business owners who do not offer health insurance to employees say they cannot afford to do so; and, of those who do provide health insurance, 71 percent are struggling to afford it. Across the 17 states surveyed, 67 percent agreed that health care reform is ‘urgently needed to fix the U.S. economy,’ [revealing](#) a growing divide between small business and its traditional Washington ally—the Republican Party.

***Young Support Health Reform:*** While many [young adults](#) acknowledge that they do not fully understand the health care reform proposals and the potential costs that the younger generations may come to bear, young adults remain some of the strongest supporters of health care reform.

### **House Activities:**

***House Leaders Merge Bills:*** [House Democratic leaders](#) are currently working to merge the bills from the three House committees: the Energy and Commerce Committee, the Education and Labor Committee and the Ways and Means Committee. While House leaders now indicate that they hope to have a final bill by October, they are still debating some major elements of the legislation. These include whether or not public option provider reimbursement rates should be based on Medicare rates and how to [reduce the overall cost](#) of the reform legislation to meet Obama’s requirement that any bill be deficit-neutral and cost \$900 billion or less over 10 years. The CBO has estimated that the cost of House package currently stands at more than \$1 trillion.

### **Additional Activities:**

***President Obama Allocates Money for New Medical Research:*** On Wednesday, President Obama announced the allocation of [\\$5 billion](#) towards medical and scientific research, medical supplies and upgrading laboratory capacity. The funds will be drawn from the \$787 billion economic stimulus package.

### **Looking Ahead:**

Sen. Baucus (D-MT) indicated that he hopes to finalize the bill developing in the Senate Finance Committee by Friday. The Committee vote will be delayed until early next week to give the Congressional Budget Office time to assess the cost of the revised health care reform package.