

Monday, August 10, 2009

This Week in Health Care Reform

The debate over health care intensified this week as House members returned to their districts and the Senate prepared to adjourn for the remainder of August. Many House members held town hall meetings with constituents this week, adding fuel to the health care debate.

Public Plan

House Committee on Energy & Commerce Completes Markup: After weeks of negotiation, the House Energy and Commerce Committee was the last of three House committees to complete work on sweeping health care reform legislation. The committee approved the bill on a vote of 31-28, with all Republicans and five Democrats voting against the bill. The vote clears the way for the legislation to move to the House floor.

Alternative Plans

Senate Finance Committee Delays Until September: Senate Finance Committee members confirmed that they would not complete a draft bill before the August recess and that negotiations would continue into September. After a meeting with President Obama Tuesday, Senate Finance Committee Chairman Sen. Max Baucus (D-MT) has set a mid-September deadline for completion of a bipartisan bill. President Obama pressured Senate Democrats to move forward with health care reform if a bipartisan bill cannot be reached. He vowed Wednesday to get a reform bill through Congress this year even without Republican support. President Obama will meet with six negotiators from the Committee Thursday at the White House to discuss the bipartisan bill.

Financing the Plan

Obama Renews Pledge to Not Raise Middle Class Taxes, but Remains Open to Taxing Health Insurance: White House officials scrambled to retract statements made by top economic advisors last Sunday, indicating that a tax increase on the middle class is an option to pay for health care reform. However, President Obama remains open to a proposal to tax health insurance.

Additional Activities

Democrats Criticize Insurance Industry: Democrats increased criticism aimed at the insurance industry, with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi accusing insurers of "immoral" profiteering. America's Health Insurance Plans President Karen Ignagni quickly fired back, saying the health insurance industry "[does] not deserve to be demonized or vilified as part of a campaign to distract attention away from the sinking support for a government-run program."

Debate Moves Outside the Capitol: The health care reform debate has moved outside the Beltway, with tactics ranging from town hall meetings and other grassroots efforts to advertising. Groups on both sides of the debate

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are mobilizing their constituencies to participate in local events and make direct contact with members of Congress in a battle over public opinion.

Administration officials and Democratic members of Congress are in the process of conducting town hall meetings across the country. In recent days, however, meetings in Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Texas have spurred protests over details of the reform proposals. Democrats are accusing Republicans of organizing "angry mobs," while Republicans indicate that the protests are signs of opposition.

According to the Campaign Media Analysis Group, more than \$52 million has been spent nationwide this year on health care reform-related advertising. But as legislators return home for the August recess and the reform dialogue shifts to outside the Beltway, political groups are also shifting advertising emphasis from national cable news channels to local channels throughout the country.

Public Polls Show Rising Concern: As details of a potential health care overhaul take shape, public opinion polls show declining support. In a New York Times/CBS poll, 69 percent of Americans are concerned their care would suffer if they were on a government-run plan. A Wall Street Journal/NBC News poll reports that 42 percent of those surveyed in July thought Obama's health care plan was a bad idea, up from 32 percent in June.

Looking Ahead

Senators will adjourn for August recess Friday, with many continuing the health care debate in their home states.

As Democrats work to gain support from the American public, and Republicans continue to voice concerns, the health care messaging battle will continue to heat up.

Should you have any questions regarding Health Care Reform, please contact your SML Account Team.

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