

This Week in Health Care Reform: March 12, 2010

This week President Obama traveled outside of Washington to rally support for his health care reform plan, while Republicans continued to highlight the risks involved with approving the Senate version before contentious provisions are removed.

On [Thursday](#), the Congressional Budget Office released its scoring of the Senate's health care reform bill passed last December. The President's plan was built on this legislation, though his version has not yet been scored by the [CBO](#).

Meanwhile, [Business Week](#) highlighted the complexities of the health care system through sharing a widow's perspective of her husband's end of life care and the value of their private health insurance.

As the health care reform debate continues to take shape this year, we encourage you and others to engage members of Congress by visiting the [Health Action Network](#).

Health Care Reform

President Obama Holds Health Care Forums: On Monday, President Obama traveled to Arcadia University, outside [Philadelphia](#), to rally support for his health care plan. He delivered a simplified argument, focusing on the stark choice between reforming the system now and leaving it unchanged. He argued that rising costs, insurance company practices, and the burden of the expense on the federal budget make immediate reform imperative.

On [Wednesday](#), President Obama traveled to [St. Louis](#), where he proposed combating fraud in the Medicare and Medicaid system by rewarding independent auditors with incentives for finding improper payments. This [idea](#) was originally proposed by Republicans, and White House officials estimate the proposal could save American taxpayers \$2 billion over the next three years.

Business Groups Launch Ad Release to Combat Legislation: As President Obama attempted to garner increased support for his health care overhaul, a [coalition of 248 business groups](#) led by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce launched a 10-day, \$10 million ad [campaign](#) aimed at pressuring lawmakers to [oppose](#) the health care reform bill. Business groups say the Democratic legislation will hurt companies by adding new taxes and costly requirements while failing to control medical costs. The [ads](#) will run on national cable television and in 17 key states around the country, targeting moderate and conservative Democrats.

[In addition](#), the health insurance industry trade group, America's Health Insurance Plans (AHIP), launched a \$1 million [ad campaign](#) Tuesday on national cable television. The AHIP ad directly responds to attacks on the industry by President Obama and Congressional Democrats. Citing data from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services showing that insurance costs only make up 4 percent of health care spending,

the ad points out that hospitals, doctors, and drugs are the real reason for rising health care costs.

Sebelius Encourages Insurers to Get on Board with Health Care Bill: Speaking at the group's annual policy [conference](#) in response to the AHIP ads, Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius urged health insurers to work with the President to pass his bill. "It's not too late to work on this issue together, for [insurance](#) companies to come to the table and work with us," said Sebelius. Industry group leader Karen [Ignani](#) responded, saying that health care costs will continue to rise under this legislation and more must be done.

Reconciliation Process at Heart of Debate: While Senate Democrats favor passing the health care bill through the legislative process known as [reconciliation](#), many rank and file House Democrats expressed reservations this week, with concerns about their "fixes" making it into the reconciled Senate version. As a result, [Democratic leaders](#) are contemplating an intricate legislative [two-step](#), by which the House would approve the original Senate health care measure and both chambers would then adopt a package of changes in a budget reconciliation bill. Those two measures would then be sent to President Obama for his signature. However, it is not clear this will pass procedural muster.

Also complicating matters for Senate Democrats this week was moderate Arkansas Senator [Blanche Lincoln](#), who made clear her opposition to the reconciliation process despite previously supporting the Senate's reform package. While Senate Democrats do not want to lose any votes, the Senator is facing a tough re-election back home with a strong liberal Democratic opponent.

Abortion Still Holding Up Health Care Bill: The debate around the use of federal funds for [abortions](#) continues to raise tensions for those on both sides of the issue. Congressional leaders continue to work on the issue behind the [scenes](#), with a renewed focus on garnering [support](#) among other conservative Democrats should anti-abortion Democrats ultimately fail to support the bill.

Democrats Fight Publicly Over Deadline: [Democratic](#) leaders huddled Tuesday night in House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's (D-CA) office for the first of many strategy sessions, as lawmakers attempt to complete the year-long health care reform debate before the start of Easter recess on March 26. That deadline, however, remains uncertain with infighting between [White House officials](#) who point to March 18 as the original [deadline](#) and Democratic congressional leadership, who contend that Easter is their goal; albeit a difficult one.

Additional Activities

Senate Approves Jobs Bill Extending Aid to the Unemployed: On Wednesday, the Senate [approved](#) a \$138 billion measure that would extend unemployment benefits and provide additional aid to states through December. This legislation will extend health

care coverage to unemployed Americans through [COBRA](#) and protect physicians from a looming 21 percent cut in Medicare fees. In addition, the federal government will send \$25 billion to the states to help offset rising Medicaid costs. The Senate voted 62-36 to approve the [legislation](#), which would also extend dozens of expiring tax cuts and ease corporate pension requirements. The bill now heads to the House where some members have expressed reservations regarding some of the Senate-approved provisions.

Public Opinion

Americans Still Opposed to Reform: In a newly released [Rasmussen Reports survey](#), 53 percent of American voters continue to oppose the health care plan proposed by President Obama and Congressional Democrats. Further, 54 percent believe passage of this proposal will lead to higher health care costs, and 49 percent believe it will reduce the quality of care. Only 17 percent of respondents said this plan would reduce health care costs as promised.

In a recent poll conducted by [Gallup](#), a slight majority of Americans would advise their Members of Congress to vote against the current health care plan and 48 percent disapprove of the President's plan for reform. The poll also finds that those who oppose the bill oppose the approach while supporting the general concept of reform. Among those who disapprove the bill, 62 percent would prefer that Congress scrap this legislation and start over; while 37 percent prefer Congress not work on reform at all.

159 Ways the Senate Bill Is a Government Takeover of Health Care: This week the [Senate Republican Policy Committee](#) unveiled a list of new boards, bureaucracies, and programs that would be created in the 2,733-page Senate health care bill that serves as the framework for President Obama's health [proposal](#).

Looking Ahead

The President plans to visit Cleveland on Monday to meet with Natoma Canfield, the cleaning woman and cancer survivor whose story he has used to exemplify the need for health care reform. Lawmakers will spend next week hammering out a final health care reform package and the process by which it will be approved. Democratic leaders are also debating whether to tack onto the bill a popular proposal to overhaul the federal student loan program. They will continue to debate this strategy, as some worry that its cost might jeopardize passage of a final health care reform bill.