

This Week in Health Care Reform: March 19, 2010

This week President Obama continued his travel outside of Washington to rally support for his health care reform plan, while Democratic leaders increased their efforts to pull together enough votes to push the package through the House of Representatives by week's end. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) needs to accumulate 216 votes to pass both the original Senate bill and the reconciliation bill of "fixes" before the Senate can take up the reconciliation bill next week.

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

Democrats' "Deem and Pass" Process: On Monday, the House Budget Committee [voted](#) 21-16 in favor of advancing the health care reform legislation toward a final floor vote later in the week. Two Democrats sided with all 14 Republicans on the Committee in voting against the plan.

The House Rules Committee spent much of the week waiting for the final scoring from the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), which would allow committee members to pass the reconciliation bill. Once they approve that bill, Democrats must wait 72 hours so all lawmakers have a chance to review both the original Senate bill and the reconciliation bill. On Thursday, the [CBO](#) released its final cost [estimate](#) of the health care reform bill. The bill would cost \$940 billion over 10 years, but would trim the federal deficit by [\\$130 billion](#) in the first ten years and an estimated \$1.2 trillion in the second ten years.

With the November midterm elections looming, House Democrats have been weighing multiple options for passing this health care reform legislation. Currently, Democratic leaders are considering an [option](#) that would allow the House to "[deem](#)" the original Senate health care reform bill passed without actually voting on it. Instead, a so-called "self-executing [rule](#)" would deem the Senate's version of health care reform legislation approved so long as House members vote on the reconciliation [package](#) as well. A vote on final passage is expected on the House floor on [Sunday](#).

Kucinich Changes Vote to Yes on Health Care Reform: On Wednesday, Rep. Dennis [Kucinich](#) (D-OH) changed his [vote](#) on the health care reform legislation from no to yes, signaling a shift in votes and a chance for Democrats to win over some former opponents of the bill. Members of the news media report that President Obama lobbied Kucinich both privately and publicly to vote for the health care reform bill. Rep. Kucinich's decision marks the first time a Democrat who originally opposed the legislation in the House in November has changed his vote, moving the party closer to the 216 votes it will need by this weekend.

Abortion Issue Remains at Forefront of Debate: Rep. Dale Kildee (D-MI) announced on Wednesday that he will [support](#) the health care reform legislation and will not oppose

it based on the abortion issue. Kildee, a strong ally of Rep. Bart [Stupak](#) (D-MI), mentioned that he is satisfied with the provisions in the Senate-passed bill that seek to limit the use of federal money for insurance coverage of abortion. This announcement gave a huge lift to House Democratic leaders, who have been working to assure abortion [opponents](#) that a vote for the bill would not reflect any change in policy on abortion.

President Obama Continues to Campaign for Health Care Reform: Throughout the week, the President has been working to garner increased support for health care reform through a variety of public forums. On Monday, President Obama traveled to [Strongsville](#), OH to build support for his health care plan. In his speech, President Obama cited rising costs, declining insurance coverage, and the inability of millions of Americans to pay rising insurance premiums as reasons for overhauling the health care system. On [Wednesday](#) evening, President Obama appeared on Fox News to reiterate his stance for necessary and immediate reform. On [Friday](#), President Obama heads to the Patriot Center in Fairfax, Virginia to hold his fourth and final rally on health care reform.

CBO Scoring of Reconciliation Bill: On Thursday, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) and Joint Committee on Taxation (JCT) released their preliminary scoring of the House reconciliation proposal. However, because legislative language in the reconciliation proposal has not yet been released, the CBO will need to review this language and refine its estimate accordingly. The CBO estimates that enacting the Senate and reconciliation bills together would result in a net reduction to the federal deficit of \$138 billion over the 2010 – 2019 period. The reconciliation bill itself would add \$20 billion of net deficit reduction to the Senate bill’s \$118 billion net deficit reduction previously estimated by CBO. The Congressional Budget Office also estimated that the deficit reduction effect of the Senate and reconciliation bills together for the period 2020 – 2029 would be approximately one-half percent of GDP. However, CBO states that this estimate is imprecise and has a great degree of uncertainty.

Public Opinion

Americans Continue to Oppose Reform: Opposition to the health care reform plan is still prevalent in national polling. In a newly released [Rasmussen Reports survey](#), 53 percent of American voters continue to oppose the health care reform plan proposed by President Obama and congressional Democrats. Similar to the numbers last week, 55 percent of those polled believe health care costs will continue to rise, and 52 percent think the quality of care will go down. Further, 57 percent believe passage of the proposal currently working its way through Congress will hurt the economy.

In a recent [Wall Street Journal/NBC](#) poll, 48 percent of voters consider the health care reform bill a “bad idea” and 36 percent consider it a “good idea,” when given a choice between those two answers. According to the [survey](#), Americans are unhappy with the job Congress is doing, which is evident by their 17 percent approval rating. Further, 50 percent of those polled said they would vote every member of Congress out of office regardless of party affiliation.

Looking Ahead

As the House moves closer to Sunday's expected vote on final passage of the two bills, Senate leaders await their chance to debate the reconciliation bill on the Senate floor and expect to do so next week.