

This Week in Health Reform: September 17

Lawmakers continued to negotiate health care reform legislation this week. Sen. Baucus (D-MT), Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, revealed his proposed reform legislation on Wednesday despite ongoing concerns from both Republicans and Democrats.

Senate Negotiations:

Sen. Baucus Unveils Proposed Legislation: After working through months of negotiations to achieve a bipartisan bill, Sen. Baucus (D-MT) [unveiled](#) his bill Wednesday, without any immediate GOP support. [With a price tag of \\$856 billion](#), the bill proposes insurance co-operatives, individual mandates, taxes on high-end insurance plans, fees on industry players, Medicaid expansions, and government subsidies for qualifying families. It would also prohibit insurance companies from dropping or denying coverage based on preexisting conditions. The bill is deficit neutral and less costly than other previous bills. In addition, the [Congressional Budget Office \(CBO\)](#) reports that the bill will trim federal deficits by \$49 billion over 10 years.

Sen. Baucus has indicated he will continue to work to forge potential bipartisan support, saying that the [bipartisan talks](#) could continue even as his Finance panel begins its formal bill drafting and voting session next week. However, with [concerns](#) voiced from both sides of the aisle, it is [not clear](#) whether Sen. Baucus will achieve support from either side. [Republicans](#) question the states' role in paying for Medicaid expansion, an individual requirement to purchase coverage, and fees on health insurance companies, clinical laboratories and medical device manufacturers, and they want specific language restricting the use of federal dollars for abortion. [Democrats](#) believe there are excessive cost-burdens placed on some families and have concerns around the financing of the [plan](#). [Interested parties](#), from consumers to employers to industry groups, are digesting what Sen. Baucus' reform bill will mean for them.

Public Plan:

Poll: Americans Give More Support if Public Option Dropped: A Washington Post-ABC News [poll](#) started on the evening of President Obama's televised joint session last week found that 46 percent of Americans favor the proposed changes to the nation's health care system and 48 percent are opposed. In regards to the public option, 55 percent like the idea. However, if the public option is removed from the proposed bill, opposition to the overall package drops by six percent.

Additional Activities:

Industry Groups Give Support Following President Obama's Speech: Following President Obama's televised joint session in which he laid out a blueprint for what he envisions for health care reform, [industry groups](#), including Americas Health Insurance Plans (AHIP), the American Medical Association (AMA), the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers Association (PhRMA) and AARP, gave support to possible change, saying they remain open to big changes in availability, financing and regulation of health care.

Debate Swirls Around Illegal Immigrants and Health Care: House Democrats asked White House officials to clarify statements made by Press Secretary Robert Gibbs last week indicating that President Obama would bar [illegal immigrants](#) from buying health insurance with their own money from a government-created insurance marketplace. Democrats believe that the health care proposals were developed to prevent illegal immigrants from getting tax-supported subsidies to buy health insurance, but not prevent them from using their own money for private insurance. White House officials clarified that illegal immigrants could use their own money to buy coverage from the few private insurance companies that will still sell insurance outside the exchange. Rep. Smith (R-TX) accused that the Administration's view admits to providing coverage to illegal immigrants.

Looking Ahead:

The Senate Finance Committee is expected to begin mark-up on Tuesday, preparing the bill for debate in the full Senate next month. The full committee will meet on Thursday to discuss the proposal and any amendments will be due by the end of the day Friday.