

This Week in Health Reform: September 10

Lawmakers returned to Washington this week after a heated August recess to continue to negotiate health care reform. A new [Gallup Poll](#) released Tuesday finds 39% of Americans saying they would direct their member of Congress to vote against a healthcare reform bill this fall while 37% want their member to vote in favor.

Joint Session:

President Obama Holds Joint Session on Health Care Reform: In a prime-time [speech](#) before a [joint session](#) of Congress and a televised national audience on Wednesday night, President Obama sought to build momentum for the health care overhaul by providing a more specific blueprint of what he expects out of reform legislation. President Obama made the case for his belief in a government-run option as the best way to introduce greater competition into the system. However, he also indicated that a [public option](#) is a means to an end and other options should be considered. He said that his [plan](#) would cost around \$900 billion over ten years, but would be deficit neutral.

Public Plan:

Hoyer Would Support Health Care Reform Legislation Without Public Option: House Majority Leader [Hoyer](#) (D-MD) said Tuesday that he would support health reform legislation without a public option: “If the public option weren’t in there, I could still support a bill, because I think there’s a lot in there that’s good.” Just hours after Hoyer’s comment, House Speaker Pelosi (D-CA) [insisted](#) that a public option is essential to reform legislation. In addition, Rep. [Ross](#) (D-Ark.), the Blue Dog congressman, said Tuesday that he could no longer back the government-insurance option.

Senate Negotiations:

Sen. Baucus Unveils Compromise Plan: The Gang of Six met Tuesday to discuss a new [proposal](#) from Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-MT) that reflects the group’s negotiations. The plan calls for non-profit cooperatives and an individual mandate, but does not contain an employer mandate. A new tax on insurance companies would raise about \$6 billion a year to help pay for health reform. [The plan](#) would also impose fees of \$4 billion a year on medical device manufacturers, \$2.3 billion a year on pharmaceutical manufacturers and \$750 million a year on clinical laboratories. On [Wednesday](#), Sen. Baucus indicated that he planned to introduce a bill next week, with or without Republican support.

Additional Activities:

President Obama Meets with Leading Democrats: In a [private meeting](#) Tuesday, President Obama met with Democratic Congressional leaders to discuss their health care reform strategy. Coming out of the meeting, Speaker Pelosi (D-CA) and Sen. Reid (D-NV) commented that they

were re-energized and ready to press forward with reform legislation. Speaker Pelosi again reiterated that the House would not pass legislation without a public option.

Sen. Harkin Will Serve as HELP Committee Chairman: A Democrat aide said on Wednesday that [Sen. Harkin](#) (D-IA) will replace Sen. Kennedy as chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, one of two Senate panels focused on health reform. A Senate aide confirmed Tuesday that Sen. Dodd (D-CT) [will not take on this role](#) and, instead, will continue to lead the Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee.

AMA Endorses Obama-style Health Care Reform: In an open [letter](#) to President Obama and Members of Congress, the American Medical Association gave its support to Obama-style health care reform, “On behalf of America’s physicians and their patients, we strongly urge you to reach agreement this year on health system reforms.” The letter, signed by AMA President J. James Rohback, M.D, was posted on the AMA Web site just before Wednesday’s joint session and [served](#) as “a shot in the arm” for President Obama as he tries to salvage health care reform.

Looking Ahead:

Sen. Baucus (D-MT), Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, indicated the he firmly intends to begin mark-up on a bill the week of [September 21](#).